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2025

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## THE DEBATES AROUND THE CREATEDNESS OF THE QUR'AN: IBN TAYMIYYAH'S APPROACH

Seda Tigranyan\*

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### Abstract

This article explores the historical origins of the debate on the createdness or uncreatedness of the Qur'an in Islamic tradition, with a particular focus on Ibn Taymiyyah's (1263–1328) views. It presents translated excerpts from the author's works that are significant for understanding his position. Since the primary sources of the study are medieval works and texts written in medieval Arabic, it is crucial to accurately understand the precise meaning of the terms. Therefore, the method of terminological analysis has been widely applied. By combining terminological, historical, textual analysis, the article offers a comprehensive exploration of Ibn Taymiyyah's views on the createdness of the Qur'an, illustrating how his approach both challenges and refines the existing theological discourse within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition. Our research revealed that Ibn Taymiyya refines and clarifies the Hanbali approach to the discussed issue, freeing it from ambiguity, explains and specifies the concept of eternity, attributing it solely to Allah's ability to speak and His Word. The research offers a novel perspective by providing a detailed examination of Ibn Taymiyyah's approach, distinguishing between the created aspects of the Qur'an (such as its written form and recitation) and the uncreated nature of divine speech. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of his role in shaping theological discourse within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

**Keywords:** Hanbali Madhhab, Ibn Taymiyyah, Islam, Qur'an, Sunnah, monotheism, values, innovations, createdness, Mu'tazilism, 'ummah.

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### Introduction

After the death of the Prophet Muhammad, as Islam spread and the territories of the Caliphate expanded, Muslims came into contact with other civilizations and cultures. As a result of changing living conditions, questions arose within the Muslim community ('ummah), for which there were no answers in the Qur'an and Sunnah. Therefore, there was a need for a rational interpretation of Islamic religious provisions, which would provide an opportunity to answer the questions of non-Muslims, as well as to resolve the problems arising within the 'ummah. The fundamental values of Islam as a religious system, while undergoing substantive changes and reformulations over time, have retained their cornerstone significance. These substantive changes were expressed in the creation of values that contradicted the main directions of Islam or in changes of their position in the hierarchy of values, leading to the emergence of new directions, making it possible to adapt to the demands of the time, and ideologically justify political processes [19]. One of the first manifestations of the change in the position of fundamental values in the hierarchy was the struggle over the issue of Qur'anic createdness, within the framework of which the following question was at the core of the debates: is the Qur'an eternal and co-existent with Allah, or was it created by Allah, like other creatures? As a result of the clash with other cultures and religious systems, similar questions arose, the discussions of which formed the basis for the formation of kalām.<sup>1</sup>

Scholars have offered various interpretations on the origin of the debate on the issue considered. Professor Peters from Radboud University in Nijmegen notes in his book "God's Created Speech" that "the very origins of the discussion remain wrapped in darkness, nor can we know for certain why exactly this question became so central a topic in later disputes". As a result of his research, he came to the conclusion that in the 3rd century AH, two opposing currents were forming among Muslims, professing the createdness and uncreatedness of the Qur'an [20: 1-3]. American professor Richard Martin argues that the debates over the Qur'an date back to approximately the last decade of the Umayyad Caliphate or the period of the Abbasid revolution [24: 468]. German author and scholar of Islamic history Wilferd

<sup>1</sup> This term in a broad sense includes any judgments on religious and philosophical topics, including the arguments of Jewish and Christian theologians. In the narrow sense, it provides interpretations of Islamic principles based on reason, not imitation (taqlīd) of religious authorities. For more information, see [16: 128-129].

Madelung argues that the debate over the Qur'an's createdness was not solely a theological or philosophical issue but was deeply intertwined with the political and sectarian dynamics of early Islam, particularly during the Abbasid period [17: 504-525]. Safrudin Ediwibowo explores the historical origins of the theological debate concerning the Qur'an's createdness. He notes that the controversy dates back to the early centuries of Islam, with significant developments during the Abbasid Caliphate. The author considers the origin of the debate within the context of theological encounters between Muslims and their Christian counterparts, particularly in efforts to define the status of the Qur'an in relation to Jesus Christ [7: 354-385] — an issue to which we will also return below.

Of particular significance are the views of Ibn Taymiyyah, a distinguished scholar of the Hanbali school of jurisprudence, regarding the createdness of the Qur'an. As one of the most authoritative figures of his time, he held a central position not only within the Hanbali tradition but also within the broader Sunni legal and theological discourse. Madelung writes that Ibn Taymiyyah denied the Hanbali doctrine of the eternity of the Qur'an [17: 513]. In his article "Perpetual creativity in the perfection of God: Ibn Taymiyya's Hadith commentary on God's creation of this world", Professor of Islamic Studies Jon Hoover briefly discusses Ibn Taymiyyah's views on the creation of the Qur'an in the context of Ibn Taymiyya's concept of God's perpetual creativity and the theological implications of God's continuous act of creation, rightly noting that, according to Ibn Taymiyyah: "God in His perfection has been speaking from eternity by His will and power when He wills and that God's speech subsists in His essence. The genus of God's speaking is eternal. However, what God says, that is, His concretized speech, is not eternal. Thus, the Qur'an is not eternal, but neither is it, as something subsisting in God's essence, created." [10: 296]. Jon Hoover's research is based on Ibn Taymiyya's theological treatise commonly referred to as *Sharḥ ḥadīth 'Imrān ibn Ḥuṣayn*.

Below, we will attempt to understand the history of the origin of the issue and, by examining examples drawn from primary sources, to clarify whether the views of Ibn Taymiyyah deny or clarify the teachings of the madhhab. In order to comprehensively present Ibn Taymiyyah's views on the discussed question, we have studied the following works of the faqīh: *Al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li-man baddala dīn al-Masīḥ* (The correct answer to those who altered the religion of Christ), *Majmu'a al-Rasa'il wa al-Masa'il* (Collection of messages and issues), *Majmu' fatawa* (Collection of Fatwas).

### On the Origin of the Question

The question of the createdness of the Qur'an originated within the context of Christian-Muslim theological polemics. The Islamic tradition criticizes the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, the existence of one God in three persons and one nature, and the eternal existence of Jesus Christ as one of the co-equal components of the Holy Trinity. In response to this criticism, the Arab Christian monk, apologist, and hymnographer John of Damascus (Yuhanna ad-Dimashqi), who lived and worked during the Umayyad Caliphate,<sup>2</sup> asks a question about the Qur'an with the same logic: if the Qur'an considers Isa (Jesus) to be the word of God (Q. 4:171), and Isa is also considered a creation of Allah, then what is the "nature" of the Qur'an as the word of Allah? Is it created or does it have an eternal existence [1: 120, 2: 11-93]? Muslims' responses to this question led to the formation of two main and contradictory opinions: some claimed that the Qur'an, as the word of God, is eternal and uncreated. This opinion was accepted by the majority of Muslims, especially those belonging to the Ahl al-Hadith.<sup>3</sup> Some Muslims believed that the Qur'an was created. According to Muslim tradition, the view of Qur'anic createdness was first expressed by Al-Ja'd ibn Dirham, followed by his disciple Al-Jahm ibn Safwan [23: 64]. This belief was further developed by the Mu'tazilites, becoming the official ideology during the reign of Caliph Al Ma'mun. The statement of Qur'an's uncreatedness is found in Abu Hanifa's work "Al-Wasiyyah" (inheritance, will) (825 AD). In this work, the author states that the Qur'an is the word of God and is eternal, although the script, the letters used to write the Qur'an, were created [20: 2-3].

The Mu'tazilites rejected the idea of the eternity and uncreatedness of the Qur'an, justifying it as follows: If the Qur'an had not been created by Allah, but had existed eternally with Him, then the Qur'an would have had the attributes of eternity and uncreatedness, just as they are inherent in Allah. With these characteristics, the Qur'an would be like the Creator and become the second one like Him, in other

<sup>2</sup> John of Damascus was born and raised in Damascus in 675 or 676, to a prominent Damascene Assyrian Christian family. His father, Sarjun ibn Mansur, was an official of the Umayyad Caliphate. Before his ordination, John possibly had a career as a civil servant for the Caliph in Damascus. For more information, see [4: 307-309].

<sup>3</sup> Ahl al-Ḥadīth (people of hadith) is an Islamic school of Sunni Islam that emerged during the 8th century, as a movement of hadith scholars who rejected innovations in religious and legal matters and followed only the Qur'an and Sunnah. For more information, see [3: 25].

words, it would result in polytheism, which is unacceptable. According to the Mu'tazilites, only Allah is eternal and uncreated, there can be no second Allah, therefore the Qur'an is not eternal and was created by the Allah, the one and only true God [21: 206-207]. The claim of the Qur'anic createdness, which stemmed directly from the Mu'tazilite understanding of monotheism, in that and next centuries was harshly criticized by Muslim traditionalists, including Ibn Taymiyyah [6: 164-165].

During the reign of the Abbasid Caliph Al-Ma'mun and his successors (Al-Mu'tasim (833-842), Al-Wathiq (842-847)), Mu'tazilism became the official creed of the caliphate, as it was the most developed theological system of its time, and also a sophisticated philosophical system, capable of satisfying the spiritual needs of the educated layer of the feudal elite, capable of answering the religious and philosophical questions raised in debates, for which the simple ideas of Muslim jurists, who were busy collecting hadiths and debating unimportant details, were not sufficient. In addition, the ideas of free will and responsibility for one's actions took on a political connotation, namely, the growing popular uprisings in the Caliphate could not be justified as a manifestation of God's will. The decree to adopt the Mu'tazilite doctrine of monotheism (*tawhīd*), which specifically includes the principle of createdness, was issued in 827 AD, and consequently was followed by another order issued in 833 AD to punish the religious and legislative figures who did not accept the principles of Mu'tazilites with exile and other persecution. This period is known as the "mihna" (test, ordeal), the first Muslim inquisition [21: 210-211]. Many were forced to accept it out of fear, but there were also opponents. Among them was the famous traditionalist Ahmad ibn Hanbal (d. 855 AD), who became a hero in the eyes of people as the embodiment of the struggle against "unacceptable innovations" for the purity of Islam. The death of Caliph Al-Ma'mun in 833 saved the persecuted Ahmad ibn Hanbal from execution [9: 84]. This is mentioned in Ibn Taymiyyah's work "Al-Jawab" (full title: "The correct reply to those who altered the Messiah's religion" (*al-Jawāb al-Ṣaḥīḥ li Man Baddala Dīn al-Masīḥ*)). Ibn Taymiyyah although does not mention the names of the caliphs, he describes the situation and mentions Ahmad ibn Hanbal: "When a group of rulers declared that the Qur'an was created and called upon people to follow it (that teaching), Allah girded the Imams of the Sunnah and the 'ummah, and they did not agree with them, and among the aforementioned Imams was Ahmad ibn Hanbal [12: 342]." Ahmad ibn Hanbal's viewpoint was clear: the Qur'an is the uncreated word

of God, and any deviation from this belief was considered a serious theological error. He considered any claim that the Qur'an is created as heretical, aligning such views with, for example, the Jahmiyya sect, which he deemed deviant [18: 914- 920]. It may be generally observed that the creeds of Ahmad Ibn Hanbal were rooted in a literalist interpretation of Islamic sources. Subsequent Hanbali scholars further articulated and defended these doctrines, including the belief that the Qur'an is God's uncreated word, as opposed to the schools which advocated a divergent view. Some prominent representatives of the Hanbali school of thought such as Al-Barbahari, Abu Ya'la, Ibn Qudamah engaged in polemical exchanges with Mu'tazilite, Ash'arite, Jahmite, Shi'ite, Sufis, philosophers. These debates contributed to the development and increasingly sophisticated articulation of Hanbali theology [8: 20]. Ahmad ibn Hanbal in his discussions on the createdness of the Qur'an emphasized simple affirmation of scriptural texts without interpretation and delving into details. Ibn Taymiyyah both defended and significantly developed the Hanbali position on the uncreatedness of the Qur'an, following in the footsteps of Ahmad ibn Hanbal but addressing theological complexities that had emerged by his time and presenting his views in full detail. As is shown below, Ibn Taymiyyah did not avoid nuances, rather being more willing to engage with philosophical and logical analysis and clarify his approaches in detail.

#### **Ibn Taymiyyah on the uncreated and eternal nature of the Qur'an**

In "Al-Jawab", Ibn Taymiyyah addresses the issue of the Qur'an as the word of God in the context of a discussion of the Christian and Islamic understanding of Christ as the word of God [25: 35-51]. According to Ibn Taymiyyah, people have different opinions about the word of God, but the Christian view contradicts all existing opinions on the matter, and he divides the existing opinions into three parts: "The word of God is 1) an attribute existing in Him or 2) created and different from Him, 3) neither of the above two options, but what exists in the human soul [13: 311]." Ibn Taymiyyah states that the Mu'tazilites follow the second view, according to which: "...His speech is created, [and] created outside of himself. This is the view of the Mu'tazilites and others, as well as some of the Jahmis [13: 312]." Regarding the Jahmis, we should note that this was the name given to the followers of Jahm Ibn Safwan. Muslim authors sometimes classified them as Murjites, sometimes as Jabarites [22: 64]. Since there is no clear information about the emergence, followers, and tenets of Jahmiism, it is difficult to distinguish it from other schools

of thought. It is known, however, that the Hanbali school of thought used that name to refer to groups and their ideologies that were considered sectarian [26: 144-148]. Ibn Taymiyyah also did this. It is interesting that when speaking about any group, he did not describe these groups, but criticized their specific tenets, the conclusions derived from them, which could coincide with different schools of thought.

Ibn Taymiyyah does not accept the doctrinal position that the Qur'an is created, but he also rejects the claim that the Qur'an is eternal as a separate expression of God's word. In other words, the statement that the Qur'an is not created does not mean that it is eternal: "They all (Muhammad's companions) agree that the Qur'an was revealed, not created, that Allah sent Gibril, and Gibril revealed it to his prophet, and Muhammad conveyed it to the people. People recite it with their voices and actions. Nothing in the voices and actions of people is eternal or uncreated, but the word of Allah is uncreated. The Salaf<sup>4</sup> did not say that the Qur'an was eternal. When the Jahmis, Mu'tazilites, and others introduced innovations that it (the Qur'an) was clearly created by Allah, the Salaf and Imams said: "It is the uncreated word of Allah." [12: 339]: This same idea is also found in the work "Collection of Messages and Questions" (Majmuat al-rasa'il wa al-masa'il) where he writes: "None of them (the Salaf - S. T.) have ever said that his recitation of the Qur'an is eternal or uncreated, especially that the voice in recitation is eternal or uncreated. They said what is stated in the Book and the Sunnah, that the Qur'an is the word of God, people recite it with their own voices and write it with their own ink [14: 353]."

Ibn Taymiyyah claimed that "the Salaf" directly or explicitly had never stated that the word of God is eternal, but only stated that it is uncreated. In the work "Collection of Fatwas" (Majmu' al-fatāwa), he writes: "The Qur'an is the revealed and uncreated word of Allah, it began with Him and returns to Him, He is the One who speaks through the Qur'an, the Torah, the Gospel, and so on. It (the word) is not created and separate from itself. He, the Glorious, speaks by His will and power, His word exists by itself, it is not created and separate from Himself... The Salafs of the 'ummah have never said that the word of Allah is created and separate from Him, and none of them have ever said that the Qur'an, the Torah, the Gospel must be permanent and eternal in their essence, and that Allah does not speak by His will and ability... rather they said that Allah continues to speak if He wills, therefore His word

<sup>4</sup> In Islam, the term "salaf" or "as-salaf al-ṣāliḥūn" (the righteous predecessors) refers to the first three generations of early Muslims [5:900].

is eternal in the sense that He continues to be speaker if He wills [15: 37-38]."

According to Ibn Taymiyyah, although man reproduces the uncreated word of Allah through recitation, the human voice and the ink with which that word is written in the form of the Qur'an are created, while the divine word, as such, is not created: "Whoever means the voice and the ink and says: it is created, then he is right, just as whoever means the same voice and the writing and says: "This is not the word of Allah, rather, this is created," he is right, but he must clarify what he means, without ambiguity. For this reason, the imams, such as Ahmad ibn Hanbal and others, condemned anyone who said that the Qur'anic expressions are created or not created, and they said: "Whoever says: it is created, then he is a Jahmite, and whoever says: it is not created, then he is an innovator [12: 347-348]."

By developing this idea, Ibn Taymiyyah clearly reformulates the concept of the uncreated, eternal nature of God's word, and attempts to clarify it and determine whether the two concepts are equivalent. He argues that "the Salaf" believed that God continues to speak if He wills. It is in this sense that he believes that God's word is eternal. Therefore, he claims that God's words have no end: "The ancestors and imams of the 'ummah are right in this matter, saying that the Almighty continues to be a speaker if He wishes, and that He speaks according to His will and ability, indeed, His words have no end [15: 598]."

Ibn Taymiyyah clarifies the meaning of the word "eternal", contradicting all those who defined the eternal word of Allah as a single universal, complete meaning with an eternal nature (for example, this is what the Ash'aris thought, but the author does not mention them in this discussion), from which, according to Ibn Taymiyyah, it could be assumed that Jibril revealed this eternal, complete "text" to Muhammad in an Arabic version, and the Qur'an is a temporary version or expression of God's eternal word, inseparable from his essence. Ibn Taymiyyah considers such an idea unacceptable. Moreover, his clarification of the eternity of the divine word is also directed against those who, within the framework of Hanbalism, identify the ink of the written text and the sounds of human reading with the eternal word of God. Ibn Taymiyyah rejects this: "None of the Salaf have ever said that Allah speaks without His will and power, nor that it is a single meaning existing in its essence, nor that the Qur'an, the Torah, the Gospel are revealed with eternal letters and sounds. After that, there were people who said that it is eternal, and some of them said that the complete meaning, which exists independently, is eternal, and that is all the words of Allah (all the holy books) [12: 340]." Ibn Taymiyyah describes Allah as follows: "He has always been and is characterized by the attributes of perfection, He has

always been the One who speaks by His will and ability, if He willed, He has always been knowing and powerful, He has always been living, hearing, seeing and He has always wanted to be like that, because every perfection that has no flaws can characterize Him, and He has always been characterized by that, and He has always been and is characterized by the attributes of perfection and excellence. Glory be to the Almighty [11: 163-164].”

### Conclusion

Based on the explorations above we have arrived at the following:

- The origin of the question of Qur'anic createdness is connected with the debates over the idea of Christ being the word of God, and the perceptions of Jesus Christ, the prophet Isa, in the Muslim tradition. Ibn Taymiyyah considers the question in this context.
- Ibn Taymiyyah not only defended the traditional Hanbali view regarding the uncreatedness of the Qur'an but also significantly developed it. While he remained firmly within the framework established by Ahmad ibn Hanbal, he responded to the changing theological environment by formulating the doctrine with greater depth and precision. What sets Ibn Taymiyyah apart is his willingness to engage critically with philosophical reasoning and logical argumentation, offering carefully nuanced distinctions and detailed explanations that go beyond earlier formulations.
- Ibn Taymiyyah, rejecting the createdness of the Qur'an, clarifies and specifies the idea of eternity, noting that the written text, the human voice, sounds, and ink when reciting it are not eternal, they are created. Only Allah's ability to speak is eternal without beginning and end. In this sense, Allah's word is unlimited, eternal. Ibn Taymiyyah does not contradict Hanbalism, but tries to supplement and clarify the approaches of the madhhab on the discussed issue, freeing them from ambiguity.
- Ibn Taymiyyah emphasizes the importance of formulating thoughts as clearly as possible in discussions on religious topics in order to avoid misunderstandings. Following this principle, he presents his thoughts quite simply and clearly, substantiates his interpretations with quotes from the Qur'an, the words of the Salaf, and also relies on logical thinking.
- When criticizing existing views on the issue of Qur'anic createdness, he mentions

only the Mu'tazilites and Jahmis, considering them the authors of innovations in Islam on this issue.

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**ՂՈՒՐԱՆԻ ԱՐԱՐՎԱԾՈՒԹՅԱՆ ՀԱՐՑԸ ԵՎ ԴՐԱ ՇՈՒՐՋ ԻՔՆ  
ԹԱՅՄԻԱՅԻ ՄՈՏԵՑՈՒՄՆԵՐԸ**

**Սեդա Տիգրանյան**

**Հիմնաբառեր** - Հանբալիական մազհաբ, Իբն Թայմիհա, իսլամ, Ղուրան, Սուննա, միաստվածություն, արժեքներ, նորարարություններ, արարվածություն, մութագիլիականություն, ումմա

**Ամփոփում**

Ղուրանի արարվածության հարցի ծագումը կապված է մուսուլման և քրիստոնյա աստվածաբանների, կրոնագետների միջև դավանաբանական վեճերի՝ հատկապես Քրիստոսի՝ Աստծո խոսքը լինելու գաղափարի վերաբերյալ բանավեճերի, մուսուլմանական ավանդույթում Հիսուս Քրիստոսի՝ մարգարե Իսայի վերաբերյալ ընկալումների հետ: Բանավեճերի սկիզբը դրել է արաբ քրիստոնյա վանական, աստվածաբան, իմաստասեր Հովհաննես Դամասկոսեցին, ով ապրել և ստեղծագործել է **Օմմայյան խալիֆայության ժամանակաշրջանում: Քրիստոնեական Սուրբ** երրորդության ուսմունքի քննադատություններին ի պատասխան՝ Հովհաննես Դամասկոսեցին Ղուրանի վերաբերյալ նույն տրամաբանությամբ հարց է տալիս. եթե Ղուրանը Իսային՝ Հիսուսին, համարում է Աստծո խոսքը, և նաև Իսան համարվում է Ալլահի արարածը, այդ դեպքում ինչ «բնություն» ունի Ղուրանը՝ որպես Ալլահի խոսք, արդյո՞ք այն արարված է, թե հավերժական գոյություն ունի: Այս հարցին մուսուլմանների պատասխանները հանգեցրին երկու հիմնական և իրարամերժ կարծիքների ձևավորմանը. ոմանք պնդեցին, որ Ղուրանը՝ որպես Աստծո խոսք, հավերժական և չարարված է: Այս կարծիքն ընդունելի էր մուսուլմանների մեծամասնության կողմից: Մուսուլմանների մի մասն էլ գտնում էր, որ Ղուրանն արարված է: Այս համոզմունքը հետագայում զարգացվել և համակարգվել է մութագիլիների կողմից՝ Ալ-Մամուն

խալիֆայի օրոք դառնալով պաշտոնական գաղափարախոսություն: Վախի ազդեցությամբ շատերը ստիպված էին ընդունել, սակայն եղան նաև ընդդիմացողներ: Նրանցից էր հանբալիական մազհաբի հիմնադիր Ահմադ իբն Հանբալը (մահ. 855թ.), ում վերջնական հաշվեհարդարից փրկեց խալիֆ Ալ-Մամունի մահը 833թ.:

Հանբալիական կրոնաիրավական դպրոցի ականավոր ներկայացուցիչ Իբն Թայմիհան խալիֆայության ներսում տիրող իրավիճակի և կրոնական պոլեմիկայի համատեքստում է դիտարկում հարցը և իր աշխատություններում փորձում պարզաբանել ու հիմնավորել հանբալիական մազհաբի մոտեցումները: Իբն Թայմիհան չի ընդունում Ղուրանի արարված լինելու մասին պատկերացումը, բայց և հերքում է Ղուրանի՝ որպես Աստծո խոսքի առանձին արտահայտության հավերժական լինելու մասին դրույթը: Այսինքն, Ղուրանի արարված չլինելու մասին դրույթից չի կարելի եզրակացնել, որ այն հավերժական է: Իբն Թայմիհայի պնդմամբ, թեև մարդն ընթերցանությամբ վերարտադրում է Ալլահի չարարված խոսքը, սակայն մարդկային ձայնը, թանաքը, որով այդ խոսքը գրի է առնված Ղուրանի տեսքով, արարված են, իսկ աստվածային խոսքը, որպես այդպիսին, արարված չէ: Իբն Թայմիհան, մերժելով Ղուրանի արարվածության դրույթը, պարզաբանում և որոշակիացնում է հավերժության գաղափարը, նշելով, որ գրի առնված տեքստը, այն արտասանելիս մարդկային ձայնը, հնչյունները, թանաքը հավերժական չեն, արարված են: Հավերժական և անսկիզբ ու անվերջ է միայն Ալլահի խոսելու կարողությունը, այդ առումով Ալլահի խոսքն անսահմանափակ, հավերժական է: Իբն Թայմիհան ոչ թե հակասում է հանբալիականությանը, ինչպես պնդում են որոշ հետազոտողներ, այլ փորձում է լրացնել և հստակեցնել մազհաբի մոտեցումները քննարկվող հարցի շուրջ՝ ազատելով դրանք երկիմաստությունից:

AN EXAMINATION OF THE US-LED MINILATERAL  
CYBERSECURITY ALLIANCE AGAINST CHINA

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**Abstract**

This paper outlines the U.S. cybersecurity strategy under the Biden administration, which emphasizes building an open, free, and secure cyberenvironment and strengthening cyber deterrence and strategic pressure by enhancing cybersecurity cooperation with traditional allies, such as Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN countries. In addition, the U.S. has strengthened cooperation with countries in the Asia-Pacific region in the areas of digital economy and cybersecurity through multilateral mechanisms, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), to ensure that it maintains a leadership position in global cybergovernance. This paper analyzes how the U.S. uses a multi-level and multi-faceted network of cybersecurity cooperation to limit China's influence in global cyberspace, and demonstrates the U.S. strategic intent to maintain dominance in cyberspace and promote regional economic cooperation.

**Keywords:** Cybersecurity, Minilateralism, Great power competition, China-U.S. relations.

**Introduction**

On March 2, 2023, the White House released the National Cybersecurity Strategy, outlining initiatives to address potential cybersecurity challenges and safeguard U.S. interests in the digital era. The strategy underscores the importance of an “open, free, global, interoperable, reliable, and secure” cyberspace, aiming to

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build a “defensible and resilient digital ecosystem [22]” while highlighting the significance of alliances grounded in a rules-based international order. The scope of cyber deterrence—particularly in light of potential threats posed by an increasingly capable China—is articulated in a more direct and detailed manner.

By reinforcing collaboration and forming bilateral cybersecurity partnerships with traditional Asia-Pacific allies such as Japan, Korea, and the Philippines, as well as actively seeking new opportunities with regional organizations like ASEAN, the United States is moving toward “minilateralism”—smaller regional coalitions—for multifaceted cybersecurity cooperation aimed at limiting China's global cyber influence [20: 49–70]. This multi-layered, broad-based, and comprehensive cybersecurity alliance exerts significant strategic pressure on China at both the technological and normative levels. Accordingly, this paper focuses on the mechanisms and underlying logic of constructing a potential U.S.-led minilateral cybersecurity framework.

**The Conceptualization of Minilateralism**

The idea of minilateralism could be traced back to the Concert of Europe in the early 19th century. Its prominence has increased at a time when major global powers are grappling with significant conflicts, such as the war in Ukraine and the growing divide between the U.S. and China, and offers a perspective characteristic of flexibility and functionality, conferring unique advantages in addressing specific international issues. This paragraph explores the theorization of minilateralism, examines its applications and impact in the scope of international relations, and further elucidates how it is taking on an increasingly significant role in the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region.

*The definition and characteristics of minilateralism*

There is broad consensus that minilateral cooperation among major powers has played a pivotal role in upholding a wider multilateral international order since World War II, as it has become prominent when the United States shifted away from Hub-and-Spokes [8: 681-708; 23: 23-25]. Scholars wrote extensively regarding the definition and implications of the concept, emphasizing the differences from multilateralism observed in conventional international cooperation. Moises Naim conceived minilateralism as the “smarter, more targeted approach” that “the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving

a particular problem,” i.e., the “magic number” [13]. Singh and Teo further clarified that minilateralism can be viewed as a relatively exclusive, flexible, and functional cooperative relationship involving anywhere from three to nine countries [21: 2]. In the contemporary context, as the U.S. strives to reassert and reinforce its influence in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, the defining features of its minilateral approach to coalition-building—namely, constructing a latticework of alliances and partnerships—can be summarized as follows: *Value-based* – Minilateralism places an emphasis on a small group of pivotal countries whose values align closely. With the U.S. as the leading power, the selection of allies tends to strongly reflect its value orientation, enabling the rapid formation of an exclusive alliance to address specific issues within a short timeframe. This approach ultimately serves to build a value-based minilateral alliance that excludes particular countries on targeted concerns.

*Convenience* – Some scholars suggest that minilateralism is a special form of multilateral relationship [5], set apart from traditional multilateralism by its flexibility and lesser emphasis on formalized mechanisms. Its key feature lies in foregoing strict adherence to rigid norms and procedures, relying primarily on voluntary commitments. This leads to relatively open entry and exit processes, along with more limited obligations for members, thereby significantly mitigating the “abandonment” and “entanglement” dilemmas often found in traditional alliances [11]. Compared to full-scale multilateralism, once the United States approves of countries that share an interest in a given issue, those states can rapidly join the alliance. As a result, member countries can respond more swiftly to the initiator’s proposals and cooperate more effectively, thus achieving alliance objectives more quickly.

*Issue-focused*: The minilateral approach typically centers on a relatively focused set of issues and is organized around specific domains. In most cases, an issue arises first, prompting cooperation among states that share common interests, leading to flexible and loosely structured partnerships. When the United States forms minilateral alliances, it can adapt the agenda in response to shifts in the international environment. Within the broader cooperative objectives of its existing alliance framework, the U.S. can extract more clearly defined issues to create new minilateral coalitions.

### **The Significance of Minilateralism in the United States’ Cyber Strategy**

Minilateral mechanisms, through their exclusivity and informality, simplify

the decision-making process, enhance cooperation efficiency, and enable rapid responses to cyber threats. Through minilateral cooperation, the United States can effectively unite its allies to address complex cyber threats, enhance comprehensive defense capabilities, and, by collaborating with key Asia-Pacific countries, curb China’s expansion in the global cyberspace, thereby maintaining its leadership position. This mode of cooperation also plays a significant role in promoting technological innovation and economic collaboration in a variety of aspects:

1. *Efficient Decision-Making and Cooperation*,  
The excludability and informality of minilateral mechanisms streamline the decision-making process and enhance cooperation efficiency. Member countries can swiftly reach consensus and take action, effectively responding to the rapidly changing cyber environment. The high complexity and dynamic nature of cyberspace require decision-making mechanisms that can react quickly, avoiding the lengthy procedures typical of traditional multilateral cooperation [1: 2]. By limiting the number of members and employing flexible agreement mechanisms, such cooperation ensures that consensus can be rapidly achieved and actions promptly taken in response to cyber threats. This type of mechanism is particularly well-suited to addressing the suddenness and diversity of cyber attacks, enabling the coordination of resources and the implementation of effective defenses in the shortest possible time.
2. *Countering Complex Cyber Threats*, Modern cybersecurity poses complex and diverse threats, making it difficult for a single nation to effectively respond. The globalization and cross-border nature of cyber attacks necessitate closer and more efficient cooperation among countries. Through minilateral cooperation, the United States can unite its allies, share intelligence resources and technologies, and jointly develop defensive measures [19: 30–50]. The borderless nature of cyberspace allows threats to originate from any corner of the world, making international collaboration particularly crucial. By leveraging minilateral alliances, the United States can revitalize traditional alliance systems. For instance, it can draw on relevant experiences from the traditional Five Eyes alliance and apply them to minilateral cybersecurity and intelligence-gathering groups such as the “U.S.-Japan-South Korea” and “U.S.-Japan-Philippines” coalitions.
3. *Enhancing Comprehensive Defense Capabilities*, Minilateral cooperation can significantly enhance the comprehensive defense capabilities among member

countries. Different nations possess unique technical and experiential advantages in the field of cybersecurity, and through collaboration, these strengths can be complementary. The diversity of cyberspace and the rapid iteration of technology make it challenging for a single country to master all defensive technologies comprehensively [18: 69–79]. Through minilateral cooperation, countries can share their technical expertise and experiences, forming a more robust and comprehensive defense system. By leveraging complementary resources and fully utilizing geographical advantages, member states can effectively manage and control threats within the region. Joint exercises and training are also key to enhancing comprehensive defense capabilities. Regular joint drills allow countries to simulate real-world cyber attack scenarios, testing and improving their coordinated response abilities. Through joint training, cybersecurity teams can share best practices and the latest technologies, elevating the overall level of defense.

4. *The Necessity of Strategic Deployment*, In the context of global strategic competition, minilateral cooperation holds significant strategic importance. By collaborating with key countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States can effectively curb China's expansion and influence in global cyberspace, thereby maintaining its leadership position in this domain [3: 26–34]. China's rapid rise in cyberspace poses a challenge to the United States' dominance in this field. The openness and interconnectedness of cyberspace allow national influence to expand more swiftly and broadly. Through minilateral cooperation, the United States can form a powerful alliance that balances China in terms of technology, norms, and strategic deployment. By cooperating with countries in the Asia-Pacific region, the United States can establish a formidable strategic deterrence force in the area. The intangible and covert nature of cyberspace makes deterrence more challenging, but with strong technological and collaborative defense capabilities, potential attackers can be effectively restrained.

#### **The Application of Minilateralism in the United States' Cyber Strategy Against China**

As cybersecurity increasingly becomes a central issue in international relations, the United States is further strengthening its strategic positioning in cyberspace through minilateralism. This form of minilateral cooperation not only enhances the U.S. leadership in the field of cybersecurity but also significantly

boosts its collaborative operational capabilities with allies. This paragraph explores the specific applications of minilateralism in the United States' cyber strategy against China, encompassing U.S.-Japan-Korea cooperation, open minilateral cyber collaborations between the U.S. and ASEAN, U.S.-Japan-India-Australia collaboration, and U.S.-Japan-Philippines cooperation centered on the South China Sea disputes.

#### **1. U.S.-Japan-Korea cooperation**

Minilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea is built upon a profound historical and strategic foundation. These three nations share long-standing alliances and a history of strategic collaboration, particularly through the bilateral alliances between the U.S. and Japan, and the U.S. and South Korea. This historical groundwork provides a robust framework of trust and coordination, enhancing the depth and sustainability of their minilateral cooperation [10: 44–63]. The US-Japan-Korea minilateral cooperation is characterized by strong decision-making and execution capabilities. It involves top-level policy consultations and decision-making bodies, such as the U.S.-Japan “2+2” Security Consultative Committee and the U.S.-South Korea Leaders' Summits. These high-level coordination mechanisms ensure a high degree of strategic and policy alignment among the participating nations, facilitating effective and unified actions [42: 71–84]. The cooperation among the United States, Japan, and South Korea extends beyond traditional security issues to include advanced cyber technologies and emerging technological fields such as 5G, quantum encryption, and artificial intelligence. Compared to other minilateral cooperations, the extensive range of topics covered by US-Japan-Korea collaboration grants it greater foresight and influence in technological innovation and cybersecurity. This broad agenda not only strengthens their collective defense capabilities but also positions them as leaders in shaping future technological standards and norms.

#### **(1) Development and Implementation of U.S.-Japan cyberspace cooperation:**

*Cybersecurity Consultations and Dialogue Mechanisms:* The United States and Japan conducted high-level consultations on cybersecurity issues in 2016 and 2020, reflecting the elevation of cybersecurity to a strategic core in bilateral relations. These high-level consultations, particularly during Shinzo Abe's second term as Prime Minister, were advanced to the level of heads of government through leader summits, thereby accelerating the development of bilateral cybersecurity cooperation mechanisms [6: 127-145]. Through the U.S.-Japan Security

Consultative Committee (“2+2”), which involves discussions between the Secretaries of State and Defense, cybersecurity was explicitly incorporated into the agenda. This inclusion provided a foundation for policy design, assessment, and coordination in U.S.-Japan cybersecurity cooperation.

*Operational Cybersecurity Exercises:* The United States and Japan regularly conduct joint cybersecurity exercises known as “Cyber Guard.” For example, the 2019 exercise simulated a transnational cyberattack to test the collaborative response capabilities of both nations. These exercises not only enhanced the cyber defense skills of both parties but also provided valuable practical experience and strategies for the global cyber defense system. Consequently, they further strengthened the U.S.-Japan capabilities in cyber defense and deterrence while consolidating the United States’ leadership position in global cyberspace.

*Global Digital Connectivity Partnership:* Launched in 2021, the Digital Cybersecurity Cooperation Partnership (DCCP) further reinforced U.S.-Japan collaboration in cyberspace. The United States and Japan jointly committed to investing \$4.5 billion in this partnership (\$2.5 billion from the U.S. and \$2.0 billion from Japan) to promote the development and application of cybersecurity technologies. This initiative not only advanced several joint research and development projects, including quantum encryption technology and artificial intelligence, but also enhanced the secure transmission and processing of cyber data. Additionally, it boosted the competitiveness of both nations in the global high-tech cybersecurity market [36].

## (2) Development and Implementation of US-South Korea Cyber Cooperation

*Open Radio Access Network (Open-RAN) Cooperation:* During the leaders’ summit in May 2021, President Biden and South Korean President Moon Jae-in jointly decided to leverage Open-RAN technology to develop open, transparent, and efficient 5G and 6G network architectures [39]. This decision reflects the two countries’ forward-looking cooperation in emerging technology fields, aiming to promote greater regional coordination and digital innovation, particularly in Southeast Asia. This collaborative project not only aligns with South Korea’s New Southern Policy but also is consistent with the United States’ vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific region.

*Advancing Cooperation on Key and Emerging Technologies:* In February 2022, the Biden administration’s new Indo-Pacific strategy emphasized the joint advancement of key and emerging technologies with partners. In May of the same year, President Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol further

underscored cooperation in areas such as cutting-edge semiconductors, environmentally friendly electric vehicle batteries, artificial intelligence, and quantum technologies. The objective is to strengthen both nations’ leadership positions in these critical sectors [39].

*Strategic Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework:* In April 2023, South Korea and the United States signed the Strategic Cybersecurity Cooperation Framework, which aims to expand bilateral cooperation into the cyber domain, enhancing the structural and formal aspects of their cybersecurity collaboration [33]. In December of the same year, South Korea joined the Critical and Emerging Technologies (CET) Dialogue Mechanism, designed to promote collaboration in information and communication technologies with like-minded countries, including the initiation of an informal trilateral technology dialogue with India. These actions demonstrate the United States’ efforts to extend its influence in technological diplomacy [30].

## (3) Construction and Implementation of a Multilayered Alliance System

The Biden administration was committed to transcending the traditional hub-and-spokes system, which primarily focuses on military security, by constructing a more multilayered and comprehensive alliance system. This strategy aims to strengthen bilateral relationships such as those between the United States and Japan (US-Japan) and between the United States and South Korea (US-South Korea), as well as trilateral relations among the United States, Japan, and South Korea (US-Japan-South Korea). The objective of this new relational framework is to make cooperation more multifaceted and comprehensive, encompassing a broader range of issues and fields, including cybersecurity and economic collaboration.

On August 18, 2023, the United States, Japan, and South Korea held the first-ever trilateral summit at Camp David. This historic summit produced several significant outcomes, including the Camp David Spirit, the Camp David Principles, and the Trilateral Consultative Agreement. These cooperation documents cover areas such as military security and cybersecurity, demonstrating the broad consensus reached by the three nations within a multilateral framework [34]. Additionally, the United States is promoting the participation of Japan and South Korea in multilateral cooperation mechanisms, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the Chip Four Alliance (Chip4). Furthermore, the U.S. is encouraging Japan and South Korea to join the Five Eyes Alliance and for South Korea to participate in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue Plus (QUAD+). These initiatives not only deepen

the strategic ties between Japan, South Korea, and the United States but also help integrate Japan and South Korea more closely into the global security and economic systems. Through these measures, the Biden administration is not only strengthening traditional and emerging security cooperation with major countries in the Asia-Pacific region but also establishing a more robust multilateral cooperation platform for cybersecurity, economic collaboration, and technological development.

## 2. U.S. – ASEAN open minilateral cyberspace collaborations

As the United States deepens its Indo-Pacific strategy and intensifies strategic competition with China, the ASEAN region has assumed an increasingly important role in America's geopolitical strategy. The United States aims to strengthen its alliances with ASEAN through cyberspace cooperation, contest leadership in cyberspace, and construct a network cooperation sphere designed to curb China's influence [40: 105–133]. The U.S. employs various mechanisms, such as the "U.S.-ASEAN Smart Cities Partnership Program," the "Digital Asia Accelerator," the "Digital Policy Consultative Forum," and the "U.S.-ASEAN Cyber Policy Dialogue," to promote technological collaboration and digital infrastructure investments with ASEAN countries. Specifically, U.S.-ASEAN cooperation extends beyond traditional security domains to encompass digital and cyber technologies, including support for the development of smart cities in ASEAN nations and the promotion and enhancement of high-speed internet infrastructure [28: 99–114].

In this process, the United States' strategic objectives are to enhance the cyber governance capabilities of ASEAN countries, bolster cybersecurity, and promote consistency in technological standards and policies across the region through deepened cyber technology cooperation. This collaboration not only helps improve the cyber defense capabilities of ASEAN nations but also contributes to forming a regional cybersecurity architecture that serves as a counterbalance to China's cyber strategy.

### (1) US-ASEAN Cyber Cooperation and Strategic Trends

*Institutionalized Cybersecurity Cooperation:* On August 20, 2021, the United States and the Singapore Ministry of Defense signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on cyberspace cooperation, marking a pivotal event that expanded their cybersecurity collaboration into the military domain and institutionalized it. This step underscores the recognition of cybersecurity's critical role in national security and the necessity for higher-level strategic dialogue and cooperation [12].

*Bilateral Security Dialogues:* In the subsequent months, the United States engaged in security dialogues with Indonesia and Malaysia, placing particular emphasis on collaboration in the field of cybersecurity. This includes the November 2021 security dialogue with Indonesia and discussions with Malaysian business leaders regarding the potential for enhancing cooperation in cybersecurity [25].

*Advancing High-speed Communication and Digital Transformation:* In March 2022, a joint statement between the United States and Singapore proposed the advancement of secure, interoperable, and advanced high-speed wireless communication technologies in the Indo-Pacific region [37]. Additionally, through cooperation with Japan, the United States further promotes the digital transformation of cities within ASEAN countries. This collaborative effort not only supports ASEAN's digital infrastructure but also aligns with broader regional innovation goals.

*US-ASEAN Special Summit:* At the "US-ASEAN Special Summit" in May 2022, both parties reached a consensus on strengthening the development of the digital economy. Although the United States' investment in the digital economy was relatively limited, the primary objectives were to reduce ASEAN countries' dependence on Chinese technology, strictly scrutinize technology investments related to China, and attempt to diminish China's cyber influence in the region [35]. Through these measures, the United States not only enhances cybersecurity and technological cooperation with ASEAN countries but also ensures strategic advantages in the global digital economy and high-tech sectors while counterbalancing China's technological expansion. This multi-dimensional cooperation strategy aims to elevate the cyber independence of ASEAN nations, reduce their reliance on major external powers, and bolster regional digital collaboration and technological autonomy.

### (2) Utilizing the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) for Cybersecurity and Information Technology Cooperation

The Biden administration, through the initiation and promotion of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), was committed to establishing a new model of regional economic cooperation. This initiative aims to fill the void left by the Trump administration's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) [31]. The IPEF encompasses 13 allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region, including Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand, Fiji, India, Singapore, the Philippines, Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Thailand, and Brunei. Together, these countries account for approximately 40% of the global GDP, highlighting the extensive

foundation and far-reaching impact of their economic collaboration. In the construction of the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), cybersecurity and information technology are central areas through which the United States seeks to enhance cooperation with the Indo-Pacific region. The IPEF focuses on advancing the development of the digital economy and establishing fair, high-standard, and binding rules for digital trade. These rules are designed to ensure cybersecurity and data protection within the region.

*Digital Trade and Cybersecurity:* The IPEF aims to further integrate the economies of the Indo-Pacific by developing standards and regulations that include digital trade agreements. These agreements emphasize the secure transmission and processing of data, ensuring cybersecurity and data protection among member countries.

*Collaboration on Critical Information Technologies:* The framework emphasizes strengthening the resilience and security of supply chains in critical information technology industries, such as semiconductors, high-capacity batteries, and medical products. This includes the identification and protection of the entire supply chain, from raw materials to production, processing, and storage, thereby enhancing the robustness and security of information technology product supply chains.

*Technological Innovation and Synergy:* The IPEF promotes information-sharing systems and supply chain logistics technologies among member countries to address issues of supply chain disruptions and vulnerabilities. These measures have a direct impact on the application of cybersecurity and information technology, fostering technological innovation and collaborative efforts to mitigate risks associated with supply chain weaknesses.

Through these measures, the IPEF not only facilitates economic cooperation within the region but also strengthens the security architecture of cyber and information technologies. This ensures that the Indo-Pacific region maintains its competitiveness and security in the rapidly evolving digital economy. These efforts contribute to building a more secure and open digital and cyber environment, providing member countries with a shared security framework to collectively address the challenges of the digital age.

### 3. US-Japan-India-Australia Cooperation: Minilateral Cyber and Technology Collaboration under the Indo-Pacific Strategy

In the geopolitical context of the Indo-Pacific region, the United States has strengthened its cooperation with Japan, India, and Australia through the

Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), particularly in the fields of cybersecurity and information technology. This cooperative relationship aims to enhance technological capabilities and data security within the region through collective efforts, thereby ensuring the security of cyberspace and fostering technological advancements in the Indo-Pacific.

*Working Group on Major and Emerging Technologies:* This working group is a key component of the Quad framework, focusing on collaboration in areas such as artificial intelligence (AI) and next-generation communication technologies. The purpose of this organization is to establish a cooperative and research framework within these critical technological domains to promote innovation and application, while also strengthening the member countries' positions in global technological competition [32].

*Quad Tech Network (QTN):* Initiated by Australia at the United States' suggestion, the Quad Tech Network aims to enhance consensus and cooperation among the four nations on technological and cyber issues through both formal and informal channels. The QTN advocates for joint research and dialogue, reinforcing the Quad nations' technological influence in the Indo-Pacific region and promoting technological collaboration and development within the area (Australian National University).

*Global Partnership on Artificial Intelligence (GPAI):* Under the Quad framework, the United States, Japan, India, and Australia have joined the GPAI, collaborating with the G7 and other countries such as South Korea and Singapore. This partnership integrates efforts from governments, businesses, civil society organizations, and academia with the goal of collectively maintaining the technological advantages of democratic nations and promoting the safe and ethical use of artificial intelligence globally [26].

*Digital Indo-Pacific Cooperation Program:* The United States has proposed the Digital Indo-Pacific program within the Quad framework, which encompasses high-end technology manufacturing, digital economic transformation, inclusive digital development, and big data governance [16]. This program places particular emphasis on the secure and efficient sharing of data among Asia-Pacific countries, aiming to ensure the safe and efficient flow of data through transnational cooperation and to strengthen collaborative cybersecurity defenses.

Through these initiatives, the United States not only consolidates its technological and cybersecurity cooperation with key democratic partners in the

Indo-Pacific region within the Quad framework but also enhances the overall cybersecurity architecture and technological innovation capabilities of the entire Indo-Pacific region through this minilateral cooperation model. This ensures the security of cyberspace and the protection of data within the region while countering cyber threats and challenges from outside the Indo-Pacific.

4. U.S.-Japan-Philippines cooperation centered on the South China Sea disputes.

In the strategic landscape of the South China Sea region, the United States, Japan, and the Philippines have intensified their cooperation in cyber technologies and maritime surveillance, particularly in addressing “gray zone” challenges to ensure regional security and counter geopolitical competition. This cooperation not only revolves around traditional military and strategic interests but has also significantly expanded into the cyber and digital domains, reflecting the profound impact of geopolitics on technological collaboration and cybersecurity.

#### (1) Space and Cyber Technology Cooperation

*Space Technology Deployment:* In 2022 and 2023, the United States and Japan, as well as Japan and the Philippines, signed space cooperation framework agreements to promote bilateral “civilian space dialogues” and attempted to deploy the U.S. “Starlink” technology. In its collaboration with the Philippines, the United States invested in technologies such as drones, low Earth orbit sensors, and automation platforms to enhance the Philippines’ capabilities in maritime and cybersecurity domain [15]. These steps aim to bolster the Philippines’ capabilities in space and communication technologies, strengthening its network coverage in remote and maritime areas. This technological support is intended to help the Philippines better monitor its maritime territories and improve its ability to respond to potential military and non-military threats. In terms of promoting cyber technologies, in July 2022, the United States and Japan jointly established the “Asia Open RAN Academy” in the Philippines to advance the promotion of 5G technologies and related standards. This initiative aims to support the Philippines in developing information and communication technologies while serving as a strategic measure to counter China’s influence in the regional 5G sector [14]. Within the framework of the trade and technology war against China, the United States leverages military cooperation and foreign capital investments with the Philippines to interfere in Sino-Filipino collaborations in areas such as 5G and the digital economy. U.S. interventions include requiring the Philippines to cease using Huawei’s 5G equipment due to concerns over national security and potential threats

to U.S.-Philippine intelligence and military cooperation.

#### (2) Maritime Surveillance, Exercises, and Intelligence Sharing

*Enhancing Maritime Vigilance and Surveillance Capabilities:* The United States and Japan assist the Philippines in upgrading its maritime vigilance and surveillance capabilities by funding the establishment of national coastal surveillance centers and providing advanced monitoring equipment such as sensors, radars, and communication devices. These facilities and technological support help the Philippines detect and monitor activities in surrounding maritime areas. In 2020, Japan exported four modernized radar systems to the Philippines, further enhancing its maritime surveillance capabilities. The United States, through the construction of shore-based radars and ship-based radar systems, has helped the Philippines establish the National Coastal Watch Center (NCWC) and the Coastal Watch Radar System (CWRS), significantly boosting the Philippines’ maritime surveillance and defense capabilities [17].

*Strengthening Operational Capacities:* By providing equipment and training, the United States has reinforced the operational capabilities of the Philippine Coast Guard, ensuring that the Philippines can effectively monitor and respond to security threats in its maritime zones. The U.S. Coast Guard and the Japan Coast Guard support the Philippine Coast Guard through personnel training, financial assistance, and joint exercises. For instance, the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) has provided the Philippine Coast Guard with over ten maritime patrol vessels, including two of the largest offshore patrol ships. In June 2023, the United States, the Philippines, and the Japan Coast Guard conducted their first joint maritime exercise, marking a new height in trilateral maritime cooperation and coordination.

*Intelligence Sharing Mechanisms:* Through the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Philippines Geographical Security Operational Measures Agreement (GSOMIA), a trilateral intelligence-sharing mechanism has been established to enhance joint maritime and aerial domain awareness capabilities. These agreements aim to refine the trilateral intelligence-sharing framework, strengthen joint maritime and aerial domain awareness, and consolidate a U.S.-led Indo-Pacific maritime situational awareness system.

#### (3) Maritime Situational Awareness and Regional Cooperation

At the fourth Quad Summit, the United States, Japan, India, and Australia jointly proposed the establishment of the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness

Partnership (IPMDA). The aim is to construct a maritime situational awareness network led by the United States and involving regional allies and partners, thereby strengthening maritime containment of China. Leaders from the United States, Japan, and the Philippines emphasized their commitment to advancing multilateral maritime situational awareness cooperation through channels such as the Indo-Pacific Maritime Domain Awareness Partnership. They plan to conduct joint training exercises and humanitarian assistance and disaster relief drills to enhance the region's crisis and emergency response capabilities [29]. These cooperative efforts indicate that the United States, Japan, and the Philippines are deepening their security alliances through technological collaboration and strategic dialogue. Together, they are enhancing their technological, cyber, and maritime security capabilities within the region to address complex geopolitical challenges and maintain stability and security in the Indo-Pacific.

In this complex international relations context, the minilateral cooperation among the United States, Japan, and the Philippines reflects the profound impact of geopolitics on technological collaboration and cybersecurity. Within the strategic framework of the South China Sea region, the United States and Japan aim to position the Philippines as a strategic outpost by providing technological support and strengthening cooperation. This strategy intends to contain China's expansion and assertiveness in maritime domains. Through technological assistance and policy pressure, the United States seeks to shape regional security and technological standards while limiting China's influence in this strategically important area. Looking ahead, the further development of this cooperation will depend on the regional security dynamics, changes in the international political and economic landscape, and the strategic choices of the involved countries in safeguarding their security and development interests.

### **The Impact of the United States on Building a Minilateral Cyber Information Security Alliance Against China**

As the United States continues to strengthen its cybersecurity strategy in the Asia-Pacific region, particularly through increasingly deepened cooperation with traditional allies such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and ASEAN countries, its influence on China's cyber information security situation has become progressively significant [27: 1-7]. The United States' cyber strategy is evidently targeted at China, aiming to construct an open, free, and secure cyberspace by

enhancing cooperation with Asia-Pacific nations through multilateral mechanisms, thereby ensuring its leadership position in global cyber governance.

Firstly, the United States' cyber cooperation with Japan and South Korea has expanded from bilateral to multilayered collaboration. For example, cybersecurity cooperation between the U.S. and Japan has been reinforced through regular joint cybersecurity exercises and high-level security consultations, enhancing both nations' cyber defense capabilities. This collaboration not only improves their cyber defense technologies but also contributes valuable experience to the global cyber defense system [10: 44-63]. Additionally, the jointly invested digital interconnectivity and cybersecurity partnerships between the U.S. and Japan have further solidified their cooperation in cyberspace, promoting the development and application of cybersecurity technologies. This cooperation significantly enhances both countries' competitiveness in the global high-tech cybersecurity market and exerts substantial strategic pressure on China.

#### *Enhanced Multilateral Cybersecurity*

Secondly, the United States has further strengthened cybersecurity cooperation with Asia-Pacific countries by promoting multilateral security collaborations such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF). The IPEF encompasses areas like digital trade and data security and protection, establishing binding rules to ensure cybersecurity among member nations [4: 26-39]. This not only helps enhance regional cyber defense capabilities but also promotes consistency in technological standards and policies, thereby strengthening the counterbalance to China's cyber strategy.

Moreover, the United States' intervention in the South China Sea issues through enhanced cyber technology and maritime surveillance cooperation with Japan and the Philippines aims to position the Philippines as a strategic outpost in the region [44: 50-67]. By promoting cyber technologies and maritime monitoring cooperation, the United States not only strengthens the strategic position of the Philippines but also enhances the overall security cooperation network in the Indo-Pacific region through technological and intelligence support [43: 50-55]. These measures contribute to maintaining regional stability, countering unilateral actions and expansionist policies, and ensuring the freedom and openness of critical maritime areas such as the South China Sea.

Lastly, the United States' cooperation strategy with ASEAN demonstrates its efforts to reduce ASEAN countries' dependence on Chinese technology and to

promote regional technological cooperation and digital infrastructure investments. U.S.-ASEAN cyber cooperation extends beyond traditional security domains into digital and cyber technology fields, highlighting the United States' strategic intent to expand its influence in technological diplomacy. This cooperation includes initiatives aimed at supporting the development of information and communication technologies within ASEAN, thereby serving as a strategic measure to counterbalance China's influence in the regional 5G-sector.

The United States' cybersecurity strategy in the Asia-Pacific region has had a profound impact on China's cyber information security landscape. Through close collaboration with regional allies, the United States has not only enhanced its own and its allies' cyber defense capabilities but also exerted significant pressure on China's influence in the global cyberspace. This pressure compels China to adopt more cautious and flexible strategies in cybersecurity and international cyber politics, aiming to safeguard its security and development interests amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics.

### **China's Strategic Countermeasures in Cybersecurity: A Response to U.S. Minilateral Containment**

Beijing has developed a multi-faceted counter-strategy grounded in normative innovation, institutional counterbalancing, economic leverage, and asymmetric capability development – forming a coherent paradigm fundamentally distinct from Western alliance models.

#### **I. Foundational Framework: Operationalizing Cyber Sovereignty**

The “Strategy for International Cooperation in Cyberspace” issued by the Office of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission in 2017 shows that China's strategy is philosophically anchored in the doctrine of cyber sovereignty, directly contesting the U.S. vision of an “open, free, global internet.” This doctrine asserts three irreducible principles: 1. Regulatory Autonomy: Unilateral authority over digital infrastructure and data flows. 2. Content Governance: Absolute discretion in information control and surveillance. 3. Normative Leadership: Rejection of extraterritorial legal imposition.

China builds operational mechanisms including: 1. Legal Architecture: Comprehensive legislation (Cybersecurity Law, Data Security Law, Personal Information Protection Law) creating compliance barriers that technically limiting malicious attacks by foreign companies. 2. Diplomatic Framing: The Global Data

Security Initiative (GDSI) advances an alternative governance model emphasizing non-interference and judicial sovereignty in data affairs, directly countering U.S.-led frameworks. 3. Technical Standardization: Through disproportionate influence in international standards bodies, China promotes protocols compatible with sovereign control principles across critical domains including 5G and artificial intelligence. 4. Strategic Contrast: Whereas U.S. minilateralism constructs exclusionary value-based coalitions, China pursues multilateral institutional penetration to legitimize its governance paradigm.

#### **II. Counter-Alliance Ecosystems: Structural Alternatives**

##### **1. The Sino-Russian Strategic Symbiosis**

This partnership counters containment through deep integration:

**Military Coordination:** Regular joint cyber exercises simulate integrated responses to critical infrastructure threats, while dedicated coordination channels enhance operational alignment against perceived Western operations.

**Technological Decoupling:** Collaborative initiatives develop sovereign alternatives across foundational technologies including operating systems, encryption standards, and financial messaging platforms – significantly diminishing the impact of Western technology restrictions.

**Information Warfare:** Joint mechanisms amplify narratives framing U.S. alliances as instruments of digital hegemony, leveraging state media ecosystems for global dissemination.

##### **2. Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Institutional Counterweight**

China uses the SCO as a scalable platform for alternative governance, and Iran is a member of this organization [41].

(1) **Operational Integration:** Regional cybersecurity centers facilitate intelligence sharing and coordinated responses to perceived threats. (2) **Infrastructure Embedment:** Strategic Digital Silk Road investments establish technological dependencies through nationwide communications networks and surveillance infrastructure across member states. (3) **Normative Consolidation:** Collective declarations explicitly reject participation in exclusive technology alliances while endorsing sovereignty-based governance principles.

#### **III. Resource Mobilization: Integrated Capability Development**

##### **1. Technological Autonomy Drive**

Massive multi-year initiatives targeting comprehensive supply chain sovereignty; Concentrated research advancing leadership in future network technologies; Significant investment in encryption systems resistant to foreign

interception.

### 2. Whole Nation Coordination

China's Military-Civil Fusion strategy enables: Seamless collaboration between military cyber units, intelligence services, and technology enterprises; Global proliferation of social control technologies to authoritarian states; Coordinated narrative campaigns amplifying sovereignty discourse while undermining Western initiatives.

### 3. Asymmetric Posture Development

Comprehensive programs isolating essential services from global networks. Systemic approaches to absorbing sanctions impact through economic scale and market depth. Development of capabilities that compel adversaries to expend disproportionate resources on defense.

U.S. technology restrictions have accelerated Chinese innovation cycles rather than containing capability development. China's institutional alternatives demonstrate expanding membership while U.S. coalitions maintain static participation.

China has constructed an adaptive counter-containment ecosystem characterized by: (1) Normative Institutionalization: Establishing cyber sovereignty as a legitimate governance model for most developing states. (2) Structural Interdependence: Creating irreversible technological dependencies through infrastructure penetration. (3) Asymmetric Adaptation: Converting containment pressures into innovation catalysts and strategic advantages.

The core divergence remains fundamental: U.S. strategy prioritizes precision containment through exclusive clubs, while China emphasizes systemic endurance through inclusive, interest-based networks. Current evidence suggests U.S. actions have paradoxically strengthened China's resolve to construct parallel technological ecosystems and governance frameworks. The emergent digital order appears increasingly bifurcated along competing visions – with China's model demonstrating particular resonance among states prioritizing developmental sovereignty over liberal digital norms. This contest will likely define the cyber-geopolitical landscape for decades, with neither paradigm achieving decisive dominance but China's approach showing greater organic growth potential in the evolving multipolar system.

## Conclusion

The United States' minilateral cybersecurity strategy against China represents a multifaceted and strategically calculated approach to maintaining its leadership in global cyberspace and countering China's growing influence. By leveraging the flexibility and exclusivity of minilateralism, the U.S. has effectively constructed a network of alliances and partnerships with key Asia-Pacific allies, including Japan, South Korea, ASEAN countries, and the Philippines. These collaborations not only enhance the U.S.'s ability to respond to complex cyber threats but also strengthen its strategic position in the Indo-Pacific region. Through initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), the U.S. has promoted technological innovation, economic cooperation, and cybersecurity standards that align with its vision of an open, free, and secure cyberspace.

However, this strategy has also prompted China to develop a robust counter-strategy rooted in the doctrine of cyber sovereignty. China's approach emphasizes regulatory autonomy, normative leadership, and the development of alternative governance models through multilateral institutions such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). By fostering deep integration with strategic partners like Russia and promoting technological self-reliance, China aims to counter U.S. containment efforts and establish its own vision of cyberspace governance.

The evolving dynamics between the U.S. and China in cyberspace highlight the broader geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region. While the U.S. seeks to maintain its dominance through precision containment and value-based alliances, China is building a resilient and adaptive ecosystem that prioritizes systemic endurance and inclusive cooperation. This contest is likely to shape the future of global cyberspace governance, with both paradigms vying for influence in an increasingly bifurcated digital order. As the strategic competition intensifies, the outcomes will depend on the ability of each side to innovate, adapt, and secure the support of regional and global partners.

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Չեն Տյենպին, Ճան Գաոճան

**Հիմնաբառեր** - կիբերանվտանգություն, մինիլատերալիզմ, մեծ տերությունների մրցակցություն, Չինաստան – ԱՄՆ հարաբերություններ

**Ամփոփում**

Հոդվածն ուսումնասիրում է ԱՄՆ-ի կիբերանվտանգության քաղաքականությունը Բայդենի վարչակազմի օրոք, որը կարևորում էր բաց, ազատ և անվտանգ կիբեր միջավայրի ստեղծումը և կիբերաշտապանության ամրապնդումը՝ ավանդական գործընկերների՝ Ճապոնիայի, Հարավային Կորեայի և ԱՍԵԱՆ երկրների հետ համագործակցությունը խորացնելու միջոցով: ԱՄՆ-ն նաև ամրապնդել է Ասիա-Խաղաղօվկիանոսի տարածաշրջանի երկրների հետ համագործակցությունը թվային տնտեսության և կիբերանվտանգության ոլորտում՝ կիրառելով բազմակողմ մեխանիզմներ, ինչպիսին է Հնդ-Խաղաղօվկիանական տնտեսական շրջանակը (IPEF)՝ համաշխարհային կիբերտիրույթում իր առաջատար դերը պահպանելու համար: Աշխատանքում վերլուծվում է, թե ինչպես է ԱՄՆ-ն օգտագործում բազմաշերտ և բազմակողմ կիբերանվտանգության համագործակցության ցանցը՝ սահմանափակելու Չինաստանի ազդեցությունը գլոբալ կիբերտիրույթում և ցույց է տալիս ամերիկյան ռազմավարական նպատակը՝ պահպանել գերակայությունը կիբերտիրույթում և խթանել տարածաշրջանային տնտեսական համագործակցությունը:

THE SECOND KARABAKH WAR: TURKEY’S SOUTH CAUCASUS  
POLICY AND IRAN’S STRATEGIC INTERESTS

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**Abstract**

Turkey, through its neo-Ottomanism policy, has framed the South Caucasus as part of its ethnic and identity sphere, deepening political, economic, and security ties with Azerbaijan under the slogan “one nation, two states.” The security paradigm shift triggered by the 2020 Karabakh conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia allowed Ankara to redefine its operational environment in the South Caucasus, transforming itself into a key regional actor. Turkey’s assertive engagement during the Second Karabakh War and its unequivocal support for Baku have posed significant challenges to the Islamic Republic of Iran’s national interests in the region. This study addresses the following question: *What are the dimensions of Turkey’s foreign policy approach in the South Caucasus following the Second Karabakh War, and how will it impact Iran’s geopolitical and geocultural interests in the region?* The hypothesis posits that Turkey’s post-war foreign policy—anchored in the Ankara-Baku strategic alliance and driven by ethnic-identity narratives, economic-military integration, and geopolitical ambitions—will undermine Iran’s security, geopolitical, and economic interests in the South Caucasus. Focusing on the period from 2020 to 2023, this research examines Turkey’s regional strategy after the Second Karabakh War, analyzing its implications for Iran’s strategic positioning.

**Keywords:** Second Karabakh War, South Caucasus Geopolitics, Pan-Turkism, Iran’s Geopolitical Interests

**Introduction**

The power vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union initiated two parallel developments in the Caucasus region. First, regional states sought to

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redefine their national identities. Second, the region witnessed intensified geopolitical competition among regional powers—Iran, Russia, and Turkey—alongside efforts by the United States and, to some extent, the European Union to expand their spheres of influence.

In the immediate post-Soviet period, Turkey, projecting a secular-democratic identity and free-market economic model, attempted to position itself—with Western support—as a paradigm for the newly independent states. Initially, Turkey's engagement in the South Caucasus and its relations with Russia were predominantly competitive. However, with the ascendancy of neo-Ottomanist discourse, the weakening of Western ties, and the growing Russia-West rivalry, Ankara's regional policy gradually assumed more cooperative dimensions.

The decline of Kemalist ideology and the rise of Islamists in 2002 marked a fundamental transformation in Turkey's foreign policy approach. The new strategy sought to establish a balanced relationship with both the West and Russia, incorporating cultural and economic considerations alongside security-focused priorities. Concurrent with the Justice and Development Party's (AKP) rise to power, key pillars of this policy included conflict resolution with neighboring states and an active, multi-vector diplomacy.

Owing to its geopolitical significance, the South Caucasus holds particular importance in Turkey's foreign policy calculus. Within this context, Azerbaijan has emerged as a focal point for Ankara due to its geopolitical, geo-economics, and geocultural attributes. Bilateral relations have expanded consistently since the Soviet collapse, with Turkey's "two states-one nation" policy significantly enhancing its influence in Azerbaijan [7: 98].

The escalation of this situation intensified with the renewed clashes in Karabakh in 2020, known as the Second Karabakh War. Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War, achieved through comprehensive support from Ankara and the subsequent signing of the Shushi Declaration, elevated bilateral relations to a strategic level of alliance across various security-military, political, economic, and commercial domains. Given Turkey's ambitions in the South Caucasus and its efforts to position itself as the focal point of developments in this region and, more broadly, in Central Asia, this development will negatively impact the interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran at various levels and across ethnic-security, transit-energy, and geopolitical dimensions.

### Theoretical Framework: Offensive Realism

Offensive realism, like defensive realism, is considered a branch of neorealism. This theory was developed by Mearsheimer. From a structuralism perspective emphasizing the anarchic structure of the international system, offensive realism can be seen as sharing common features with defensive realism, though it differs in some aspects. The point of divergence between offensive and defensive realism stems from their differing views on the level of security desired by states. In offensive realism theory, security in the international system is scarce because achieving security requires acquiring as much power as possible relative to other states' tendency to maximize power brings offensive realism closer to Morgenthau's classical realism. Mearsheimer posits five fundamental assumptions in his offensive realism approach: (1) the international system is anarchic; (2) great powers inherently possess offensive capabilities and intentions; (3) states can never be certain about others' intentions, making mutual distrust a defining feature of interstate relations; (4) states prioritize survival; and (5) great powers are rational strategic actors [16: 30-31]. These principles collectively explain great power behavior and demonstrate that in Mearsheimer's framework, international politics essentially equates to analyzing great power foreign policies.

A crucial implication is that these assumptions inevitably lead to state behavior characterized by revisionism, power maximization, and expansionism. Offensive realism emphasizes states' relentless pursuit of power maximization in foreign policy, whereas defensive realism prioritizes security maximization as states' primary objective under international anarchy. Consequently, defensive realism suggests that states focus more on maintaining their systemic position than on aggressive expansion or power accumulation. Such states essentially seek to preserve the status quo, with defensive realism paying limited attention to revisionist states in international politics.

The fundamental distinction in Mearsheimer's perspective lies in his interpretation of anarchy's consequences for states and their foreign policies, as reflected in the core assumptions of offensive realism. The anarchic nature of the international system breeds mutual distrust among states, which - combined with factors like states' offensive intentions and capabilities - drives them toward maximizing relative power. Offensive realism posits that states seek to accumulate maximum power until achieving hegemony within the system. Consequently, the only guaranteed path to security and survival becomes hegemony, implying that status-quo powers cannot exist unless one state dominates the entire system. Since

this rarely occurs, great powers persistently pursue revisionist foreign policies marked by expansionism and power accumulation.

Applied through offensive realism's lens, Turkey's direct involvement in the 2020 Karabakh conflict, comprehensive support for Azerbaijan, and subsequent elevation of bilateral relations to an alliance-level partnership (per the Shushi Declaration) across cultural, military, political and economic domains reflects its strategy for regional power maximization in the South Caucasus. While strengthening Turkey's pivotal regional role, this development simultaneously undermines Iran's geostrategic, geo-economics and geocultural interests across multiple dimensions in the South Caucasus.

### Turkey's Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caucasus and Central Asia gained particular significance in Turkey's foreign policy. The power vacuum left by the USSR's dissolution created opportunities for Ankara's regional engagement. The geopolitical characteristics of the Caucasus—such as ethnic and linguistic diversity, landlocked geography, connectivity needs, and energy transit routes—enabled regional and extra-regional actors to address these structural constraints. While Central Asia partially receded from Turkey's foreign policy focus due to Russia's resurgence, the Caucasus retained Ankara's attention owing to its geographical proximity and energy resources. The South Caucasus holds critical importance for Turkey across economic, security, cultural, and neighborhood policy dimensions. Economically, Azerbaijan's energy reserves and the region's transit potential reinforce Turkey's role as an East-West energy and trade corridor. The South Caucasus remains a pivotal zone in Russia's near abroad, representing a strategic intersection between Moscow and NATO's southwestern flank—a point of security friction given Turkey's NATO membership. Moreover, the protracted Karabakh conflict and its destabilizing effects pose challenges to Turkey's security strategy in the region. Culturally, Ankara's neo-Ottomanist policies and Turkic integration efforts, exemplified by the Organization of Turkic States, underscore its ambitions. President Erdogan's re-election has reinforced Turkey's pursuit of global and regional influence, with Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan's appointment reflecting this vision. Fidan's regionalist outlook, shaped during his tenure at the National Intelligence Organization (MIT), suggests continued focus on the South Caucasus as a strategic priority [2].

### The Second Karabakh War and the Intensification of Turkey's Engagement in the South Caucasus

The Second Karabakh War between Armenia and Azerbaijan concluded on November 10, 2020, with a ceasefire agreement. Analysts identify Turkey's supportive role as the decisive factor in Azerbaijan's military victory. Ankara's backing of Baku - spanning military-security, economic, cultural, and geopolitical dimensions - facilitated Azerbaijan's battlefield success while expanding Turkey's regional influence in the South Caucasus. Post-war relations between Turkey and Azerbaijan, formalized through the Shushi Declaration, elevated bilateral ties to an alliance-level partnership encompassing political, military-security, cultural, and economic-commercial cooperation. This development significantly strengthened Ankara's regional role in the South Caucasus [10].

### Turkey's Military Assistance to Azerbaijan

The modernization of Azerbaijan's armed forces proved instrumental in its 2020 victory over Armenia, with Turkey playing a pivotal role through both arms sales and military advisory support. However, Turkey's contribution extended beyond immediate wartime assistance, encompassing three decades of systematic military capacity-building. Following independence in 1992, Azerbaijan faced a strategic choice between maintaining Soviet-era military structures or adopting Western standards - opting decisively for the latter.

The foundational 1992 military education cooperation agreement (ratified by Turkey in 1993) established training programs for Azerbaijani officers at Turkish military academies. This partnership reached its zenith with the 2010 Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support Agreement, enabling:

- Joint military exercises
- Reciprocal defense visits
- Annual training for hundreds of Azerbaijani personnel under the 2018 Medical-Military Cooperation Agreement [4].

Turkey's military modernization program for Azerbaijan aligned with NATO's partnership policies. Azerbaijan's NATO engagement, beginning with 1992 North Atlantic Cooperation Council membership, included:

- Participation in Turkey-led Kosovo operations (late 1990s)
- Contribution to Turkish-commanded ISAF forces in Afghanistan

Turkey's assistance constituted the critical differentiator between Azerbaijan's 1990s defeat and 2020 victory - transforming Soviet-legacy forces into Western-standard military capabilities. This achievement demonstrates both Turkey's military capacity-building expertise and its potential value as a NATO security provider [28].

#### *Military Relations Between Turkey and Azerbaijan Over the Past Decade*

Over the past decade, military relations between Turkey and oil-and-gas-rich Azerbaijan have significantly expanded as Baku has invested heavily in achieving military superiority over its neighbor Armenia. Currently, alongside Israel, Turkey ranks among Azerbaijan's largest arms suppliers. Key military cooperation includes:

- Procurement of SOM cruise missiles with 250km range
- Sales of various reconnaissance and combat drones
- Joint drone production in Baku
- Collaboration on developing the fifth-generation KAAN fighter between

Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry and Turkey's TUSAS

- The Nakhchivan military factory equipment project under an agreement between Azerbaijan's Defense Ministry and Turkey's ASFAT defense company [23].

#### *Post-Karabakh Conflict Military Presence*

Following the 2020 war, Turkey's joint monitoring center with Russia for ceasefire observation represented another dimension of Ankara's active military partnership with Baku. The pinnacle of this military cooperation was the Shushi Declaration, which:

- Emphasized defense cooperation and joint military efforts against external threats
- Committed to joint efforts for armed forces modernization and reconstruction [29].

The Declaration affirmed mutual commitment to act jointly against any threats to independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, or security of internationally recognized borders [18].

#### *Ethnic-Cultural Ties*

The shared ethnic, linguistic and cultural identity between Turkey and Azerbaijan has formed the foundation of bilateral relations since Azerbaijan's independence. The "one nation, two states" principle articulated by former President

Heydar Aliyev symbolizes the nationalist logic governing these relations [12]. Turkey was the first country to recognize Azerbaijan's independence in 1991.

In the early 1990s, Turkey positioned itself as an "elder brother" to newly independent Turkic states, supporting Azerbaijan against Armenia. This continued during the 2020 Karabakh War under the "one nation, two states" framework. President Erdoğan's post-victory visit to Azerbaijan, where he recited poetry lamenting "divided Azeris across the Aras River", reflected this [15]. However, this perspective contradicts Iran's national security and territorial integrity, as Iran remains the core while its "hand" (Azerbaijanis) were separated across the river.

Erdoğan's symbolic visit to Azerbaijan after his 2023 re-election demonstrated Turkey's strengthened geopolitical ambitions in the Caucasus post-war [6]. While Turkey promotes pan-Turkic identity, concerns exist in Azerbaijan about losing local identity to this assertive Turkish identity, though high-level cooperation prevents open expression of these sensitivities.

#### *Religious and Educational Cooperation*

Turkey has sought to promote its model of Islamic liberalism in secular Azerbaijan through:

- NGOs like the Nurcu movement and Fethullah Gülen network
- Charity organizations and cultural programs
- Government programs including satellite broadcasting, news distribution,

Turkish-language books, schools, and promoting Turkish-style Latin script [13: 219-220]

Educational cooperation includes plans for a joint Turkey-Azerbaijan university to enhance scientific and technological collaboration [26], with about 35,000 Azerbaijani students currently studying in Turkish institutions [24].

#### *Economic Interests*

Beyond constructed ethnic and linguistic ties, Azerbaijan holds significant economic and geopolitical importance for Ankara. Turkey's economy is primarily focused on services and industry. Limited domestic energy resources on one hand and rapid industrial growth—and consequently, rising energy demand—on the other have made Turkey dependent on hydrocarbon imports. Turkey's ambitious economic and industrial export programs necessitate securing energy supply security and diversifying supplier markets. Azerbaijan, with its proven energy reserves, is a key country in this regard, playing an effective role in supplying and diversifying Turkey's hydrocarbon imports and transforming Turkey into an energy hub after Russia. Energy projects and other economic initiatives have taken bilateral relations

beyond emotional ties, fostering pragmatic, win-win cooperation between the two regional actors [14].

In this context, at the 29th Caspian International Oil and Gas Exhibition during Baku Energy Week, a natural gas supply and exchange agreement was signed between Turkey's BOTAS, Azerbaijan's state oil company SOCAR, and Azerbaijan's gas distribution company. Turkey's Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, Alparslan Bayraktar, and Azerbaijan's Economy Minister, Mikayil Jabbarov, extended the natural gas exchange agreement, originally set to conclude by the end of 2024, until 2030. Azerbaijan's Energy Minister, Parviz Shahbazov, stated during a meeting with a Turkish delegation that the two countries cooperate in many areas, from oil and natural gas to renewable energy and electricity interconnections. Azerbaijan exports its natural gas to Europe via Turkey and will increase gas exports to Europe through Turkey in the future. Bayraktar, Turkey's energy minister, emphasized the importance of energy security and strong regional cooperation to achieve it in his post-agreement speech. He added that through cooperation and synergy, resources can be used more efficiently, ensuring benefits are widely shared [25].

Alparslan Bayraktar noted that, based on a joint Ankara-Baku decision, supplying natural gas to Nakhchivan via Turkey's Iğdır province is feasible. According to the Minister of Energy and Natural Resources, the natural gas for Azerbaijan's Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic is supplied through Turkey via the Iğdır-Nakhchivan pipeline. Azerbaijan and Turkey signed a memorandum of understanding on the Iğdır-Nakhchivan gas pipeline on December 15, 2020. The Iğdır-Nakhchivan pipeline diversifies Nakhchivan's gas supply, eliminating its dependence on a single source. This project is among the priority initiatives included in the state program for the socio-economic development of the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic for 2023-2027. The pipeline can transport 2 million cubic meters of gas per day and 730 million cubic meters annually, fully meeting Nakhchivan's gas demand [1]. With the opening of this pipeline, Nakhchivan no longer relies on Iranian gas, dealing an economic blow to Iran's interests in the region.

### *Geopolitical Interests*

In the realm of geopolitical competition, Azerbaijan holds paramount importance for Turkey in the Caucasus. It can be considered the focal point and heart of Turkey's foreign policy in the region. Understanding Turkey's geopolitical ambitions in the region and Azerbaijan's role in achieving these objectives is essential to comprehending Ankara's foreign policy approach. Turkey's expansion

of influence in the Caucasus and its extension toward the Caspian Sea hinge on Azerbaijan's transformation into a key regional actor. Baku enables Turkey's penetration into a broader geographical sphere. Thus, following the Soviet Union's collapse, Turkey sought to establish its foothold in the Caucasus by supporting Azerbaijan in the Karabakh conflict, filling the power vacuum left by the USSR's dissolution.

Since 2015, nationalist figures in Turkey have gained prominence, advocating for Azerbaijan and prioritizing the geopolitics of European alliances and the Black Sea. Meanwhile, the Justice and Development Party's foreign policy has shifted from the early Erdogan-era "zero problems with neighbors" soft-power approach to unequivocal support for Baku in the Karabakh conflict. Given these realities, Turkey's foreign policy in the Caucasus and its relations with Armenia cannot be separated from its ties with Azerbaijan. Consequently, Ankara has consistently voiced support for Azerbaijan's positions, and its backing of Baku during the Karabakh crisis deepened tensions and hostility between Armenia and Turkey [7: 5-8].

Over the past decade, Turkey's regional activities have increasingly aligned with the militarization of its foreign policy strategy under President Erdogan's ideological influence. Its military-diplomatic intervention in the Second Karabakh War was an extension of its engagements in Syria, Iraq, Libya, Cyprus, and the Eastern Mediterranean. Relying on military force in its South Caucasus operations, Turkey has moved away from a "no war, no peace" approach to resolving the Karabakh conflict. In recent years, Ankara and Baku have deepened their strategic relations under the "one nation, two states" concept, becoming a critical factor in regional power redistribution.

The push for the so-called "Zangezur Corridor" (or "Turan Corridor") following Azerbaijan's victory in the Second Karabakh War is set to significantly alter regional geopolitics in favor of Turkey and Azerbaijan. Ankara aims to control Eurasian transit geopolitics by sidelining Russia and Iran through this corridor, framed as the "Middle Corridor." This route connects China to Kazakhstan, then via the Aktau and Kuryk ports in the northeastern Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, extending further through Georgia to Turkey. By establishing the "Zangezur route" through Armenia's Syunik province, Turkey could directly access the Caspian Sea and Central Asia via Azerbaijani territory without transiting Georgia. The war in Ukraine has amplified the geostrategic importance of the Middle Corridor as the third Eurasian transit vector linking Asia and Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and Turkey, presenting Ankara with a unique opportunity [9].

### **The Implications of Turkey's New Foreign Policy Approach on the National Interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the South Caucasus**

With the rise of Erdogan's government, Turkey adopted a policy of expanding neighborhood influence. In this context, the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan, given their shared ethnic and linguistic identity as well as transit and transportation potential, became a focal point for Ankara. Following the outbreak of the 2020 Karabakh conflict, Turkey intensified its efforts to expand influence in the South Caucasus through comprehensive support for Azerbaijan. Turkey's foreign policy in the region, based on military, economic, cultural, and geopolitical factors, has threatened Iran's national interests in three key areas:

- 1) Ethnic-Security (promoting pan-Turkic ideologies)
- 2) Geopolitical (altering regional geography through the "Zangezur Corridor")
- 3) Economic (seeking to become a transit and energy hub for Central Asia and the South Caucasus)

#### ***The Spread of Pan-Turkic Ideology in the South Caucasus***

Ankara's strategy to strengthen ties with Baku and expand influence in the South Caucasus heavily relies on pan-Turkic messaging. This approach seeks to capitalize on Turkic language, history, and culture, imposing it across a vast region from northwestern Iran to the Caucasus, Central Asia, and China. Iranian officials and analysts are deeply concerned about this trend, particularly Turkey's potential to incite Iranian Azeris amid rising tensions between Tehran and Ankara. Iran has grown increasingly wary of Turkey's pan-Turkic agenda in the South Caucasus and Central Asia due to its potential repercussions on Iran's Azeri-populated regions [3].

According to Iranian officials, the Turkey-Azerbaijan alignment in promoting pan-Turkism against Iran is notably supported by Israel. Amid Russia's involvement in Ukraine, some in Tehran anticipate that Ankara and Baku will further advance pan-Turkic rhetoric, inevitably leading to confrontation with Iran [27]. Discussions on uniting Turkic states have increasingly included references to "all Azeri people," including those in Iran. For instance, at the 2022 Summit of Turkic States in Samarkand, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev emphasized strengthening ties between so-called "North Azerbaijan" (Azerbaijan) and "South Azerbaijan" (Iranian Azeris), implicitly endorsing the idea of a unified Azerbaijan [11].

In line with this aggressive rhetoric, Turkish President Erdogan, during his December 2020 visit to Baku, recited a poem lamenting the separation of Azeri-speaking populations by the Aras River [15]. Iran perceived this as a direct affront

to its territorial integrity. Tehran is particularly concerned that recent geopolitical gains by the Turkey-Azerbaijan axis could fuel ethno-political demands for a "Greater Azerbaijan." Iran views Turkey's pan-Turkic maneuvers in the South Caucasus as part of Ankara's broader strategy to revive a "Turkic world" bloc.

Iran fears that Turkey's growing geopolitical influence among Azeris could destabilize its northern provinces and threaten territorial integrity. After Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 Karabakh War, President Aliyev adopted an unprecedented aggressive tone toward Iran. At the Ninth Summit of Turkic States, he indirectly referenced Iran's Azeri minority, stating: "The Turkic world is not limited to independent Turkic states; its geographical boundaries are much wider." Aliyev's remarks were interpreted as a direct challenge to Iran's sovereignty, as he declared: "We will do everything to protect Azerbaijan and Azerbaijanis, including those living in Iran. They are part of our nation."

While Iran does not view Baku's claims as an immediate security threat, it remains deeply troubled by the rising pan-Turkic sentiment leveraged by regional rivals—Turkey and Israel. Tehran's greater concern is that Azerbaijan could serve as a tool for hostile powers to expand influence in northwestern Iran. The rise of Turkic nationalism in Erdogan's Eurasian activism and its growing sway in Azerbaijan has heightened Iranian anxieties, particularly as Erdogan positions himself as the staunch protector of the entire Turkic world, including Azeris on both sides of the Aras River [9].

Iran is well aware that this is not merely Baku's game—Ilham Aliyev is but a minor player in a much older geopolitical struggle dating back to World War I. Many of the powers that once sought to partition Iran have since faded from history, disintegrated, or retreated within their borders. Iran's national identity is not based on ethnicity; rather, all ethnic groups, regardless of language or religion, identify as Iranian and unite under a shared national identity. Nevertheless, Iran remains vigilant against the destabilizing actions of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

#### ***The "Zangezur Corridor" Initiative***

The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly stated since the beginning of the Second Karabakh War that it is "opposed to any changes in borders" in the region [17]. The issue of border changes, the closure of Iran-Armenia land borders, and the land swap proposal between Armenia and Azerbaijan are not unprecedented. Paul Goble first proposed this idea in 1992, followed by Turkey's "twin corridors" concept the same year. A few years later, Azerbaijani and Armenian officials negotiated a "land swap" plan under this framework, which failed due to domestic

opposition in both countries.

Iran's 42-kilometer border with Armenia has become one of the most strategically critical land routes. An analysis of Iranian media and scholarly reactions to the proposed "Turan Corridor" ("Zangezur Corridor") reveals that the primary concern revolves around potential changes to national borders, particularly the risk of severing the Iran-Armenia land connection [15]. In 2022, Iran deployed approximately 50,000 troops along the border to signal to Turkey and Azerbaijan that it would not tolerate any alteration of internationally recognized borders and that Armenia's territorial integrity must be preserved. The reopening of Iran's consulate in Syunik in August 2022 was widely interpreted by regional analysts as a clear demonstration of Iran's commitment to Armenia's sovereignty [19].

Former Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian emphasized during the consulate's inauguration in Kapan (Syunik's regional capital) that Iran would not allow the blocking of its transit route with Armenia. Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Khamenei explicitly warned Putin and Erdogan in July 2022 that any plan disrupting Iran's historic border with Armenia would be unacceptable [9].

Kamal Kharrazi, head of Iran's Foreign Policy Strategic Council and former foreign minister, warned in an article titled "The Plot to Create NATO's Turan Corridor" that completing the Zangezur Corridor would have significant geopolitical consequences for Iran, Russia, and China. Kharrazi argued that the "NATO Turan Corridor" could directly bring NATO to Iran's northern border, Russia's southern frontier, and China's Xinjiang region, completing an encirclement strategy aimed at fragmenting these states. NATO's presence in the Caucasus and Central Asia complements Russia's containment via the Black Sea, China's through the South China Sea, and Iran's via the Persian Gulf [21].

The proposed "Zangezur Corridor" threatens Iran's interests in multiple ways:

1. Loss of Iran's monopoly over connectivity between Nakhchivan and mainland Azerbaijan.
2. Increased dependence on Azerbaijan for trade/transit with Armenia, subordinating Iran's South Caucasus access to Turkish-Azerbaijani political will.
3. Diminished role in East-West transit routes, as the corridor could integrate with China's Belt and Road Initiative via Turkey, bypassing Iran.

The security implications are equally critical, as the corridor would:

- Reinforce pan-Turkist ideologies near Iran's borders.
- Facilitate NATO's southward expansion into the South Caucasus.

Given post-Ukraine war dynamics in the Black Sea and Turkey's revived strategic value to NATO, Ankara's involvement signals the alliance's geopolitical footprint in reshaping the South Caucasus [9]. Tehran's concerns are compounded by Erdogan's post-election policies, which Iran views as excessively ambitious if not expansionist—extending beyond the Caucasus to competitive theaters like Iraq and Syria [3].

### *Transit and Energy*

The competition between Iran and Turkey extends beyond cultural and geopolitical dimensions to include economic aspects. The uneasy rivalry between Iran and Turkey in the South Caucasus also carries geoeconomic implications. Tehran views Ankara as its primary geoeconomic competitor in the South Caucasus, seeking to marginalize Iran from key transit and energy routes. Due to its unique geographical position, Iran serves as a transit bridge connecting West Asia to Europe and East Asia. However, powers such as the United States oppose Iran's effective involvement in transregional projects that could bring it economic benefits. Meanwhile, Turkey aims to replace Iran's role as a regional hub for trade and transit.

Turkey's efforts, including initiatives to connect with Central Asia via the Caspian Sea through the Middle Corridor, pose a direct challenge to Iran's interests. This corridor links Turkey to the Caucasus through Georgia and Azerbaijan and further extends via a maritime route across the Caspian Sea to Central Asia and China. A subsidiary component of this strategy is the Turkey-Georgia-Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan-Afghanistan Transit Corridor Agreement, also known as the Lapis Lazuli Corridor. This project seeks to develop a transit route from Central Asia and Afghanistan to the Black and Mediterranean Seas, bypassing Iran's transport networks and jeopardizing its trade relations with Afghanistan and Central Asian countries [27].

Iran's primary transit advantage lies in its position along the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC). To fully leverage this, Iran has pursued projects such as developing the Chabahar Port in cooperation with India and expanding transit links with Central Asia and the Caucasus. However, the activation of the Middle Corridor—which requires the construction of the Zangezur segment—significantly diminishes Iran's competitive edge in international transit [15]. Turkey seeks to establish "route dependency" in its relations with neighboring countries and regions, positioning itself at the heart of East-West energy and transit corridors. Achieving this goal requires Turkey's active presence in areas where China-Europe

transit routes are planned, making the South Caucasus crucial. Iran, with its ability to offer alternative routes, is seen as an obstacle that must be circumvented.

The Middle Corridor is designed to connect China to Kazakhstan and then, via the Aktau and Kuryk ports in the northeastern Caspian Sea, to Azerbaijan. Currently, this route extends through Georgia to Turkey. However, if the southern Zangezur route through Armenia's Syunik Province is operationalized, Turkey could gain direct access to the Caspian Sea and Central Asia via Azerbaijan, bypassing Georgia. The Ukraine war has amplified the geostrategic significance of the Middle Corridor as the third vector of Eurasian transit, linking Asia and Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, and Turkey [5].

From Turkey's strategic perspective, the Middle Corridor is highly attractive not only for establishing direct connectivity with Eurasia but also for reducing the dependence of Turkic-speaking countries on Russia and Iran. The Second Nagorno-Karabakh War and the ongoing Ukraine conflict have shifted regional power dynamics, creating unprecedented opportunities for Turkey to strengthen its strategic partnerships with Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan through multilateral initiatives like the Trans-Caspian International Route and the Organization of Turkic States. Deepening ties between Turkey and Central Asian republics—coupled with their desire to rely less on Russia and China—provide Turkey with greater leverage to expand its foothold in East-West corridor dynamics.

Turkey also shares geoeconomic interests with the European Union in developing the Middle Corridor, as the EU seeks to diversify energy sources and enhance supply chain resilience. Unsurprisingly, the Middle Corridor's establishment would diminish Russian and Iranian influence in the South Caucasus and Central Asia while boosting Turkey's and the EU's role in shaping Eurasia's geoeconomic landscape.

Growing concerns in Tehran over Turkey-backed transit projects—particularly the Trans-Caspian Corridor—have prompted Iran to advance the INSTC via Armenia. The INSTC is a multimodal network of shipping, rail, and road routes linking the Persian Gulf and Indian ports to Russia. Tehran and Moscow, alongside India and recently Armenia, have taken practical steps to implement this corridor. Beyond its numerous geoeconomic benefits, the Ukraine conflict and subsequent Western sanctions against Russia have been the strongest drivers in accelerating this transit route [9].

## Conclusion

Ankara has been one of the key regional actors in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. The country's regional policy gained momentum with the rise of Islamist parties, particularly the Justice and Development Party, transforming Turkey into an influential player in the region. The strengthening of Azerbaijan's position in the political and security dynamics of the Caucasus—and, consequently, the increase in its geopolitical weight—can be seen as an extension of Turkey's influence not only in the South Caucasus but also in Central Asia.

Initially, by enhancing cultural, political, and economic ties with Azerbaijan, Turkey managed to expand its influence in the country while laying the groundwork for deeper security and military cooperation. Before the outbreak of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey's role in the South Caucasus was limited due to Russia's dominance in the region. However, Ankara's strategy of aligning with Baku under the "One Nation, Two States" framework, its active role in Azerbaijan's victory in Karabakh, and the elevation of bilateral relations to an alliance through the Shushi Declaration have significantly bolstered Turkey's standing in the South Caucasus. This development, coupled with the Russia-Ukraine war and Moscow's preoccupation with managing the conflict after the 2020 hostilities, has provided Ankara with additional opportunities.

Turkey's post-Second Karabakh War foreign policy, rooted in the theory of offensive realism, seeks to maximize its presence and power in the South Caucasus, reflecting an expansionist foreign policy approach. A key tenet of offensive realism is the pursuit of hegemony in regional and global affairs vis-à-vis rival powers. In this context, Turkey's recent foreign policy maneuvers in the South Caucasus—particularly its engagement with Azerbaijan—demonstrate its ambition to become the central actor in regional developments, spanning transit, energy, geopolitics, and security. This shift negatively impacts the interests of other regional players, including the Islamic Republic of Iran.

In the realm of transit and energy, Ankara's push to develop the Middle Corridor aims to weaken and eliminate competing routes, particularly those involving Iran and Russia. Turkey's geopolitical ambitions, manifested in the Zangezur Corridor initiative and direct access to Azerbaijan and Central Asia, pose a significant threat to Iran's interests by altering the South Caucasus' geopolitical landscape.

In terms of regional security, Turkey's growing presence threatens Tehran's interests on multiple levels. First, as a NATO member, Turkey's expanding military-

security role in the region equates to NATO's creeping influence in the South Caucasus and along Iran's northwestern borders. Second, Ankara and Baku's promotion of pan-Turkist ideologies—including the fabricated concepts of "Greater Azerbaijan" and "South Azerbaijan"—poses an existential threat to Iran's territorial integrity.

In summary, following the Second Karabakh War and leveraging Russia's entanglement in Ukraine, Turkey has pursued an expansionist agenda in the South Caucasus across political, military, and economic dimensions. This approach jeopardizes Iran's national interests in the region, including regional security (through pan-Turkist narratives and potential NATO encroachment), exclusion from transit and energy routes, and shifts in regional geopolitics (via the "Zangezur Corridor").

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**ԵՐԿՐՈՐԴ ՂԱՐԱՔԱՂՅԱՆ ՊԱՏԵՐԱԶՄԸ. ԹՈՒՐՔԻԱՅԻ  
ՔԱՂԱՔԱԿԱՆՈՒԹՅՈՒՆԸ ՀԱՐԱՎԱՅԻՆ ԿՈՎԿԱՍՈՒՄ ԵՎ ԻՐԱՆԻ  
ՌԱԶՄԱՎԱՐԱԿԱՆ ՇԱՀԵՐԸ**

**Մոհամմադ Աֆրասիյաբ**

**Հիմնաբառեր** – Երկրորդ ղարաբաղյան պատերազմ, հարավկովկասյան աշխարհաքաղաքականություն, պանթուրքականություն, Իրանի աշխարհաքաղաքական շահեր

**Ամփոփում**

Նեո-օսմանյան քաղաքականության համատեքստում Թուրքիան Հարավային Կովկասը դիտարկում է որպես իր էնթիկ և ինքնութենական տարածքի մաս՝ խորացնելով քաղաքական, տնտեսական և անվտանգային կապերն Ադրբեջանի հետ՝ «մեկ ազգ, երկու պետություն» կարգախոսի ներքո: Ադրբեջանի և Հայաստանի միջև 2020 թվականի հակամարտության հետևանքով անվտանգային հարացույցի փոփոխությունը հնարավորություն է տվել Անկարային վերափոխել իր գործառնական միջավայրը Հարավային Կովկասում՝ վերածվելով տարածաշրջանային դերակատարի: Երկրորդ ղարաբաղյան պատերազմում Թուրքիայի հաստատական ներգրավվածությունը և աներկբա աջակցությունը Բաքվին լրջագույն մարտահրավերներ են առաջացրել տարածաշրջանում Իրանի Իսլամական Հանրապետության ազգային շահերի համար: Այս հետազոտությունն արծարծում է հետևյալ հարցը՝ *որո՞նք են Թուրքիայի արտաքին քաղաքականության մոտեցման չափումները Հարավային Կովկասում Երկրորդ ղարաբաղյան պատերազմից հետո, և ինչպես այն կանդրադառնա Իրանի աշխարհաքաղաքական և աշխարհամշակութային շահերի վրա տարածաշրջանում*: Համաձայն ներկայացված հիպոթեզի՝ Թուրքիայի հետպատերազմյան արտաքին քաղաքականությունը՝ հիմնված Անկարա-Բաքու ռազմավարական դաշինքի, էթնիկ-ինքնութենական նարատիվների, տնտեսական-ռազմական ինտեգրացիայի վրա, հարվածի տակ է դնելու Իրանի անվտանգային, աշխարհաքաղա-

քական և տնտեսական շահերը Հարավային Կովկասում: Ուսումնասիրությունը, ընդգրկելով 2020-2023 թվականները, վերլուծում է Թուրքիայի ռազմավարությունը տարածաշրջանում և դրա հետևանքները Իրանի ռազմավարական դիրքի համար:

# CONSEQUENCES OF SOVIET ETHNIC FEDERALISM IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS

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## Abstract

The roots of Islam in the beliefs and thoughts of the people of the Caucasus region go back to the seventh century and have evolved over the centuries through various developments. The creation of the alleged "Green Belt" by the USA during the Cold War also promoted Islamic tendencies in the peripheral regions of the Soviet Union. After the military attack of the Soviet Army on Afghanistan, Islamist movements found greater opportunities to enjoy the support of the USA against the Soviet Union. The resurgence of Islamic trends in the Middle East and West Asia affected the Caucasus region as well. The conditions created by the implementation of Gorbachev's reform policies were also favorable for Islamism. As the ethnic policies of the Soviet Union and the "ethnic federalism" of the communist system were entering the last stage, Islamism was strengthened by using the space created by the implementation of Glasnost. The study of the effects of ethnic-racial policies of the Soviet Union on the political-military trends in the Caucasus, after its collapse, is the aim of this review. The main question of this paper is: "What effect has the legacy of ethnic policies of the Soviet Union had on the political-military developments of the South Caucasus, considering the factor of "Islam"?" The hypothesis is that: "The legacy of ethnic federalism in the Soviet Union has had a direct and immediate impact on the political-military developments of the South Caucasus, and the Islamic factor is an intervening variable." The study employs a qualitative method with a descriptive-analytical approach, using resources available in libraries and Internet.

**Keywords:** Ethnic Federalism, Islam, Caucasus, Russia, Afghanistan, America

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## Introduction

The Caucasus is divided into two parts by the Caucasus Mountain range, the northern and southern. Many tribes, ethnic and linguistic groups live in the North Caucasus, located in the Russian Federation. The impressive diversity of the Caucasus in terms of ethnicity and language is unparalleled in the world. Islam has been adopted in this area since the 7th century. The spread of Islam in the region was fast and until the expansion of the presence and influence of Tsarist Russia, these areas were always under the control and influence of Iranians.

At the end of the fifteenth century when the Safavid government declared Shiism official in Iran, a major portion of the Muslims of the South Caucasus also converted to the Shia religion. Until the victory of the October Revolution, Islam was dynamic in Central Asia and the Caucasus and large parts of Russia [8: 225]. The Muslims of these regions, like other Muslims, had a similar history and culture and spoke closely related languages. Even on the eve of the 1917 revolution, Baku was more closely connected to Tabriz and Isfahan than to Moscow and Petrograd. These areas were obviously parts of *Dar al-Islam*. Followers of other religions also lived in North Caucasus. In the 16th century, Dagestan became the main center of Islamic education in the Caucasus, where Arabic and Persian were the dominant cultural and literary languages. Despite the conversion of many tribes living in the mountainous areas to Islam, Christians and followers of other religions continued to live in the high mountainous areas [8: 230]. Until the early 19th century, many Ingush still adhered to pagan beliefs or Christianity. By the 19th century, however, Islam was the predominant religion among Chechens and Ingush. In fact, the Islamization of the Caucasus occurred over the course of ten centuries.

## Expansion of Russian Influence in the Caucasus

Following the capture of Astrakhan in 1556 by Ivan the Terrible, Russia began to compete with the Ottoman Empire and Safavid Iran for control over the Caucasus region. Each of these states tried to gain the allegiance of local rulers. To ensure their security, local rulers sought the support of competing foreign powers. Russia's influence on the lower parts of the Volga River along with the expansion of the influence of the Shiite government of Iran resulted in the Sunni Muslim world becoming divided into two parts on either side of the Caspian Sea. Soon, the people of the Caucasus faced the intensification of the cultural colonization of the Russians [14: 132]. The Caucasus was one of the arenas of Russia's rivalry with the Ottoman Empire. In response to intensifying activities of Russia in the North

Caucasus, the Ottoman government tried to reinforce Islam among the mountain people. At the end of the 18th century, the Russians had expanded their military garrisons throughout this region[19]. They tried to annex the Caucasus into the empire. In this situation, Islam was an influential force against Russian colonialism and Russification in the region. After the Iran-Russia wars and the secession of the Caucasian regions from Iran since 1813, Iran's influence in this region declined.

### Sufi Tariqats

Sufi *tariqats* in the Caucasus began to form in the 19th century, inspired by the teachings of Baha al-Din Naqshband, who lived in Bukhara during the 14th century. Sufi imams traced their efforts back to the era of the Prophet of Islam (PBUH) and continued to search salvation in the world. This *tariqat*, which was primarily widespread in Central Asia and India, began to spread in the Ottoman Empire in the 18th century. An Ottoman sheikh named Sheikh Diya al-Din Khalid al-Shahrazuri lent his name to a new branch of this *tariqat*: the Khalidiyyah *tariqat* tried to spread religious beliefs rooted in spiritual inspiration. Sufi *tariqats* spread northward through the Ottoman territory and the South Caucasus. At the beginning of the 19th century, Sheikh Ismail Al-Shirwani, one of the important figures of the Naqshbandi *tariqat*, found many followers in the South Caucasus. His influence also extended into Dagestan[19]. The Russians faced the increasing influence of the *tariqat* leaders, as the Naqshbandiyyah played a unifying role among tribes of the North Caucasus.

From the late 19th century onward, Muslim armed movements against Russian rule began to emerge. Sufi sects and their leaders played a crucial role in these uprisings, declaring jihad. These movements were led either by the leader of Naqshbandiyyah or Qadiriyyah. They fought not only against the Russians, but also against other "infidels." The first Sufi uprising, led by Sheikh Mansur, was directed against Russian rule. He was the first Naqshbandi leader who combined religious duties with national interests [16: 206-209]. Many Caucasian clerics recognized his leadership. He spoke about the necessity of returning to Islamic laws and values.

In the mid-1820s, the Chechen Rebellion erupted and soon encompassed other ethnic groups like the Ingush and Kabardians. Its main driver was the political teachings of the Naqshbandi order. This struggle led to a stable union among the mountain dwellers of the Caucasus. The Russian forces, against the expansion of the waves of this movement, adopted a "policy of encirclement."

Their goal was to isolate the Chechens in the mountains and prevent their influence among the peoples of the Caucasus. However, the Russian policy in the Caucasus failed, and the Naqshbandi *tariqat* network in the region supported Mansur. The second mentor of Naqshbandiyyah was Sheikh Muhammad Effendi al-Yaraghi, who called on Muslims to wage *jihad* against the Russians in the south of Dagestan. This movement known as the "Muridist Movement" continued for 35 years until 1859. In the years of the Chechen rebellion and the Iran-Russia war, with Russia's attention diverted, Naqshbandi Sufis seized the opportunity to strengthen and promote their teachings.

Qazi Muhammad Ibn Ismail Al-Ghimrawi was one of the most influential leaders of the Naqshbandi *tariqat*. He believed that the implementation of Islamic rules leads to the salvation of people. Qazi Mohammad and his representatives had a major impact in turning Chechnya into one of the Naqshbandi centers. The experience of the second Imam of Naqshbandi showed that among the people of the Caucasus, religious legitimacy is very important for gaining political power [19]. Sheikh Shamil also organized new efforts. With the support of the people, he followed the fight against the Russian forces. The Russians inflicted heavy blows on Shamil's forces, which had a severe impact on the Muslims of Dagestan. Shamil consolidated his power in Chechnya in 1840. His reforms were very effective in strengthening and sustaining his power. By creating a regular and efficient administrative system, he reshaped the conditions existing in the Caucasus. He transformed the traditional power structure and limited the power of elites. It created the foundation for the emergence of the concept of citizenship in the region and, for the first time, ensured that both rulers and subjects accountable to the law. He was able to mobilize the Naqshbandiyyah network to gain people's support and sustain military struggle against the Russian forces. He exercised his power in the name of Islamic laws. In the early 1850s, Russia altered its strategy, strengthening the garrisons and forts in the region. Financial restrictions and food shortages fueled public discontent. Following the conclusion of the Crimean War, in 1857, Russian forces launched assaults on Shamil's strongholds. After the occupation of Dagestan by the Russians, the Naqshbandi order became a secret underground organization. After the defeat of Shaykh Shamil, the Qadiriyyah sect was established in the North Caucasus [19]. In contrast to the Naqshbandi approach, the early Qadiriyyah order did not emphasize conflict or struggle. Yet, its isolationist orientation carried the idea of resistance against Russian domination. Consequently, Qadiriyyah soon became one of the centers of armed resistance against Russia.

### Jadidi Movement

In the middle of the 19th century, all over the Islamic world, efforts were made for Islamic renewal. During communication with European countries, the intellectuals of Islamic societies began effort to answer the question of the causes and factors behind the backwardness of Islamic societies. In the Caucasus region, which was on the way to connect with European societies, this tendency was very strong. Islamic reformism in the Caucasus became a powerful movement among Muslims. Some new-minded Muslim clerics took the leadership of this movement. Abu Nasr Qursawi, who taught in Bukhara schools, and Shihabuddin Marjani were among their prominent figures. They considered Islam to have full capacity to respond to the needs of all people in all periods. Consequently, Muslims in the Caucasus shared experiences similar to those of other Islamic societies. Some have considered the new movement as a response to Russia's modernization programs among Muslims, as well as the impact of the spread of waves of Slavophilism. Jadidis tried to modernize Islamic ideas in the Muslim areas of the Russian Empire [9]. This reform movement was very powerful in the Caucasus and the Tatar-inhabited regions, but it faced strong resistance from the traditionalists.

### Muslims and the Revolution of October 1917

With the publication of Lenin's thoughts on the "right of nations to self-determination", the Muslims of the Caucasus also believed that they would be able to establish their desired government in the post-tsarist regime. In their different congresses, they discussed the conditions and means for the establishment of an Islamic government. In these congresses, the importance of Muslim unity was emphasized too [2]. At their 1917 congress in Moscow, the federal system, and the way of distribution of power were also considered. In Kazan, their emphasis was placed on the unity of Muslims and the formation of special institutions for the Muslim population. While Russian Muslims wanted unity, but the Bolshevik government prioritized the creation of small ethnically based states. In the South Caucasus, three independent republics were formed with the division of the Transcaucasian Republic [12]. This policy was also implemented in Dagestan. Although institutions were first established to manage the affairs of Muslims, they soon came under the complete control of the Communist Party. The government of the Soviet Union soon started the policy of unification of all nationalities by using all its tools and facilities. The policy aimed at destroying Islam and all its symbols

and institutions.

During the civil war period, the followers of Sufi *tariqats* found a favorable opportunity to resume their fight against Russia. After the defeat in these confrontations, all Naqshbandis were persecuted and harassed. Later, Stalin arrested and deported many Chechens and Ingush and other tribes in 1944 [11]. Thus, the Soviet Union, like the Tsarist Russia, instead of providing appropriate political and administrative mechanisms to ensure the rights of Muslims, implemented the policy of extermination and Sovietization in the Caucasus. Under the tsarist regime, the policy of "Russification" was imposed on all nationalities, including Muslims. This policy was later continued by the Soviet Union in the form of "Sovietization."

### After Reform Era

With the implementation of political reforms during the period of Mikhail Gorbachev, the last General Secretary of the Communist Party, the conditions for the spread of Islamic trends in the Caucasus were also provided. The removal of obstacles to communication with Islamic societies and participation in Muslim religious activities, as well as the increase in the activities of Islamic countries, helped the process of Islamic renewal among Muslims. This process was very evident in Dagestan, Tatarstan and Chechnya. Separatism in the autonomous republic of Chechnya, which separated from Ingushetia, was one of the most serious problems of the Russian government [12]. The historical background of Islamism among Chechens and the leadership of General Dzhokhar Dudayev intensified separatism. Policies of repression and humiliation against Caucasian Muslims greatly contributed to the spread of separatism. Muslims tried hard to preserve their values, identity, and culture despite the persistent policies of the Russian government. Following the August 1991 coup in Moscow, Dudayev raised the flag of independence. In 1994, Russian military forces attacked separatists in Chechnya.

The bloody war in Chechnya ended in 1996 with thousands of dead and wounded. However, it also led to the strengthening of radical Islam in the Caucasus. After the death of Dudayev, the president of Chechnya, Zelimkhan Yandarbiyev, paid attention to the implementation of Sharia law. Islamism intensified in Chechnya with the rise of Aslan Maskhadov. Chechnya sought to reach the Caspian Sea and integrate with Dagestan. The Russian government feared of repeating the collapse scenario, especially in the Caucasus [10]. Maskhadov banned the Wahhabi activities in Chechnya and expelled their

missionaries. He accused them of spreading division and interfering in the affairs of the country. In the summer of 1999, a major conflict erupted in the Caucasus, during which Chechen forces sought to separate Dagestan from Russia and establish an Islamic government.

According to some local reports, they were accompanied by rebels from Central Asia and Arab countries [3: 83-102]. Maskhadov condemned the rebellion, while Shamil Basayev and Khattab assumed leadership. The Russian federal forces under the management of Vladimir Putin severely crushed their resistance. Chechens also turned to guerrilla warfare. Among these actions were the bombing of a shopping mall in Moscow, an attack on apartment blocks in Moscow, an explosion in a residential military complex in the Buynaksk in Dagestan, and a military building in Volgodonsk. The hostage-taking at the Dubrovka Theater in Moscow and at a school in Beslan opened Putin's hand to crack down on radical Islamists. In all the mentioned cases, the Chechen fighters acted with martyrdom and sacrificed their lives in this operation [7: 293-311]. The rise of anti-Caucasian sentiments among the Russian people threatened the country's integrity.

Moscow supported Ramzan Kadyrov's Islamization policies in this autonomous republic. The issue of transferring Caucasus energy resources from Russia or other routes has influenced Chechens' Islamism and separatism. To use its territory to transfer energy from the Caucasus to world markets, Russia desperately needed stability and security in the Caucasus. Chechnya was the main transportation route of Russia in the Caucasus [4]. In contrast, Turkey, with the support of the United States, sought to establish itself as the primary route for energy transfer from the Caucasus to the West. It was very important for Russia to stabilize the situation in Chechnya. Moscow even accused Ankara of helping Chechen fighters [17]. The conquest of Chechnya strengthened the Islamic tendencies in the Caucasus, but it led to people's fear of Islam and the strengthening of centralism for the benefit of Moscow. Putin ended the policy of decentralization in the Russian federal system. The terrorist attacks of 9/11 caused an increasing rapprochement between Russia and America. Moscow continued to suppress the Chechens more easily in the light of the announcement of the US policy for the global fight against terrorism.

### **The Republic of Azerbaijan**

Since the introduction of Gorbachev's policy of Glasnost, Islamic tendencies have grown significantly in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Approximately 85% of the

Azerbaijani population are Shia Muslims, making it one of the countries with the largest Shia populations worldwide. Soviet assimilation policies severely undermined the Islamic beliefs of its people; however, diverse perspectives on political Islam have existed within the country. Moreover, the Islamization of the North Caucasus has had a notable impact on Azerbaijan.

Three main groups can be distinguished among the people of the Republic of Azerbaijan: the group that has put Islam on the sidelines of their lives due to the policies of the Soviet Union. The second group who consider Islam as the most important indicator of their identity [15: 116]. The third group consists of those who intertwine their Islamic identity with political activism. It appears that the largest portion of the population belongs to the first group, while the smallest portion falls within the third group. The Spiritual Administration Muslims, a legacy institution from the Communist period, continues to function in religious matters and maintains close coordination with state policies. In 2001, the government of Azerbaijan established The State Committee on Affairs with Religious Associations to control effectively the activities of religious institutions and organizations. Another key institution is the Ministry of National Security, which monitors matters related to Islamist activities. Following the terrorist attacks of September 2001, the role and significance of such institutions increased considerably.

Azerbaijan Islamic Party was granted official registration in 1992; however, its license was revoked in 1996. Its activities were primarily concentrated in Nardaran and the southern areas of Baku. Some sources estimated its number of followers at around 70,000, mostly drawn from the lower strata of society. One of the most important Shiite activists in this country, is Ilqar Ibrahimoglu. After eight years of studying in Iran, he returned to Azerbaijan and became the imam of the Friday Mosque in the old part of Baku. He successfully blended religious teachings with modern ideas, attracting many young people to Islam. However, in 2004, he was prohibited from continuing his activities at the Baku Mosque and was subjected to significant restrictions. By 2003, 65 new Salafi-controlled mosques had been established in Azerbaijan [18: 7], and they expanded their activities too.

In 2011, the pressure on the Islamists in the Republic of Azerbaijan intensified. The government increased various repressions and restrictions against Islamists. The handling with women's hijab, approval of anti-religious bills by religious leaders sparked protest. Some defenders of the model of the Islamic Republic, demanded the dismissal of the government in Baku and cutting relations with Israel. Many of them were arrested and imprisoned. The arrest of the leaders and members of the Islamist party has had a negative impact on the relations

between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Iran. It is worth mentioning, that training of thousands of Shiite clerics from Azerbaijan in the Islamic Republic of Iran demonstrated the level of influence of Iran in Azerbaijan.

In the context of the Iranian influence, in the early 1990s, the People's Front of Azerbaijan, led by Abulfaz Elchibey, made significant efforts to align the country more closely with Türkiye and the United States. This tendency persisted during the administrations of Heydar Aliyev and his son.

The Azerbaijani government's pro-Western orientation has encountered opposition from both Russia and Iran. Meanwhile, Türkiye, with strong backing from the United States, has actively worked to influence Islamist movements in Azerbaijan since the country's independence. Türkiye has built mosques in Baku and has had extensive cooperation with universities in Azerbaijan. Turkish *tariqats* have also found favorable conditions to extend their influence in Azerbaijan. The Nurji *tariqat*, influenced by Fethullah Gülen's teachings, has been particularly impactful. This moderate approach and orientation toward the West align closely with the policies of the Azerbaijani government. The convergence of these ideas with the needs of Muslims, especially within a framework of cooperation with the West, has created a conducive environment for the country's secular government. In Gülen's thoughts, religious modernization and a new movement have been shaped. The Shiites and the secular population of Azerbaijan saw the Gülen movement as a real enemy, accusing it of trying to advance its Islamic political agenda that was mainly Turkish Sunni driven and, in fact, acted as an agent of the Turks in their efforts to advance Sunnism against the Shi'a identity [5: 410].

Due to the presence of a Sunni minority in the Republic of Azerbaijan, Salafi Islamic extremism found a significant base of support. Thousands of Salafis resided in border areas adjacent to Chechnya and Dagestan. These individuals were involved in recruiting fighters and engaging in terrorist activities connected to international jihadist movements. They actively facilitated the dispatch of volunteers to conflict zones such as Chechnya, Afghanistan, and Iraq. Azerbaijan's border with Dagestan and Chechnya further eased the movement Salafists.

However, the Karabakh war made the further expansion of these tendencies difficult. At the same time, the war in Chechnya and Russia's military operations contributed to strengthening jihadist connections, particularly through increased migration flows. Financial and institutional support from some Arab countries in the Persian Gulf was impressive in fostering these activities. Wahhabi centers were involved in training a number of Azerbaijani volunteers.

The Nagorno-Karabakh war has had a direct impact on the policies of the

Republic of Azerbaijan. [13]. By accusing Iran and Russia of supporting Armenians, the government of this country has followed the expansion of relations with Turkey, Israel, and the US. The internal goal of this policy has been to intensify the pressure on the Islamist currents and strengthen the Jordanian tendencies in this country. Israel has also responded to these security concerns by implementing an active policy and has strengthened its security influence in the north of Iran's borders. Israel's foreign policy, which continues to be governed by Ben-Gurion's Doctrine, pursues alliance with its second circle neighbors [6: 125-142]. The Caucasus is a part of Israel's Middle Eastern foreign policy. According to the ruling view of this country, it is important to help reduce the effects of underdevelopment through economic cooperation, because Islam exploits these deficiencies to intensify the fight against Zionism. Israel has paid attention to the expansion of economic cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan on this basis. On the other hand, the issue of the unresolved issues between Iran and America has been effective in strengthening the nationalist tendencies in the Republic of Azerbaijan. Israel and the anti-Islamic Republic groups in America have aimed to strengthen Azeri nationalism to intensify the pressure on the Islamic Republic of Iran [1: 68-72]. Azerbaijan has tried to acquire the necessary levers to put pressure on Armenia by positioning itself within the strategic framework of European energy supply. The internal reflection of this approach in the foreign policy of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been to limit the field of activities of Islamists. The important point is that, like all the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, in this country, the ruling elites consider Islam and its institutions as their most important serious political rivals.

### Conclusion

Islam entered the Caucasus from the late 7th century AD. The spread of Islam in this region was rapid. Until the expansion of the presence and influence of Tsarist Russia, these regions were under Iranian control and influence. The Muslims of these regions, like other Muslims, had a similar history and culture and spoke closely related languages. Even on the eve of the 1917 revolution, Baku was more closely connected to Tabriz and Isfahan than to Moscow and Petrograd. Despite the conversion of many tribes living in mountainous areas to Islam, Christians and followers of other religions continued to live in the high mountainous areas. Tsarist Russia entered the Caucasus in the second half of the 16th century, although at that time it had mostly commercial and military objectives. From the late 18th century, they expanded their military garrisons

throughout the region and pursued the annexation of the Caucasus to the empire. They also aimed for cultural assimilation. After the Russo-Persian Wars and the separation of many Caucasian regions from Iran, Iranian influence in the region declined. The Russians were confronted with the increasing influence of the *Tariqa* leaders, as the Naqshbandiyyah united the tribes of the North Caucasus. In the mid-19th century, efforts were made throughout the Islamic world for religious renewal. Islamic reformism in the Caucasus became a powerful movement among Muslims. The "Jadidis" were able to modernize Islamic ideas in the Muslim-populated areas of the Russian Empire.

With the publication of Lenin's ideas about the "right of nations to self-determination," the Muslims of the Caucasus also came to believe that in the post-tsarist regime, they would be able to establish their desired government. Russian Muslims wanted unity, but the Bolshevik government prioritized the creation of small ethnically based states. In the South Caucasus, three independent republics were formed by the disintegration of the Transcaucasian Republic. This policy was also implemented in Dagestan. Although institutions were initially created to administer Muslim affairs, they soon all came under the control of the Communist Party. The Soviet government soon adopted a policy of homogenizing all nationalities and destroying Islam and all its symbols and institutions. Like the Tsarist Russian government, the Soviet government implemented a policy of assimilation in the Caucasus, instead of providing appropriate political and administrative mechanisms to ensure the rights of Muslims.

The policies of repression and humiliation of Caucasian Muslims were very influential in the spread of separatism in the Caucasus. Following the August 1991 coup in Moscow, General Dudayev raised the flag of independence in Chechnya. The bloody Chechen war ended in 1996 with thousands of deaths and injuries, but it strengthened Islamism in the Caucasus. The Chechens launched a major war in the Caucasus in the summer of 1999 to separate Dagestan from Russia and establish an Islamic state. They were joined by rebels from Central Asia and Arab countries. They then turned to guerrilla warfare and also to terrorist acts, causing great panic among the Russian people. Vladimir Putin considered the suppression of separatism in Chechnya to be a fundamental necessity for preserving Russia's territorial integrity. He supported Ramzan Kadyrov's Islamization policies in Chechnya. The transfer of energy resources from the Caucasus to Russia or other routes has influenced Chechen Islamism and separatism. Russia desperately needed stability and security in the Caucasus in order to use its territory to transfer energy from the Caucasus to world markets. The people of the Republic of Azerbaijan

have also accepted Islam as the main form of their identity. However, there are different views among them regarding political Islam. Fear of extremist activities has led society and the government towards secular tendencies. The Islamic Party of this country was granted a license to operate in 1992, but its license was revoked in 1996. However, it has continued its activities. In 2011, pressure on Islamists in the Republic of Azerbaijan intensified. The government increased various repressions and restrictions against Islamists. Members of this party called for cutting relations with Israel. The arrest of its leaders and members has had a negative impact on Azerbaijan's relations with Iran.

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ԽՈՐՀՐԴԱՅԻՆ ԷԹՆԻԿ ՖԵԴԵՐԱԼԻԶՄԻ ՀԵՏԵՎԱՆՔՆԵՐԸ  
ՀԱՐԱՎԱՅԻՆ ԿՈՎԿԱՍՈՒՄ

Էլահե Բոլաի

**Հիմնաբառեր** - էթնիկ ֆեդերալիզմ, իսլամ, Կովկաս, Ռուսաստան, Աֆղանստան, ԱՄՆ

**Ամփոփում**

Կովկասի տարածաշրջանի ժողովուրդների շրջանում իսլամի արմատները հասնում են 7-րդ դար: Հետագա ժամանակաշրջանում իսլամի դիրքերն ավելի են ամրապնդվել տարբեր զարգացումների հետևանքով: Սառը պատերազմի տարիներին ԱՄՆ կողմից այսպես կոչված «Կանաչ գոտու» ստեղծումը նույնպես նպաստավոր էր ԽՍՀՄ ծայրամասային շրջաններում իսլամական միտումների համար: Խորհրդային բանակի Աֆղանստանի վրա ռազմական հարձակումից հետո, ԱՄՆ սկսեց ավելի լայն աջակցություն ցույց տալ իսլամիստական շարժումներին՝ ընդդեմ Խորհրդային Միության: Մերձավոր Արևելքում և Արևմտյան Ասիայում իսլամական միտումների վերածնունդը իր ազդեցությունն ունեցավ նաև Կովկասյան տարածաշրջանի վրա: Գորբաչովի բարեփոխումների քաղաքականության իրականացման արդյունքում ստեղծված պայմանները նույնպես նպաստավոր էին իսլամիզմի համար: Երբ Խորհրդային Միության էթնիկ քաղաքականությունը և կոմունիստական համակարգի «էթնիկ ֆեդերալիզմը» իրենց վերջին շրջանն էին ապրում, իսլամիզմը ամրապնդվեց՝ օգտագործելով «Գլասնոստ»-ի իրականացման շնորհիվ ստեղծված հնարավորությունը: Այս ակնարկի նպատակն է ուսումնասիրել Խորհրդային Միության էթնիկ-ռասայական քաղաքականության ազդեցությունը Կովկասի քաղաքական-ռազմական միտումների վրա՝ ԽՍՀՄ փլուզումից հետո: Հոդվածում ներկայացվում է հետևյալ հարցադրումը՝ ի՞նչ ազդեցություն է ունեցել Խորհրդային Միության էթնիկ քաղաքականության ժառանգությունը Հարավային

Կովկասի քաղաքական-նազմական զարգացումների վրա՝ հաշվի առնելով իսլամի գործոնը»: Հոդվածի հեղինակը պնդում է, որ «Խորհրդային Միության էթնիկ ֆեդերալիզմի ժառանգությունը ուղղակի և անմիջական ազդեցություն է ունեցել Հարավային Կովկասի քաղաքական-նազմական զարգացումների վրա, և իսլամական գործոնը միջանկյալ փոփոխական է»: Ուսումնասիրությունը կատարվել է որակական մեթոդով՝ նկարագրական-վերլուծական մոտեցմամբ, օգտագործելով գրադարաններում և համացանցում առկա նյութեր:

## THE MODERNIZATION OF CHINA: ARMENIA-CHINA RELATIONS

(International conference)

On 12 November 2024, the Institute of Oriental Studies of NAS RA, with the support of the Bryusov State University (BSU), organized an international conference entitled "The Modernization of China: Armenia-China Relations." The conference addressed China's modernization, Beijing's vision for current international relations, global security issues, universal human development, and welfare issues. Moreover, the conference aimed to examine the dynamics of Armenia-China relations, their weak and strong sides, and current tendencies. Researchers from the Institute of Russian, East European, and Central Asian Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, a major partner of the Institute of Oriental Studies (IOS), Renmin University of China, and Beijing University of Aviation and Astronautics, participated in the conference. From the Armenian side, researchers from the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, BSU, the Armenian State University of Economics, and representatives of institutions cooperating with China participated in the conference.

At the opening of the conference, Dr. Araks Pashayan, Head of the International Relations Department of the Institute of Oriental Studies, addressed the scientific and political importance of the issues discussed at the conference, the growing role of China as a superpower in modern geopolitical and geoeconomic processes, the internal and external aspects of Chinese modernization, and the importance of the Chinese experience for the international community, including Armenia. Dr. Gohar Iskandaryan, Director of the Institute of Oriental Studies of the NAS RA, delivered a welcome speech. She made an in-depth overview on the cooperation between the Institute of Oriental Studies and various scientific and educational institutions of China, notably the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, and its prospects. She mentioned that tangible steps have been taken toward bilateral cooperation in recent years: namely, the organization of numerous workshops and conferences and bilateral visits. In this sense, the Institute of Oriental Studies is already an accomplished center for Chinese studies. The conference was welcomed by Johnny Melikyan on behalf of the Orbeli Center for Public Relations and Information of the Prime Minister's Office of the Republic of Armenia. He emphasized the critical role of the studies of China's multilateral role in international relations and final results processing.

The Chargé d'Affaires of the People's Republic of China in the Republic of Armenia, H.E. Chen Ming, and the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of Armenia to the People's Republic of China, H.E. Vahe Gevorgyan, also delivered welcome speeches. Mr. Chen Ming offered a detailed insight into the modernization of China in theory and practice, after which he referred to Armenia-China relations in a relatively positive light. He noted that over more than a hundred years, as a result of the strict and successful policy of the Communist Party of China, the Chinese people, having gone through many difficulties after long searches, have found their own unique and successful path to modernization, namely modernization in the Chinese style. China can offer its concept to the nations searching a development path. "Supporting the world's equal and orderly multi-polarization and inclusive economic globalization, China is committed to forming common values for all mankind, contributes to constructing the so-called "community with a shared future for mankind," and constantly offers new opportunities to the world with its development. In the face of global changes, China has always been committed to maintaining world peace and international justice, considered it necessary to reform the global governance system, and has contributed to the peaceful settlement of major international and regional issues and conflicts. H.E. Chen Ming expressed hope that the Armenian and Chinese think tanks will strengthen exchanges and cooperation, enrich the content of bilateral relations, and strengthen the social foundation of friendship between the Armenian and Chinese peoples. The Chinese side considers it essential that both countries are part of ancient civilizations with a history of thousands of years and friendly traditions passed down from generation to generation. It is satisfying for the Chinese side that in recent years, interest in the Chinese language has developed in Armenia, especially among young people. Furthermore, the number of young people living in Armenia who want to study and work in China is also increasing. The number of Chinese tourists visiting Armenia, in its turn, continues to grow; the Chinese have begun to get to know the history and culture of Armenia better and the societies - each other. The Chinese diplomat expressed hope that the Armenian-Chinese friendship has prospects for further strengthening. As a good friend and partner, China is ready to share its experience of modernization with Armenia, deepen mutually beneficial cooperation, and support Armenia's national development and improvement of the people's living standards.

H.E. Vahe Gevorgyan highlighted the significance of the conference, noting that although it is not possible to discuss issues related to the phenomenon of Chinese modernization during one conference, it is possible to hold discussions on many topics. According to the Armenian diplomat, China's modernization has

significantly influenced the process of forming a new world order, changing the structure of the world economy and globalization. On the other hand, it is impossible to understand the foreign political environment around Armenia and its reshaping tendencies without understanding China's growing influence on them. He noted that studying China's modernization can provide many good experiences for Armenian state institutions and society.

The conference touched upon the transformations of China-Armenia relations, the main directions of cooperation, the factors uniting the two states, issues related to Armenia's involvement in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the "Belt and Road Initiative" (BRI). The conference attempted to shed light on the peculiarities of China's domestic and foreign policy as a superpower and contemporary geopolitical competition, including issues related to China. Topics on China's modernization, its conceptual provisions, in particular, the impact of modernization on China's domestic and foreign policy, global security, and international relations, including on the Eurasian continent, the Middle East, the South Caucasus, Central Asia, the Chinese vision, international transport corridors, universal human well-being, and China's policy and approaches to the development of various regions of the globe were discussed. China's modernization also emphasized the BRI and the SCO perspective of sustainable development. Special attention was paid to the Chinese concepts of the SCO "Common Home" and "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind." The conference also discussed the main issues of China's modernization in the domestic field, in particular, Beijing's efforts to solve the problems of uneven development, the development of China's ethnic regions, China's policy on national and global economic growth, as well as issues related to the philosophical aspects of Chinese modernization. The participants of the conference managed to conceptualize Beijing's doctrine on modernization.

The discussions led to the following conclusion: China has formed its vision of current international relations, the global security system, universal human problems, in a word, the fate of the planet and humanity. According to this vision, humanity has faced serious challenges: polarization, conflicts, wars, displaced persons, refugees, starving people, difficulties in governance, etc. Non-traditional challenges, such as artificial intelligence (AI), climate change, biosecurity issues, etc., have also emerged. The future of human civilization is at stake. China has successfully done its homework, modernized the country, and is striving to export its experience of modernization. In the process, China has invested in international

development programs and high technologies, created infrastructures, and locally supported partners and friendly governments worldwide.

As a result, China has acquired a vast influence on global developments. The Chinese vision of the world is also a globalist program, an alternative to Western globalization. In any case, China offers mechanisms for peaceful coexistence, a community of shared destiny, based on Chinese philosophical theses. The extent to which China will succeed in creating an international consensus on its vision remains to be seen.

It should be noted that the conference had not only scientific but also political significance. The interaction of diplomats and the scientific community is essential, stressing the importance of "scientific diplomacy" adopted by the Institute of Oriental Studies in recent years. Currently, the IOS is trying to keep on its agenda studies related to the main trends in the development of China as a superpower and a state that impacts global power processes. Another important significance of the conference is that Armenian and Chinese specialists discussed joint topics of mutual interest. In a changing world, Armenian experts need to share their approaches and scientific results with foreign specialists, including Chinese ones.

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Հայերեն եվ ռուսերեն այբուբենների լատինատառ գրադարձումներ  
 THE LATIN TRANSLITERATION OF THE ARMENIAN AND RUSSIAN  
 ALPHABETS

Հայերեն	Armenian Transliteration	Русский	Russian Transliteration
Ա ա	A	А а	A
Բ բ	B	Б б	B
Գ գ	G	В в	V
Դ դ	D	Г г	G
Ե ե	E	Д д	D
Զ զ	Z	Е е	E
Է է	Ē	Ё ё	Yo
Ը ը	ə	Ж ж	Ž
Թ թ	t'	З з	Z
Ժ ժ	Ž	И и	I
Ի ի	I	Й й	Y
Լ լ	L	К к	K
Խ խ	Kh	Л л	L
Ս ս	s'	М м	M
Կ կ	K	Н н	N
Հ հ	H	О о	O
Ձ ձ	Dz	П п	P
Ղ ղ	Ĝ	Р р	R
Ճ ճ	č'	С с	S
Մ մ	M	Т т	T
Յ յ	Y	У у	U
Ն ն	N	Ф ф	F
Շ շ	Š	Х х	Kh
Ո ո	Vo	Ц ц	Ts
Չ չ	Č	Ч ч	Č

Պ պ	P	Ш ш	Š
Ջ ջ	J	Щ щ	Šč
Ռ ռ	ř	Ъ	“
Ս ս	S	Ы	Y
Վ վ	V	Ь	‘
Տ տ	T	Э э	Ē
Ր ր	R	Ю ю	Yu
Տ ց	Ts	Я я	Ya
Ու ու	U		
Փ փ	p’		
Ք ք	k’		
Լ	Ev		
Օ օ	O		
Ֆ ֆ	F		

**ԲԱՆՔԵՐ ԱՐԵՎԵԼԱԳԻՏՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԻՆՍՏԻՏՈՒՏԻ**  
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 ԱՐԵՎԵԼՔԻ ԵՐԿՐՆԵՐ ԵՎ ԺՈՂՈՎՈՒՐԴՆԵՐ») ՄԱՏԵՆԱՇԱՐ  
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