

# Analysis of Russian-Armenian Relations and its Influence on the Political - Security Future of the Caucasus after September 11 Attacks

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## Abstract

The Caucasus, from the distant past, whether as part of a land or as the sphere of influence has always attracted Russia's attention. Regarding that it cannot remove all its rivals from the Political arena of Central Asia particularly the Caucasus in these new conditions, Moscow's policy and influencing has been directed towards the path in through which has established strong relations with countries such as Armenia in the Caucasus region. Also, regarding this issue, this country is trying to use its own superior economic, political and military position in the region in order to control the conducts and foreign policies of Caucasian republics in line with fading the existence of factors which are incompatible with Russian interest and national security, hereby it can delay or prevent the convergence of countries of the region having western political and security structures. Armenia, because of strategic objectives like removing economic siege, being out of geopolitical isolation, responding to the local crisis and achieving regional security, tend to improve the relation with Russia. Such changes could alter the balance of power in the region. The changes of geopolitical components in the Caucasus include changes in regional alliances and the emergence of new regional order, evolution of mechanisms and security arrangements, influence on Karabakh conflict and particularly the economy of energy, and energy security as well as economic cooperation in the region.

**Key words:** The Caucasus, security models, collective security, trans-regional competition.

## Introduction

Geographical situation and strategic importance of the South Caucasus make this region as one of the most important ones in the world which has become the arena of political and economic competitors of great powers as the crossroad of Asia, Europe, and the Middle East. Oil and energy resources and geopolitical competitions in the South Caucasus cause more gaps among the region's countries and increase in conflicts in it, which these issues have attracted the attention of the region's countries towards the great powers to fulfill their needs in such a way that all three countries are to enhance their relations with the great

powers. Russia, as one of these great powers, is trying to interfere in Caucasus through Armenia and achieve its economic, political, and ... by locating Armenia as a strategic point. Until September 11 attacks, the collection of the South Caucasus had attracted well the attention of the great powers in terms of domestic upheavals as well as strategic and security orientation and the reasons of paying attention to this region was for its oil and gas resources which brought about competitions in this region. But, after September 11 attacks, new conditions arose in this region and the South Caucasus attracted many attentions toward itself. Geopolitical competitions in this region cause more gaps among the region's countries and increase in conflicts in it. This increase in weapons in the region plays the role of providing security in the region according to these countries' building relations with the great powers. However, the issue considered in this study is how Russia can dominate the South Caucasus by placing Armenia as a strategic point. Therefore, the present study aims at investigating the challenges and opportunities with which Russia encounter through relations with Armenia. It also investigates how Russia can make his role greater in the Caucasus against a super power like the US.

### **Theoretical framework**

To choose a specific theory for explaining the relations between Russia and Armenia is a difficult one because in investigation of the history of their relations, behaviors and performances of these two countries are so complicated that placing these relations in the form of each of the theories of international relations will cause one to encounter the strengths and weaknesses of them. In the basic foundations of Russia's macro strategy in relation with Armenia during a series of rulers, the focus upon "national interests" and "national security" has been prioritized. Consequently, according to the scientific methodology in the present study, the researcher selects the theory or theories in order that he can better justify the relations of these two countries.(Fairbanks, 2001: 45).

Influenced by the systems theory's achievements and selective using of some theories and the methodology of behaviorism, Kenneth Waltz, as the founder of the theory of structural realism, created this theory. Robert Gilpin and Stephen Krasner are considered also as the most important neo realism theorists in the field of international political economy and international institutions. According to Waltz's theory, all countries are common in two components of political structure i.e. ordering principle (constant anarchy and lack of central authority), and the principle of the differentiation of functions that each unit fulfills (similarity of countries in the survival and security) and there is no difference in political systems of the world, but the only main difference among countries is due to the distribution of their capabilities which any change in this principle may result in changes in the structure of the international system.( Torbakov, 2008). By changing the structure, we can predict the way the units of the system behave and the consequence of their interactions. In the international system, units usually show different performances. The reason of this duality refers to the capabilities of units. Kenneth Waltz believes that states as the main players stage and perform their "plays". Recognizing these plays are not appropriate for them, these states, because of their power, change them. To Waltz, these are states which always interact and cooperate with other states in order to maximize their powers and hereby they keep safe their independence.

By revising the balance of powers theory, Stephen Walt, as one of the most defensive neoclassical realists, presented the "balance of threats" theory. To his opinion, states unite

with each other against those states which are the sources of the greatest threats. He considers "threat", in addition to power, as a combination of other factors like offensive capabilities, military power, geographical proximity and possibly aggressive intentions. Whenever states feel that their existence or interests are threatened by other states, they start to counterbalance those states (Shaffer, 2003: 18).

According to Walt's theory, one can say that Russian and Armenian states have been united with each other because of separate strategic threats from the US, and by adopting the "balance of interests" defense their interests and values.

### **Caucasus, arena of regional and trans-regional competition**

Caucasus is always considered as an important and strategic region because of its particular situation and characteristics. After the collapse of the USSR and the emergence of three sovereign states in Caucasus, the importance of this region has increased. Some of the factors by which Caucasus has achieved its importance and attracted the attentions are as follows:

a. A connecting loop of the continents of Europe and Asia:

This region easterly is connected to the Caspian Sea, westerly to the Black Sea, northerly to plains of southern Russia and southerly to two countries of Iran and Turkey. Therefore, this region both northerly-southerly and easterly-westerly connects two continents of Asia and Europe. This geographical situation causes that the great powers always consider Caucasus as very important throughout history. After the collapse of the USSR, its geopolitical importance has increased. (Fairbanks, 2001: 15).

b. A bridge between North and South and East and West

The Caucasus has been one of the paths of connecting east and west since ancient times, and has had a central role in completing the Silk Road. After the independence of the states of Central Asia and the Caucasus and changes in economic conditions, the Caucasus has been considered as one of the most important routes of transiting goods from east to west and vice versa. And after introducing the north-south corridor, its importance has increased as well as it has been considered as one of the north-south transiting routes (Sedivy, 2004: 5).

c. Confluence of the great ancient civilizations:

The Caucasus region in terms of the mentioned situations, since the ancient times, has been confluence of the great ancient civilizations. Great and ancient civilizations such as Iran, Greece, China, Ottoman, Russia and Europe have been around this region. This issue has caused that this region always be the arena of competitions and conflicts of great powers.

d. Neighborhood of the Islamic world and the Christian world:

The Caucasus easterly (beyond the Caspian Sea), westerly and south-westerly is connected to the Islamic lands and westerly and northerly to Christian land. In addition, within the South Caucasus, Armenia and Georgia have Christian and Azerbaijan has Islamic and within the North Caucasus, most of the autonomous republics of Russia like Chechen, Ingush, Dagestan and etc. are Muslims. The symbiosis of these two divine religions in this region is highly important in linking between these nations (Rywkin, 2004: 56).

e. One of the oil and gas transit routes to Europe

Oil pipeline Baku – Batumi of 867 km long was constructed in 1896 and exploited in 1907. This pipeline is the first one in Russia which transfers the oil of the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea Coast. In the Caucasus there are two main resources of exploitation of natural gas; one in the South Caucasus in Karadakh (around Baku) and the other is in the North Caucasus in Grozny. These resources provide the consumed gas of the region through the gas pipeline of the South

Caucasus. This pipeline which is the most important one in the South Caucasus was constructed in 1957 and exploited in 1959. It is 425 km long pipeline in the territory of Azerbaijan. This network divaricates near Aqastafa. One branch which is 107 Km. long, moves to Tiflis and the other branch which is 170 Km moves to Yerevan. The pipe diameter is 700 mm (Rywkin, 2004: 56). To transfer the export resources of energy (gas and oil) from the Central Asia and the Caspian Sea to Europe, there are various transiting routes like Iran, Russia, and the Caucasus, which because of the attempts of the US to prevent crossing the pipeline route from Iran and the remoteness of Russia, the Caucasus is considered as an important route for crossing pipelines. In this line, Baku - Ceyhan newly-constructed pipeline is acting for transferring the new exploited resources of the Caspian Sea particularly from the route of the Caucasus. Therefore, transferring oil and gas has increased the importance of the Caucasus(Sedivy, 2004: 6).

The history has shown that the Caucasus has been important and geographically, it is considered as one of the geopolitical and geo-economic regions in the world. Its geographical situation has been playing an important communicative and commercial role between Europe and Asia throughout history. This is the reason why the regional and world powers are trying to dominate this region. The collapse of USSR has agitated this desire and makes this region as the canon of great powers' attention. Security vacuum caused by the collapse the availability of the enormous resources of energy and their transference to the world markets are among the important factors of competition between the regional and trans-regional powers(Robins, 2005: 4).

On the other hand, the geo-strategic Caucasus region is of great complexity and its constituents are dependent to each other inseparably; every movement which occurs in one of its constitutive units, it will transfer its effects on the other adjacent units (which recent elections and the power transition to western-oriented elements are of these changes). Hence, providing security in this region has increased the necessity of consensus among the Caucasian states and the surrounding powers( Nichol, 2009: 8).

Russia is pursuing to establish its political, economic and military dominance over the Caucasus and on the other hand, the US, by financing economically, particularly in the field of energy, and improving military cooperation is pursuing spreading its spheres of influence in this region. Other states including EU states, Armenia, and Turkey, according g to their political, economic and cultural abilities are trying to have more and more influence in this region(Oliker, 2003: 7).

In the meantime, competing and influencing in building security arrangements in the Caucasus have been of the important issues discussed among the powers and states located in this region, which are influenced by geographical, political and economic issues in the Caucasus. In this respect, providing more security is the very competition between Russia and the US.

Security vacuum caused by the collapse and economic and political improvement affected the relations between the existing units in the region; they also have attracted the attentions of all countries as well as close and far powers to establish security arrangements. Therefore, scenarios have been introduced by each of the main players, which are focused on achieving the interests of a range of states. The only common points which could be mentioned among all of these scenarios are the words stability and security. However, the objectives and interests of the beneficiary countries are very different from each other.

The Caucasus has been always considered as an important as well as strategic region because of its particular situation and characteristics. After the collapse of the USSR and emergence

of three sovereign countries in the Caucasus, the importance of this region increased (Markedonov, 2009).

All three countries of the South Caucasus have experienced fragile conditions in the political, social and economic fields in the Cumbersome process of state - nation building. The total changes of the past two decades indicate that “the South Caucasus, in terms of the governance of democratic structure, has entered the gray sphere of politics. The region’s countries contain some components of democratic life, but yet, they are suffering from the democratic recession includes the weak role of the citizens, low levels of political participation, repeated abuses of power by government officials, elections with vague legitimacy, low levels of public trust in government institutions and the institutional weak of the states. Accordingly, lack of democracy, economic corruption, public poverty, low levels of economic interaction with the world markets and finally deepening the gap between governors and the public have become the situation in the South Caucasus ever more worrisome” (Carothers, 2002: 243-276).

Domestic conditions of the Caucasus and its foreign policy can change the balance of power between the region’s countries. Any upheaval in the relations and balance of power in the region firstly influence on the adjacent states including Russia, Iran and Turkey, and then this limited circle would become wider by joining some of the other states with it. Conditions and situations with which the Caucasus is faced indicate that threats and divergences with which the region is faced are very diverse and multiple. One can search different types of security threats can in ethnocentrism, boundary disputes, radical nationalism, separatism, inequalities and economic problems. In other words, the Caucasus has always encountered security problems both because of internal crises like ethnic conflicts and external factors which are imposed by the influential powers.

The other issue which one can know as the common point of the cooperation and competition of the regional and trans-regional players in the Caucasus’s upheavals is the issue of energy and the way of its transference. “In such a way that the main geopolitical advantage of the region is to control the transference of oil and gas resources to consuming markets” (Buzan, and Waver, 2003, p.422). This issue causes that “the Security problem in the Caucasus as a regional and universal problem appeals the attentions and the regional and trans-regional players engage their security strategies in oil export and oil and gas pipelines (Russetsky, 2002: 29-36).

Challenges emerged over the projects like the Nabucco pipeline and the Baku - Tbilisi - Ceyhan pipeline which cause the different countries to rally against each other are the typical links of security and politics with the issues of energy in the South Caucasus. Its general result which the a kind of contrast in regional and trans-regional players’ interests regarding different fields is one of the main security challenges of the South Caucasus, and in many cases the effect of this factor results in securitizing the non-security issues which can impose heavy expenses on the region’s countries (Dadandish and Kaleji, 2010: 389).

### **Russia’s attitude toward the Caucasus**

Since the early of 1990’s, Moscow viewed the region particularly by considering the South Caucasus as one of the Near Abroad fields. Contrasting and controlling the ethnic and religious links between two sides of the North and South Caucasus (especially in Chechnya and Dagestan), supporting of ethnic minorities in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia) and support for Armenia against Azerbaijan and Turkey in the Nagorno – Karabakh, retaining many

Soviet-era military bases alongside keeping and maintaining wide economic links, especially in the section of energy, with the region countries are representative of Russia active role as an influential regional power in the South Caucasus (Rywkin,2003:4).

On the other hand, in addition to defining its own objectives and interests based on the considerations of national security, The Russian Federation plays the roles of a great power. "In fact, the most important Russia's military-security principles and objectives regarding the field of Near Abroad are as follows: Russia's continued military presence in the Republics, consolidation of Tashkent Collective Security Treaty and the joint protection of borders, prevention of the military-security intrusion of the other global and regional powers security in the Republics particularly the republics of the South Caucasus" (Dadandish, 2005: 110).

When, in 1992, Russia's new strategy was developed, in this strategy, the geographical area of the former Soviet Union was called as the field of Russia's national security interests. Russia has focused on the importance of the south Caucasus as a very important region in terms of strategic interests since the first days of its existence as an independent state. The Russian Federation, as the successor of the Soviet Union's, claims a special role in the Caucasus's geopolitics. In spite of the lack of an official doctrine regarding this issue, the Russian policy is clearly representative of the mentioned claim (for example peacekeeping operations and interference in the internal affairs of Georgia and Azerbaijan in the early 1990's). Moscow's determination of keeping its domination over this part of the lands which formerly belong to the Former Soviet Union is worrying (Markedonov, 2009:11).

Deputy of the Council of Russian Federation believes that the Caucasus is part and parcel of the field of Russian geopolitical interests. Ethnic groups living in the region practically have been living in a state- the Russian Empire or the Soviet Union. Russia should understand the unity of their fates. It should not forget if it leaves this region, others enter this region- an issue which would not promote the status of Russia (the Red Star Newspaper, 1994).

After Vladimir Putin became president in 1999, it seemed that Russia considered a great strategic importance for enhancing its least influence in the South Caucasus. However, several upheavals make these attempts more complicated since 2003, including the Pink Revolution in Georgia which seems that it is the dawn of democratic reform in this country, NATO's increased ties with the region's states, completion of Baku-Ceyhan oil pipeline and gas pipeline related to it, Russia's continued concerns about security situation in the North Caucasus (including Chechnya) and Russia's agreement to close down its remaining military bases in Georgia. It seems that decrease in Russian influence on the results of the conflicts between Russia and Georgia in August 2008 has started to be reversed (Nichol, 2009:5).

The Russians views pessimistically on the political challenges existing in the region. This view is not necessarily removing; i.e. in new conditions, Russia is not trying to remove all the competitors from the Caucasus. In contrast, if any power or force which one way or another tries to remove Russia from political and geopolitical arena, it will be faced with Russia's resistance and response.

After the upheavals in August 2008, Moscow tends to have a more effective political, security and economic existence in the South Caucasus by exploiting maximally from the region's upheavals. One of the most important Kremlin's objectives is trying to securitize in line with Russia's interests in the region. Parallel to direct military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, Moscow has started new diplomatic moves. The most important the Russians' move should be known as holding Moscow meeting in November 2008, attended by the presidents of Armenia, Azerbaijan and Russia, which was one of the most significant diplomatic moves of the Kremlin in the Caucasus particularly after the crises of August 2008. The crisis of August

2008 in Georgia foremost was representative of Russia's serious attention to not losing the control of security situation in this region. Russia showed that to control the security situation of the region was ready to take any action. However, the Russians, after the crisis, have been considering this issue that the consequences of increased militarization in the region could be dangerous for them in future. As a result, after the crisis had subsided, the Russians pursued stylizing regional security situation through the expansion of regional cooperation. Russia in recent years focused the additional energy on Karabakh conflict. It can be claimed that separatism in Abkhazia and South Ossetia which at last concluded by Russian military intervention in August 2008, was expensive for Moscow. Although this war showed that Russia is the undisputed power of the South Caucasus, regarding its negative consequences for Russia's international face, Moscow was to control the management of Karabakh conflict.

### **Armenian view on the Caucasus**

The Republic of Armenia as one of three countries of the South Caucasus, involved in Nagorno – Karabakh conflict and political and military confrontation with Azerbaijan in the first years of its independence. Despite this challenge, this country tried to exploit the capacities created to for resolving its problems particularly in Nagorno – Karabakh conflict as well as achieve a more appropriate place in the political relations by expanding its own diplomatic relations. Therefore, Yerevan tried to realize the mentioned objectives by membership in the World Trade Organization and the Council of Europe and participation in individual cooperation with NATO and the policies of its new European neighbors of the EU. Despite of such attempts, Armenia is considered as the weakest country of the South Caucasus especially in economy which a large part of this weakness is the consequence of its economic isolation due to severing diplomatic relations with neighboring countries of Azerbaijan and Turkey. In geopolitical realities, the necessities of balancing the foreign policies and reducing the extent of dependence on Russia and Iran have caused Yerevan to cope with the problems of its foreign policy in the region seriously( Markedonov, 2009: 62).

This country tries to keep its security by resorting to any tool. This consideration is mainly because of Armenia's geographical and geopolitical situation which in the one hand is located between two regional powers and on the other hand has conflict with its eastern neighbor. Any threats from Azerbaijan and Turkey make this country is closer to Iran and Russia. Therefore, Armenia needs Russian support. The vast military cooperation of this country with Russia can be investigated in this line. Armenia tries to defense its security within the definition which it has from the security in the Caucasus by using its relations with Russia and the Armenians' interests and capabilities of the world.

Caucasus has always been one of the important regions in the field of Armenian foreign policy and relations. During the period after the collapse of USSR, this region often has been the source of emerging new issues for Armenian foreign policy because of its changing conditions. Naturally, the national units analyze sensitively the upheavals in the neighboring countries and the surrounding regions and evaluate any change or move according to their national interests. On the other hand, playing the effective role in a regional structure requires such a level of power, capability and adequate will as well as planning for adopting such a responsibility. From the viewpoint of each of these two rules, the Caucasus of the period after the collapse of USSR has been important for Armenia and consequently, it views this region attentively and sensitively( Kraig, 2010: 43).

At the end of this discussion, it can be noted that Armenia knows the Caucasus as its own secure region and cannot be indifferent regarding the ethnic-racial tensions and security upheavals of this region. Fueling nationalism and minorities' persistence on separatism can be considered as a regional threat in the fragile conditions of the Caucasus in which many ethnic nations are living together (Robins, 1994, p.70). Therefore, since two decades, Armenia has been trying to play a role in the important upheavals in Caucasus.

### **Conclusion:**

Within the collective security model, the satisfaction of all the beneficiary players in the region is considered important and it is supposed that if in some conditions, all regional players cooperate with each other under certain mechanisms, the level of the threats will be reduced and by gradual emergence of cooperation interests, the orientations change from competitive ones to cooperative ones. Accordingly, there is this supposition that when countries of the Caucasus and their neighbors find a precise definition of the domestic and collective security, they will be able to solve the Caucasus's security problems with the regional cooperation.

The Islamic Republic of Iran as the inseparable neighbor of the Caucasus on which security upheavals influence should attempt in fulfilling its own contribution in line with building trust and creating prerequisites and providing substrates for the formation of collective security arrangements. Within this framework, contributing to empower the region's states is important in order to reinforce the economic basis, increase the welfare of the people, creation and increase in civic institutions, spread of conflict between democracy and overcome instability in domestic dimension and in foreign dimension, more independence, increase in cooperation, decrease in conflicts, transparency and exchange of information, building trust and cooperation between the region's states in fields which there are common interests can result in improving a security situation in short-time and providing regional collective security arrangements in long-term.

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