



The Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Effects of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline (1996) Implementation on Regional Countries: A Case Study of Iran

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ABSTRACT

Energy projects and pipelines have become critically important, influencing not only the member countries involved in initiatives like the Trans-Caspian pipeline but also the broader region. The significant role of energy in both economic and political spheres has prompted countries to focus on areas rich in oil and gas reserves. Central Asia and the Caucasus are key regions in this context, with Turkmenistan playing a vital role due to its substantial natural gas reserves. The Trans-Caspian pipeline project is regarded as one of Turkmenistan's most important initiatives for developing natural gas exports. Given the considerable importance of the Trans-Caspian pipeline for the countries in the region, particularly Iran, this research aims to explore the question: What impact does the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline have on the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of Iran? Utilizing the explanatory-analytical method informed by the theoretical frameworks of the Copenhagen School, the primary hypothesis of this research posits that the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline will yield diverse effects on Iran's geopolitics and geoeconomics. The research findings indicate that the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline poses various geopolitical and geoeconomic challenges for Iran, notably threatening its energy security and influencing military and political dimensions. Given these implications, developments related to the Trans-Caspian pipeline demand greater attention, particularly concerning their potential to diminish Iran's influence in the region, alter the balance of power in favor of Western countries, and undermine Iran's role as an energy transit route and supplier to the European market.

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Introduction

Nowadays, pipelines have evolved significantly from their historical forms, and they hold considerable importance and value. Currently, oil and gas transmission lines extend beyond mere economic factors, encompassing many issues. These dimensions include economic, political, cultural, and environmental topics—each critical for nations (Öge, 2021: 3-4). Furthermore, pipelines are no longer limited to the exporting or importing countries; in recent years, they have impacted neighboring countries and even regional nations through which the pipelines traverse. Thus, a pipeline cannot be confined to one or two specific geographical areas; its dimensions and implications are far broader than a mere geographic scope.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of new nations prompted these countries to focus on oil and natural gas. Much of this attention can be attributed to energy issues. The newly independent states of the former Soviet Union prioritized energy concerns in light of their relatively weak economies (Pradhan, 2022: 6-8). This focus has facilitated the implementation of pipelines in Central Asia and the Caucasus for oil and gas exports. Additionally, regional competitions underscore the significance of energy resources and suppliers to global powers, which allows for the involvement of key global actors such as China, the United States, and European countries in this area (Xuanli Liao, 2021). Therefore, the pipelines connecting Central Asia to the Caucasus are of paramount importance and influence. One such pipeline is the Trans-Caspian Pipeline.

Although this pipeline has not yet been completed, its eventual implementation could produce diverse effects and consequences, particularly concerning Iran. The realization of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline and its ramifications for the member countries—namely Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan—could adversely impact Iran as a neighboring country. This would entail geopolitical and geoeconomic repercussions, with both short-term and long-term effects that could undermine Iran's interests and conditions. Consequently, the impact of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline on Iran is multidimensional. This article aims to address the central question: What effect does the implementation of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline have on Iran's geopolitical and geoeconomic interests? The findings of this research employ an analytical approach within the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School to explore the various implications of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline's implementation. The results indicate that the pipeline's implementation may overshadow Iran's energy security and its standing in the energy sector, as well as affect Iran's security arrangements and economic cooperation with Turkmenistan. Furthermore, this pipeline could pose additional security risks for Iran.

1. Theoretical framework

There are several theories in the field of international relations, one of which is the Copenhagen School theory. This article employs this theoretical framework, which is primarily based on the ideas of Barry Buzan, the chief theorist associated with this school. The Copenhagen School has been applied in security studies since the Second World War to analyze security and threats across various contexts, including politics, economics, society, and culture (Ağır, 2023). A fundamental aspect of this theory is its historical perspective on social phenomena and the examination of these phenomena. Buzan contends that security is not always grounded in objective criteria and should not be perceived in a one-dimensional manner. In this context, the Copenhagen School outlines three essential principles.

1. Its level of analysis is not global and tends to be more towards regional analysis.
2. There are many sectors and dimensions of security, and these do not include militarism.

They also adhere to a specific perspective concerning security issues and assert its negation (Buzan, 2007).

Regional security complexes refer to how security is organized within geographically defined areas. The security of each actor within a region interacts with that of others, leading to strong security interdependence within the region, while such interdependence is often absent between different regions. This dynamic is crucial for defining a region and makes regional security an interesting area of study. Insular countries can sometimes create isolation between regions (Buzan, 2003). A notable example is Afghanistan, which lies at the intersection of the Middle East and South Asia. Insulators delineate boundaries of indifference, where security dynamics intersect, contrasting with the traditional notion of "buffer states" located in areas characterized by intense security (Yar et al. , 2023). Regions should be viewed as micro-systems that can be analyzed through other International Relations theories, such as balance of power, polarity, interdependence, and alliance systems. Securitization, a concept developed by Ole Wæver, is the most prominent notion within the Copenhagen School and has produced significant scholarly literature. Wæver posits that "security" functions as a speech act with specific implications in international politics. Through this speech act, a (state) actor seeks to reframe an issue from a political context to one of security, thereby legitimizing extraordinary measures against a socially constructed threat (Buzan and Wæver, 1998).

This article posits that the implementation of the pipeline not only jeopardizes Iran's economic and energy security but also extends into various political, military, and cultural dimensions, leading to severe impacts and challenges concerning security, particularly for Iran and the surrounding regions of Central Asia and the Caspian Sea. The security challenges in these regions are primarily related to Iran; therefore, this article employs the theoretical framework of the Copenhagen School to examine these issues in detail.

2. Literature review

There is currently a lack of comprehensive studies on the Trans-Caspian Pipeline and its impact on regional relations. This gap underscores the significant importance of the present research. Therefore, this section aims to examine and analyze research closely related to the subject of this article. Such a review can enhance our understanding of the topic. M,Cutler (2020) asserts that the Trans-Caspian Pipeline has considerable effects on the global energy supply network. As a geopolitical and strategic project for Europe, it presents significant benefits, particularly for Turkmenistan. Projects like the Trans-Caspian Pipeline offer a unique opportunity to secure Europe's economic interests and political influence in the region. The implementation of Turkmenistan's gas exports to the European Union is likely to contribute meaningfully to the geopolitical goal of strengthening Central Asia's relations with Europe, thereby promoting integration and stability.R, Teminkov (2019) similarly discusses the geopolitics surrounding pipelines in the Caspian Sea region, highlighting the competition between Western and Northern oil and gas transport routes to Europe. The author investigates the incremental production of natural gas in the Caspian Sea, providing insights into the technical conditions surrounding the Trans-Caspian Pipeline and outlining the obstacles to its implementation, such as environmental concerns. Teminkov also notes that should the capacity of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline reach half or less of its annual capacity of 30 billion cubic meters, both Iran and Russia would likely accept this scenario, indicating that a diminished project would not pose significant issues for these countries.

M,Melintei (2021) meanwhile, discusses the energy asymmetry of the Caspian region, arguing that the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline project represents an opportunity to enhance European energy security. The author emphasizes that the 21st century is characterized by increasing global dependence on energy sources, particularly oil and gas. The Caspian Sea region has attracted global attention due to both post-Soviet conflicts and its extensive hydrocarbon reserves. Consequently, the region is expected to play a crucial role in energy

dynamics within Central Eurasia, attracting investments and interests from regional and global power centers over the next decade. Thus, the Trans-Caspian Pipeline emerges as a vital opportunity for reinforcing Europe's energy security. D. Chumakov (2019) analyzes the prospects of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline, exploring the current status and historical context of the gas pipeline traversing the Caspian region. The author discusses how new international agreements will influence governmental cooperation on projects such as the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. Each Caspian nation has varying perspectives on the pipeline; while Russia and Iran align with environmental standards, Turkmenistan seeks to diversify its gas export destinations. The introduction of a new country into the supply chain would introduce competition in the European market. The European Union aims to construct a robust energy security policy to mitigate Russia's gas supply monopoly, emphasizing the need to strengthen relations with Central Asian and South Caucasian nations. Thus, Chumakov views the Trans-Caspian pipeline as an advantageous opportunity for both European countries and Turkmenistan, aligning the interests of both parties.

But M. Cutler (2021) argues for the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline as a means of fostering peace in the South Caucasus. The author contends that the European Union should prioritize three key areas in its bilateral cooperation with South Caucasus countries: energy, security, and transportation. The construction and expansion of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline is a collaborative effort that can fulfill the EU's energy needs at minimal cost while addressing pollution concerns. This pipeline has the potential to enhance competition and market integration, facilitating broader deployment of renewable energy sources within the EU. Turkmenistan can provide natural gas more efficiently and cost-effectively, thereby enhancing supply security. Ultimately, Cutler posits that the successful implementation of this project could improve the humanitarian situation in the South Caucasus and bolster the credibility of the European Union in the region.

T. O'Keefe (2020) posits that the current geopolitical context is conducive to the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. The prolonged uncertainty surrounding the legal framework of the Caspian Sea has previously hindered its implementation. However, following the resolution of the legal regime and the agreement among countries to advance pipeline construction, as well as Western nations' desire to diversify natural gas import routes, interest in the Trans-Caspian pipeline has surged. In terms of environmental concerns, agreements mandate that coastal countries collaborate should any issues arise. Furthermore, the economic justification for Turkmenistan makes the pipeline an attractive endeavor. One of the primary objectives of this study is to assess the significance of this project for Iran, a key player in the region. This focus highlights the relevance of this article and underscores the necessity of the current research for future scholarly inquiries.

3. Geoeconomic effect

Geoeconomics has emerged as a critical parameter in the analysis of political and economic developments globally. It is only natural for countries to scrutinize geoeconomic issues closely and seek to safeguard their interests by leveraging its advantages. The implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline can influence geoeconomics in two significant ways. First, it impacts energy security, enhancing energy security for Europe while potentially undermining it for Iran. Additionally, energy cooperation may further facilitate collaboration and economic integration between Turkmenistan and European nations (see Figure 1).

3- 1. Energy security in Europe

European countries increasingly depend on gas imports from around the globe, particularly from Russia. This reliance has raised concerns within these nations regarding potential Russian

aggression, especially in light of discussions surrounding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Following the onset of the war and subsequent threats from Russia, European countries began to explore alternative gas export routes to meet their energy needs and reduce dependence on Russian gas. Among the regions considered viable sources are Central Asia and the Caucasus, given their substantial gas reserves (Sadik and Gatto, 2021). Informed by historical experiences and the adverse outcomes of the 2009 gas crisis, which became particularly pertinent after the Russo-Ukrainian war, European countries have been vigilant in tracking gas import routes (Giuli and Oberthür, 2023). Consequently, European countries have supported initiatives for gas imports from various parts of the world, with a strong focus on Central Asia and the Caucasus. A notable project in this context is the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. The implementation of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline is significant for enhancing the energy security of European nations.

In addition to its importance for European countries, the construction of the Trans-Caspian Pipeline would have significant implications for Iran's energy sector. While the pipeline remains unfinished, its potential implementation could affect Iran's energy security in various ways. In recent years, exacerbated by extensive sanctions, Iran has focused on domestic investments and attracted foreign investments in its oil sector. This has resulted in Iran achieving an annual gas production of 259 billion cubic meters in 2022 and a domestic consumption of 228 billion cubic meters.

Table 1. Natural gas production in selected countries 2023

Countries Natural gas: Production in billion cubic meters*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Iran	213.9	224.9	232.9	249.5	256.7	259.4
USA	746.2	840.9	928.1	916.1	944.1	978.6
Russian Federation	635.6	669.1	679.0	638.4	702.1	618.4
Qatar	170.5	175.2	177.2	174.9	177.0	178.4
Turkmenistan	58.7	61.5	63.2	66.00	79.3	78.3

Source: (<https://www.energyinst.org>).

Table 2. Natural gas consumption in selected countries 2023

Countries Natural gas: Consumption in billion cubic meters*	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022
Iran	205.0	212.6	218.4	236.8	236.5	228.9
USA	740.0	822.0	851.0	832.9	835.8	881.2
Russian Federation	431.1	454.5	444.3	423.5	474.6	408.0
Qatar	43.3	41.2	41.2	34.1	36.7	35.0
Turkmenistan	24.8	28.4	27.7	34.3	36.8	37.5

Source: (<https://www.energyinst.org>).

The issue indicates that the production and consumption of Iranian gas are approximately equal, with no surplus available for export. This situation suggests a reduction in Iran's ability to export gas. For instance, the Peace Pipeline, intended to connect to Pakistan and India, has remained unfinished for years and has yet to reach completion. Similarly, with the Pars pipeline, Iran typically exports between 500 and 900 million cubic meters of gas to Turkey each month. Notably, in November and December 2023, exports to Turkey amounted to 682 million cubic meters and 781 million cubic meters, respectively (Tasnim News, 2024: February 7). These factors indicate that the development of Iran's gas industry has stagnated recently, with no new pipelines being established to enhance export capabilities. To address these challenges,

consideration should be given to implementing a large-scale export pipeline from Central Asia and the Caucasus to East Asia and Europe.

It is evident that competition for energy in Central Asia and the Caucasus has intensified. The implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, which has an annual capacity of 30 billion cubic meters, could undermine demand for Iranian gas. The direct connections from Turkmenistan to Azerbaijan and subsequently to the European gas market may further diminish Iran's gas demand (Karatayev and Hall, 2021). This situation highlights that Iran is gradually losing its position in the energy market, particularly in gas, and regaining this position will be challenging. While European countries have expressed a willingness and need to import gas from Iran, the increasing focus on alternative sources reduces demand for Iranian gas. The threats posed to the security of natural gas demand and exports, alongside the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, could adversely affect Iran's production in this sector (refer to Table 1 and 2).

The reduction in production has gained increased attention, particularly in light of the widespread disruptions stemming from the Russo–Ukrainian war. This conflict seems to have driven up global gas demand; however, this does not present a suitable opportunity for Iran due to its inadequate capacity. Overall, the introduction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline and the establishment of a new route for exporting Central Asian gas to Europe pose significant risks to the demand security for Iranian gas. This vulnerability stems from Iran's lack of proper export infrastructure and the gradual erosion of its market position.

To further understand this issue, we can examine the potential replacement of Iran by Saudi Arabia in the global energy market. The sanctions imposed by Western countries and the United States against Iran due to its nuclear activities have enabled Saudi Arabia to seize Iran's former position by increasing its production, thereby preventing Iran from regaining its previous status in the medium term (Kaya, 2023: 285). Iran has also attempted to establish new export pipelines, one of which is the SAGE submarine export pipeline connecting Iran and India. This \$ 3 billion project will source gas from Qatar, Iran, and potentially Iraq, with distribution to a gas gathering system off the coast of the Arabian Peninsula. Submarine pipelines traversing the Arabian Sea could provide a viable market for Iran's natural gas exports (Amirahmadian and Nejad, 2017).

Another scenario to consider is the possibility of reduced tensions in the relations between Iran and the United States. Such a shift could lead to changes in regional energy dynamics and Iran's role within them. The fluctuations in foreign investment in Iran are evident through the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which aims to alleviate tensions between the two countries. In instances where sanctions are lifted and normalization of relations occurs, large oil and gas companies have shown increased interest in Iran. This involvement can enhance production capacity and, consequently, the export potential of Iran's oil and gas (Brown, 2020: 30).

As previously mentioned, many undiscovered and unexplored gas fields exist in Iran. According to the Iranian Ministry of Petroleum, several of these gas fields have yet to be discovered, and substantial investments are needed to develop them. The potential capital influx from major companies, which could arise following the lifting of sanctions, promises significant changes in Iran's energy sector, particularly concerning the gas fields. In addition to facilitating knowledge sharing and technology transfer, particularly in liquefied natural gas (LNG), the engagement of large firms could catalyze enhanced production capabilities (Rahbar et al. , 2023).

Conversely, a reduction in tensions between Iran and the U.S. may encourage neighboring countries to import gas from Iran. For instance, this could mitigate pipeline-related issues, enhance the capacity of the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline, and create opportunities for

new pipelines to export gas to Europe (Rehman and Mushtaq, 2020). If relations between Iran and the U.S. improve, Iran is poised to become a crucial player in ensuring Europe's energy security, although this outcome may not be immediately feasible. Nevertheless, normalization could significantly bolster Iran's role in the mid-to long-term. Overall, the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline could lead to greater European engagement with Turkmenistan, potentially diminishing Iran's significance in the energy security landscape of Europe. This shift could, on one hand, strengthen Turkmenistan's position, while on the other hand, reducing European attention toward Iran, leading to a series of broad consequences.

3-2. Turkmenistan Economic Cooperation with Europe

Economic cooperation can encompass a wide range of dimensions. Historically and in contemporary contexts, we have observed that economic cooperation can lead to extensive applications across political, security, and cultural spheres. Economic cooperation is essential for implementing political and military reforms (Shlapentokh, 2021). Turkmenistan's economy is significantly reliant on gas exports, which means that most economic collaborations with the country focus on energy and related industries. The high level of economic dependence of Turkmenistan on revenue from energy sales necessitates that the country prioritize economic reforms in its international relations. Consequently, Turkmenistan often finds itself as an exporter of energy products, which can lead to a situation where importing countries become dependent on Turkmen energy. Moreover, Turkmenistan recognizes the importance of collaborating with various nations, particularly concerning gas export pipelines and transportation to other countries. European nations have also expressed interest in Turkmenistan's initiatives to export natural gas to Europe, reflecting a desire to diversify energy routes and acknowledging the significance of these projects (Falkowski, 2021).

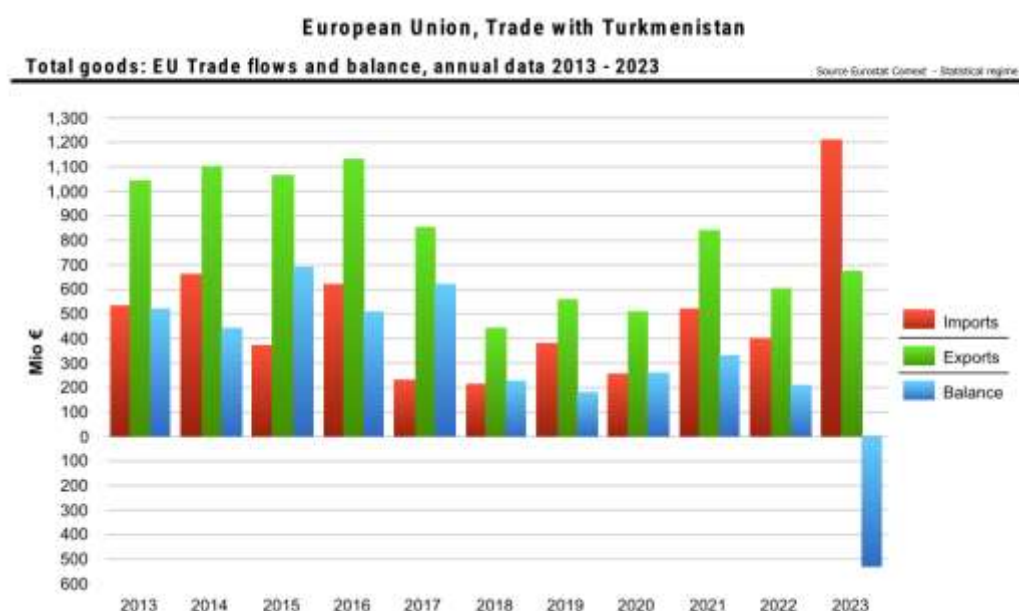


Figure 1. European Union trade with Turkmenistan (2013-2023)
Source: (European Union, Trade in goods with Turkmenistan 2024:3)

The Trans-Caspian Pipeline is among the significant projects that could enhance cooperation between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. Implementing such initiatives is likely to increase the number of collaborative projects between the two countries involved in this endeavor. The Trans-Caspian Pipeline has the potential to foster widespread economic cooperation between Turkmenistan and Europe. Given the low energy consumption within Turkmenistan's economy,

there exists a possibility for expanding cooperation into other economic sectors. Certain European nations are formulating strategies to position Turkmenistan as a key economic partner, particularly through initiatives like the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. Economic exchanges could gradually strengthen political and diplomatic ties, especially with political parties advocating for the extension of the memorandum of understanding agreements and shaping political dynamics in Turkmenistan (Melintei, 2021).

Over time, cooperation between Turkmenistan and Europe may transcend economic dimensions, encompassing broader areas such as military and intelligence collaboration. This shift could have significant implications for Iran. The presence of other nations, particularly European countries, in Turkmenistan, combined with increased military activity, may lead to heightened border insecurity for Iran. Nonetheless, Turkmenistan has sought to maintain an independent policy since its independence from the Soviet Union, avoiding political bias and refraining from permitting foreign military forces to use its territory. In recent years, Turkmenistan has made efforts to avoid creating tensions with neighboring countries, particularly Iran. However, as it develops economic policies and extends these into other areas, such as military and security cooperation, it is challenging to rule out future political and military actions.

4. Geopolitics

Geopolitics has historically played a crucial role in international relations. The interplay between politics and geography has led to significant effects, prompting countries to adopt measures aimed at strengthening their geopolitical positions. However, the policies and actions of certain nations can have a profound impact on the geopolitics of neighboring countries and the broader region. For instance, the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline may influence relations between Iran and Turkmenistan, among other issues, which this article will explore further.

4-1. Changes in the Central Asian region and Caucasus Countries

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union and the independence of new states in the Central Asian region and the Caucasus, the United States, particularly after the September 11 attacks, adopted a distinctive perspective on the region. The newly independent states—once governed by tsarist Russia and subsequently under the communist and authoritarian rule of the Soviet Union—emerged as sovereign entities. This shift has underscored the significance of the form and nature of the political systems in these countries. Despite efforts to alter their governance structures, the political frameworks in these states have largely persisted due to their unique historical and socio-political contexts. The intense competition between Russia and the United States concerning Central Asia extends beyond political and military dimensions to encompass geopolitical issues (Kanapiyanova, 2020: 62-64).

After gaining independence from the Soviet Union, the countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus held elections and adopted presidential systems in an effort to establish a form of democracy. In these elections, citizens selected presidential candidates; however, over time, this effort revealed itself as a somewhat naïve aspiration for genuine democracy. The presidents of these republics have sought to consolidate their authority through legal mechanisms, ultimately transforming these nations into authoritarian regimes. Leaders have bolstered their power by employing tactics such as securing re-election or extending their terms in office, thereby entrenching their rule (Nazarov and Obydenkova, 2022). This dynamic prompted Western nations, particularly the United States, to attempt to instigate political reform and regime change in these countries. The significance of Central Asian and Caucasian states is further enhanced by their vast energy resources, which have attracted considerable attention from Western countries. Consequently, altering government systems and implementing various

reforms are viewed as top priorities by Western leaders. Western nations have sought to influence political regimes that do not align with their strategies, employing international mechanisms such as human rights dialogues and leveraging connections with local power holders to promote supporters aligned with their interests (Axyonova, 2016). It can be argued that Western countries aim not only to address economic dimensions but also to diminish Russian influence by promoting government changes and aligning Central Asian and Caucasian states with Western policies.

Western governments believe that the outdated democratic models prevalent in Central Asia and the Caucasus facilitate Russian influence in these regions. In response, European nations have sought to pursue political reforms that complement recent economic initiatives (Mordovtsev et al., 2016). This approach has gradually influenced the political and diplomatic orientations of these nations, aligning them more closely with Western policies. Accordingly, these states are more inclined to support projects like the Trans-Caspian pipeline, which are favored by Western interests, while resisting initiatives that might enhance Russian influence.

Countries in Central Asia and the Caucasus are increasingly moving towards greater economic and political cooperation with European nations. This trend has shifted the political dynamics in the region in favor of Western interests, potentially curbing Russian influence (Fawn et al., 2023). The implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline and similar projects underscores the strategies of European countries to further their political and security objectives, reflecting alignment with their economic goals. Although nations such as Turkmenistan have historically pursued a policy of neutrality regarding East-West relations, there is a discernible trend towards closer affiliation with Western initiatives, marking the increasing significance of these projects in shaping the geopolitical landscape of Central Asia and the Caucasus.

4-2. Iran - Turkmenistan Relations

Iran-Turkmenistan relations in recent years, particularly following Turkmenistan's independence from the Soviet Union, have experienced various fluctuations. The two countries share a standard land and maritime boundary and possess historical and cultural similarities. Under the presidency of Saparmurat Niyazov, Iran made efforts to improve its relations with Turkmenistan; however, these efforts were insufficient to achieve a broader partnership. The Korpheje–Kordkuy pipeline exemplifies the significant ties between the two countries, highlighting Iran's need for gas from Turkmenistan and Turkmenistan's dependence on Iran for transit options due to its landlocked geographical status (Erkan, 2023: 703-704). Moreover, the relationship between Iran and Turkmenistan has shown a sinusoidal pattern over the past decade. For instance, during Hassan Rouhani's administration, a dispute arose over Turkmen gas exports to Iran, with the Iranian government asserting that the gas did not meet quality standards and thus refusing to settle the debt (Mashreghnews, 2020, July 11). This dispute led to a suspension of Turkmen gas exports to Iran and further strained bilateral relations. Ultimately, Iran was obligated to repay its debt to Turkmenistan.

Under the current Iranian government led by Ebrahim Raisi, there has been a notable improvement in relations between the two countries, primarily driven by the Iranian government's determination to settle its debt to Turkmenistan and increase imports (Abulghasemi, 2023, May 31). Additionally, Serdar Berdimuhamedow, Turkmenistan's new president, has demonstrated a commitment to strengthening bilateral ties. In recent years, Turkmenistan has sought to leverage Iran's existing infrastructure due to its landlocked status and lack of access to open waters. The country has aimed to address its need for maritime access through transit arrangements, with Iran being recognized as the most economical and secure route. The most critical aspect of Iran's export capacity is that its route to open waters is

singular, providing significant advantages concerning security (Pishgahifard and Ranjbari, 2020). Over the past few years, Turkmenistan has sought to diversify its gas export routes to Europe and other nations, such as Turkey and Azerbaijan. The opening of the Kordkuy pipeline has notably enhanced Turkmen's gas export capacity to both Iran and Europe.

Given Turkmenistan's lack of direct access to India and its growing energy needs, the country is exploring gas exports to India, particularly in light of India's large population and rapid economic growth. Turkmenistan had previously considered the TAPI pipeline; however, this initiative has faced significant challenges that have hindered its completion. Consequently, Turkmenistan is focusing on alternative export routes, including leveraging Iran for gas exports to India. Iran could transport Turkmen gas to India using the Kordkuy and Torkaman-Sahra pipelines, as well as via maritime routes in the Arabian Sea. While this plan remains to be fully realized, if the necessary capacity is established, it could create favorable conditions for gas exports for both Iran and Turkmenistan (Sadeghi et al., 2018).

Another significant aspect of energy cooperation between Turkmenistan and Iran involves gas swapping. Turkmenistan's lack of access to European markets has prompted it to view Iran as a strategic partner. Consequently, by the end of 2021, a trilateral agreement among Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan was established to facilitate Turkmen gas exports to Azerbaijan, with a commitment to transfer 500 million cubic meters of gas annually. Following President Berdimuhamedow's visit to Iran on June 14, 2022, Turkmenistan reiterated its call for increased gas swap capacities with Iran (Eurasianet, 2022). The recent agreement signed between Iran and Azerbaijan further suggests Azerbaijan's interest in expanding this cooperation. The pivotal question arises: What role does the Trans-Caspian pipeline play in the relations between these two countries, particularly concerning energy collaboration? If the Trans-Caspian pipeline were to be realized, it would significantly alter all current plans and dynamics. The operation of this pipeline would enable Turkmenistan to directly export gas to European countries, especially Azerbaijan, potentially diminishing its reliance on Iran for gas transit. This shift could decrease Iran's strategic role in Turkmenistan's gas exports, as Turkmenistan aims to diversify its export routes and reduce dependency on any single country or pipeline. However, by proposing innovative solutions in this domain, Iran could maintain its relevance in Turkmen gas exports even with the implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. It remains uncertain whether Turkmenistan intends to continue its cooperation with Iran following the recent bilateral summit, which sought to establish mutual interests for both nations.

4-3. *Compounds and border in security*

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of new countries, Central Asia and the Caucasus gained independence, facing significant military and security challenges that can be viewed as contributing to their comparatively limited military power. In the years following this transformation, particularly after the events of September 11, the United States became increasingly active in the region, thereby disrupting existing security dynamics in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Conversely, China plays a critical role in the security landscape of these areas due to its concerns regarding Islamic extremism, as well as economic and energy issues pertinent to the region (Olcott, 2016). The U.S. presence and establishment of military bases in these countries have raised significant concerns for Russia and Iran. Russia perceives Central Asia and the Caucasus as its sphere of influence, complicating U.S. military efforts to assert itself against Russian dominance. This dynamic is exemplified by the onset of the Russo-Ukrainian War, which was sparked by NATO's involvement and the establishment of bases in Ukraine, an issue that initially elicited Russian warnings and ultimately culminated in military aggression.

Exploring these issues is essential for enhancing our understanding of the security dynamics in Central Asia and the Caucasus in the aftermath of the September 11 incidents. The proposed Trans-Caspian pipeline is a critical component of this context, as its security remains a significant concern. Should the Trans-Caspian pipeline be realized, the potential for increased involvement of Western states and the U.S. in the Caspian Sea becomes plausible. Following the Russo–Ukrainian War, European countries are actively seeking alternative sources for gas imports, raising the importance of the Trans-Caspian pipeline as a potential route (Levine, 2016). This development poses a threat to Iran, particularly from the Iranian perspective toward the West and the U.S. Although this threat has persisted for some time, various Western companies have increasingly engaged in the Central Asian region over the past year. Some experts argue that the presence of these companies could facilitate the expansion of military cooperation and intelligence sharing. However, it is unlikely that the military involvement of European countries and the U.S. in support of the Trans-Caspian pipeline will result in border insecurity for Iran, given Tehran's commitment to maintaining an autonomous military and security policy. Nonetheless, the realization of the Trans-Caspian pipeline is poised to alter the security dynamics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, particularly regarding the Caspian Sea. Influential foreign players, such as the U.S., could reshape the strategic landscape of the region, potentially leading to significant geopolitical tensions.

Conclusion

In conclusion, it can be asserted that the implementation of any pipeline has significant implications for the region and the countries involved. Historically, Central Asia and the Caucasus have garnered the attention of major powers. This was notably evident during periods such as World War II, when Hitler sought to advance into these regions to secure vital oil and gas resources, underscoring their strategic importance. The construction of new oil and gas pipelines has prompted extensive geopolitical shifts in this area. The Trans-Caspian pipeline is one such project that Turkmenistan has endeavored to complete in recent years. However, opposition from Iran and Russia has hindered its implementation. The realization of the Trans-Caspian pipeline could have profound economic implications for Iran. Given the Iranian economy's reliance on energy resources, the introduction of a competing pipeline could result in significant challenges. According to the Copenhagen School's theoretical framework, this pipeline poses a serious threat to Iran's energy, political, and economic security. The existence of the pipeline could reduce Iran's customer base, particularly if European countries shift their energy imports toward Turkmenistan, facilitated by its connection to Europe through this pipeline.

Conversely, this situation further distances Iran from regional energy projects, exacerbating its isolation from neighboring countries and weakening its energy position. In Iran, this has led to a decline in production capacity, coinciding with an increase in the gas export capacity of neighboring countries, such as Turkmenistan. Furthermore, the growing prominence of Turkmenistan's gas can overshadow Iran's economy, potentially yielding both short- and long-term repercussions. The implementation of the Trans-Caspian pipeline could also trigger significant political consequences for Iran. This project aligns with the United States' strategy of isolating Iran, a policy that is further highlighted by the potential implementation of other pipelines, such as the TAPI pipeline. These developments suggest that Western countries may increasingly find themselves less reliant on Iranian gas, thereby diminishing Iran's regional influence and diplomatic standing.

In recent years, U.S. policies have contributed to a reduction in relations between Iran and its neighboring countries. Alongside the implications of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, this phenomenon is likely to alter the political landscape and security dynamics of the Central Asian

region, impacting Iran's standing. Changes that may not affect some countries, such as Turkmenistan—which has maintained a policy of neutrality—could gradually shift the balance of power in Central Asia and the Caucasus, introducing new actors into the equation. These actors could subsequently alter the security arrangements and order among the Caspian Sea border nations.

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