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## The Great Caspian Basin and the Geopolitical Balance in Today's World

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### Abstract:

Undoubtedly, during the post-Cold War era, the fields of political competition changed and with the change in the political geography of the Caspian Sea, the Caucasus and Central Asia, as the Soviet Union collapsed and new countries emerged, the field of competition for a change in power balance not only expanded but took on a new form. Economic benefits, diversification of fossil fuels and new and large markets have shaped, so trans-regional countries have become aware of this part of the world. Competition for filling the geopolitical vacuum in the Caspian Sea and its Piraeus due to political forces trying to balance power in the regions, from the offensive Realism's point of view is the subject of this article. This paper uses a Descriptive-Analytic library approach to answer the following question, what roles do the Caspian and Eurasian areas play in the geopolitical balance of the world today? The expansion of globalization, the free market, and the explosion of information indicate the polarization of this region. Given the presence of important Trans-Regional and regional Players in this area, the important Hypothesis is that, the region will be the geopolitical intersection of the multipolar world in the future.

**Keywords:** Post Cold War, Power balance, Geopolitics, Trans, Regional

### Introduction

If we assume the end of the Cold War the collapse of communism in the USSR and Eastern Europe, never ignore the roots of ex-

ternal pressure and, above all, the United States, by directing to the economic weakness of the Communist bloc as a lever of

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pressure, alongside its domestic-political weaknesses.

Now in the Post-Cold War world, there seems to be a desire to return to the former Empire in Russian leadership in economic terms and in tactical-political alliances between them and other influential countries in the region, including China, Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey in the international environment, that from the author's point of view, it will end to a- Multipolar world. In this unpredictable world, the competition is not about nuclear weapons or Ideology, but about economic domination with militarism.

Today's the phenomenon is not dominated by the structure of the world system, but by policies based on 'Individualism'. It seems the future will be for those Powers in which Militarization-based economics prevails in various forms, such as arms sales, etc. From an Offensive Realism point of view, which dominated a large part of the structure of the international world, it will reflect the geopolitical impact of the Caspian region, the Caucasus and Central Asia, and Eurasia on most events in the world.

### **Theoretical Foundations:**

#### **Offensive Realism**

The basis of theories in international relations is its pervasiveness. In international relations, Rationalists are the mainstream that insists on proving themselves. The basis of this proof is its inclusiveness. The Rationalists, and especially Neo-Realists, try to explain the nature of states in international relations, even with the exclusion of historical events and they offer very strong assumptions in this area. The key question in this area is what theory can explain the current conditions of the Caspian Sea and Eurasia. The hypothesis is that Offensive Realism can better explain the events of this region of the world.

From "Meashmeier's idea, there are three main reasons for the Power-seeking of governments. The first is the structure of the international system, which is highly anarchic. Second, Governments generally have the capacity for aggression and third, concealing the enemy's aims and intentions, which causes distrust. Other points in his theory are his disregard for the ideology and internal politics of governments, not trivializing the nature of human warfare and the nature of human power-seeking, which goes against Classical Realism and is one of the important points of his theory. Basically in his view, international institutions are of little importance because the power of these institutions derives from the power of governments. Even throughout history, these institutions have not played a role in developments in international relations." (Moshirzadeh, 2007: 132).

War, Conflict, and Violence Since the beginning of the history of the presence of governments, they have been a prominent feature of international relations. With the end of the Cold-War, the debate re-emerged because the ideological confrontation between East and West was over but it was the beginning of a new paradigm that, for governments, violence would be legitimized again and parallel to that, many social movements were formed in human societies that did not sanctify violence, viewed the world optimistically. The end of the Cold War, although promising the beginning of Political Superpowers cooperation, was only temporary, as competition in other areas was established and force was still a determining factor in resolving conflicts (Blice, 2004: 569).

Offensive realism is in fact the continuation of the Neoclassical Realism Theory and the securing of States in international relations. In fact one of the aspects of separation of Offensive Realism from New -Realism is

security. In the inevitable Anarchic conditions of the International System, Governments maximize security by increasing their points on "Hobbes" status. 'Invasion' is an inherent thing that helps governments survive and this is due to their belief in the direct impact of the global system defined on players. Their analysis also includes a historical basis. "Farid Zakaria" refers to history as directly attributing the increase in the wealth of Governments and their military capability. This is the view that extends power beyond their borders. That is, they seek to increase international power in exchange for increasing national power. As a result, they pursue expansionist policies in their foreign policy. Therefore, it will be important for Offensive Realism to constantly gain power in the shadow of achieving maximum security (Zakaria, 1998: 3).

"Mearsheimer" believes that governments must seek a specific security policy to attain the power of the majority in order to weaken their enemies. Then no country will be able to harm and attack them (Mearsheimer, 2005: 40). Increasing power means weakening others. Governments have always been in an environment of insecurity, on the verge of external threats. In terms of security, some countries have a balancing role they call 'wagon band'. In the case of regional security, the term contrasts with 'balance' (Bilgen, 2014: 208).

Given the above theory, the important question is whether the security is not a more important component for governments? And the question is whether rising military might be just an increase in power influence, or Governments seeking to increase their security? This important question leads to a new topic called "security puzzle". John Hertz interprets the security dilemma as the tendency of individuals to increase power, which

reduces the security of others. This is where it leads to the selection of very bad behaviors (Hers, 1990: 175). Jervis', yet, repeats the security dilemma in the same sense as above, but in a different way, resulting in the increasing power of governments in the issue of security to reduce the security of others (Jervis, 1978: 188).

The importance of 'survival' for Offensive realism lies in the phrase 'Mearsheimer' that Governments must constantly worry about maintaining their survival as there is always a risk of them being eliminated by competing Governments (Taliaferro, 2000: 140). Offensive Realists are concerned with over-increasing the power of Governments to achieve the Hegemonic power of the International System. All the Political Powers mentioned in the Caspian and Eurasian region act directly and indirectly.

### **Geographical features of the Great Caspian**

The Caspian Basin comprises five coastal countries including Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and the Russian Federation. In its other layers, it is geographically and politically connected to several regions, leading to a larger political geographical area. The new domains that are directly and meaningfully related to the Caspian Sea and actually interact with each other are significant. For example, the Islamic Republic of Iran is one of the coastal countries of the Caspian Sea that is geographically linked to the Middle East. In fact, some of the political and economic occasions in that geographical area could affect the Caspian Sea because of Iran.

Likewise in the southwest of this sea, the Republic of Azerbaijan, located in the South Caucasus, is connected to Georgia and Armenia and even Turkey, and the policies applied in that geographical area, such as econ-

omy, politics, energy and social relations, a particular geopolitical space imposes on the Caspian region. To the east of the Caspian, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are not only geographically located in the Caspian region, but also in Central Asia, including Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, which include Russian's vocabulary 'Central Asia'. In addition to the southern regions, it includes Kazakhstan, and extends to western China due to the same country (Koolae, 2014: 128).

"Eurasia" is another region that has been linked to the Caspian Sea for various reasons. The word "Eurasia" is a combination of European and Asian words first introduced by Austrian geologist "Edward Swiss" in 1883. The term was not very attentive during the Cold War and is not even mentioned in the political literature of the 20th century in geopolitical discussions. Eurasia accounts for 75 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of GDP, and 75 percent of the world's energy (Amir Ahmadian, 2004: 22).

In 2001 study by the Atlantic Council of the United States defined a region called 'Central Asia' that borders from the West to the Black Sea, from the East to the West China, from the North to Russia, and from the South to Iran, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Central Eurasia includes Central Asia including Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and East Kazakhstan, the South Caucasus to the west of the Caspian Sea, including the Republic of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia in the West Caspian Sea and the Slavic Republics (Russian Federation, Ukraine, White Russia, and Moldova) in the north of the Caspian Sea. But, this geographical term actually covers part of the territory of the continents of Asia and Europe, and its range is fluid, so it is also a political term. Of course, in some interpretations Central Eurasia refers to the 'Commonwealth Independent

State (CIS), which includes 12 republics from the fifteen former Soviet republics, is used (Koolae, 2014: 7-8). There is no consensus on the definitions and inferences of Central Eurasia. For this reason, most views emphasize Russia and five Central Asian states and three South Caucasus countries (Fairbank, 2001: 9). Thus the word 'Great Caspian' can be imagined.

From the point of view of "Sir Halford Mackinder", the former head of the Geography Society in England for power and survival, land areas are far more important than areas adjacent to water. So Eurasia seemed to be inaccessible to a large landlocked region with Extra-Maritime Powers. This region has historically been immune from the onslaught of these Powers but was itself a focal point for pressure around (Ezzati, 2001: 22). However, throughout Eurasia, history has always been subjected to great damage and great wars. The Iranian and Ottoman wars, Europe and the Ottomans, Napoleon Bonaparte's invasion of Russia in 1905, and World War I. The revolutions that took place in this region can also be mentioned as the Constitutional Revolution in Iran in 1906, the Russian Revolution of 1905 and the October Revolution of 1917 (Amir Ahmadian, 2004: 43).

After the October Revolution of 1917 and the establishment of Communist rule in that region began developments. Especially with this event, the Muslim regions were separated from their own history and culture. The formation of governments throughout Central Eurasia and the establishment and predominance of Socialism not based on Marx's theories but on the necessities of the Bolshevik Revolution, and Central Eurasia based on the same transformations created in the Soviet Union by economics, culture and Soviet society was affected.

The creation of Ethnic Republics throughout the region continued to form the 'Soviet Human' to evolve into the Bolshevik socialist society desired and to be realized in all aspects of the individual and society. Accordingly, the changing attitudes of people, beliefs, values, language, and lineage throughout Central Eurasia were pursued using all the possibilities and capabilities of the Communist government (Koolae, 2014: 12-13). Given this, it is essential to understand the 'Great Caspian' from a geopolitical perspective.

### Geopolitics

We need geopolitics to understand global politics and the politics of competition between world and Regional Powers. Although there have been differences between international and geopolitical issues, the similarities between them cannot be ignored. In international relations, the study of the relationship between States is discussed, but in geopolitics it is about relations between Powers. In fact, geopolitics aims to explain the influence of geographical factors on political decisions (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012: 78).

Great geopolitical games go back to the beginning of the 20th century, with Russia and Britain spearheading colonial geopolitics in Europe resulting from World War I. By the Treaty of Versailles on June 28, 1919, a new political arrangement was formed that led to the loss of colonies in many countries, including Germany, which led to the formation of many States in the Middle East, North Africa and Eastern Europe. In this Treaty, however, a bipolar world was formed between the USSR and Britain that replaced America after the Second World War (Mojtahedzadeh, 2012: 231).

Its colonial geopolitics traces its origins to nuclear power, which was regarded as an in-

dicator of Power in World War II, resulting in the division of the world into two Blocks, East and West. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, three new nuclear Powers (Russia, Ukraine, and Kazakhstan) replaced the former Soviet Union. Today, the holders of nuclear weapons are in fact Geopolitical Powers that are capable of shifting power around them.

### Geopolitical position of Caspian, Caucasus and Central Asia

The Caspian Sea is undoubtedly not limited to its five coastal states, but its peripheral regions, including the Caucasus, Central Asia, and Eurasia in general. Given the presence of Iran as a liaison between the two regions, connected to the Middle East, this geographical area is also involved in some of the issues. By examining the geographical boundaries of the Caspian Sea, one can consider its geopolitical significance:

-China's presence in the northwest of the Caspian Sea due to its connection to Kazakhstan and its desire to connect with Iran through the sea.

-Russia's presence due to its increasing Hegemonic Power in contrast to US geopolitical movements in the 'near-by' region, the Middle East and even East Asia.

- -Iran in the south of this sea as an increasing Regional Power with an ideological and independent Government.
- -Turkey as the interface between Europe and the region with occasional tensions in the Syrian geopolitics and Kurdish regions.
- -The presence of Trans-regional countries, including the US, Israel, and the European Union, in Post-Soviet states, in various

forms, including the presence of multinationals oil companies.

Given this geography, the Caspian region is an important geopolitical and geostrategic region, with its emphasis on the importance of 'Hartland' and 'Rimland'. According to Mackinder's theory, the area is in a new Hartland that encompasses other areas such as Central Asia, the Middle East, and the Caucasus. In fact, Mackinder confines the Heartland from the west to the Volga River, from the east to Siberia, from the north to the Arctic Ocean, and from the south to the Himalayas, Iran, and the Mongol Highlands (Mackinder, 1904: 425).

Spikeman refers to Rimland as a borderland with the same Hartland area, with the ability to combine Army and Navy forces together. That means "Rimland" has more resources and manpower for ease of communication. The Caspian Sea, with these definitions, is at the heart of these designs from a geopolitical point of view.

Due to the presence of energy sources such as oil and gas, features and importance have been added to the area. Such features

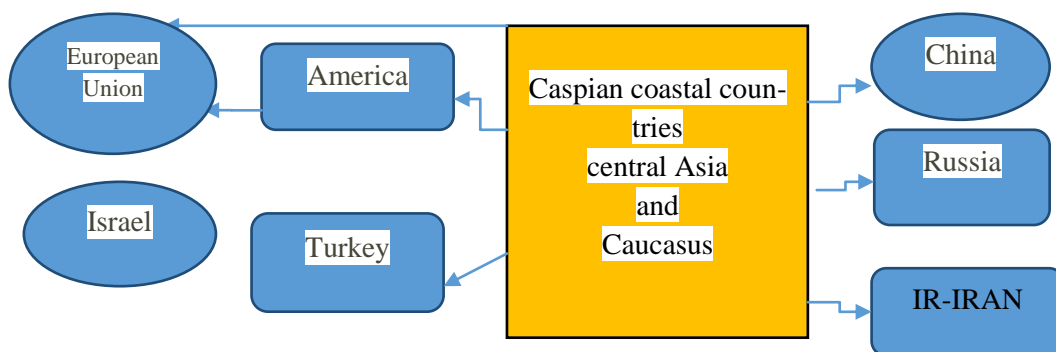
have long been a factor in struggle, challenges, and even conflict.

In the new era and after the emergence of new geopolitical games, World Powers have always strived to excel. It basically geography shapes spaces and types of conflicts. These conflicts vary at different times. But when these spaces are in the vicinity of the Heartland, they will be sometimes geopolitically important, so they add to the importance of geographical space and the world's dominant economic and Political Powers to dominate the conflict. Such conflicts are for the balance of power (Hafez Nia, 2006: 17).

International politics has always benefited from three dominant, subordinate, and internal systems. In the dominant system, States are referred to as the most powerful components, but in the subordinate system, they benefit from the interaction within the region, and in the domestic system, National Governments benefit from the internal organs.

### Important Regional Players

The following diagram symbolically shows the apparent and hidden presence of key players in the Caspian, Caucasus and Central Asia region:



*Fig 1: Important Regional Players*

The presence of these political powers will undoubtedly increase the security burden of the region. In fact, the presence of the four Russian, American, Turkish, and Iranian Powers causes atmospheric emergence in the region which always increases security costs.

### **Russia and influence in the Middle East**

According to "Doug Beruter" Theory, Central Asia and the Caucasus face three major challenges in the twenty-first century. First, forging a common national identity within ethnic and religious groups. The second is the institutionalization of legal and political structures compatible with democracy and the third is the creation of a free and open economic system (US policy).

After the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of new countries, the relationship between these countries and the Middle East was Stressful for Russia. Cultural and religious similarities motivated these nations to communicate with the people of the Middle East, and Iran played an important role in this regard. Thus, proximity to Iran became very important for Russia.

For this reason, Russia had to establish relations with the region to control relations between the countries around the Caspian Sea, Central Asia, and the Caucasus, although Iran seemed a separate problem from the outset, given the "Shiite" nature of the Islamic Revolution in Iran, Russia soon realized the importance of a strategic relationship with Iran since Russia sought to secularize the "Near-Abroad" countries, communication with Turkey and facilitating its influence on the independent countries was considered the best possible. There has always been the notion that Russia wants to return to pre-collapse power and control in Eurasia. The main reason for this was the sometimes security-oriented view and dependence of the

independent countries on Russian aid (Smith, 1996: 257).

Following an agreement between Turkey, Georgia and Azerbaijan on energy transfer by the US to the Mediterranean, given the possible influence of Iran and Russia outside their borders and on the Caspian and Caucasian states, the agreement was considered a security victory.

So Russia's dominance in the region was diminishing and on the other hand, the United States has even asked Kazakhstan to send its oil and gas to Baku in order to extend its interests to Europe. This was an anti-China approach. Turkey, however, a notice of its \$ 4.1 billion debt in connection with the project, which the United States has expressed its willingness to make up for it. In any case, the implementation of this project would enhance the national power and interests of the country. Turkey has been in the interests of the US at various times and to enhance this cooperation, it has strengthened oil companies in Baku.

Such geographic routes to oil pipelines are actually a way to infiltrate American power in the Caspian, Caucasus, and Central Asia. In fact, such paths in relation to oil pipelines are geopolitical and geostrategic in this respect; any close cooperation between Turkey and Russia would be in conflict with US interests. But in recent years Russia has urgently sought political and economic ties with every region in the Middle East that has left by the United States. Russia uses all diplomatic and military tools to infiltrate the Middle East, a tool that the US has used for many years. For instance, Russia's presence in Syria after a limited military intervention in 2015. Opening negotiations with all the forces involved in the Middle East. Support to Iran and Simultaneously connection with Israel. It deals with the Turks and at the same

time with the Kurds. It benefits the diplomats in the Middle East who speak Arabic. Russia is influenced by interests, not ideology. They choose effective diplomacy for economic gain and arms sales.

### **Iran and Turkey**

Iran's and Turkey's role in the presence of trans-regional countries in the Caspian, Caucasus and Central Asia is different. Iran claims to have Shia world and Turkey's claim to return to Ottoman times with 'neo-Ottoman' imaginations.

The two countries have been in the lime-light of Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union for reasons such as being on the border with independent states and linguistic, cultural and ethnic similarities with some of them. In essence, the Caucasian nations, Central Asia, feel closer to the nations of the Middle East in cultural terms than they have in common with Russia and China. For the United States, Turkey's secular influence in the Caucasus and Central Asia is better than that of Iran. This importance, given the presence of Iran and Russia, has numerous strategic implications for the United States (Smith, 1996: 255). One of the main reasons for this region's attempt to transport oil to Europe via Turkey was in line with this strategy. Therefore, Turkey is an active player in the Caspian and Eurasian regions. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, due to ethnic, linguistic, and religious affiliations with the countries of the region, efforts have been made to bring closeness and attraction that can be seen from a security perspective. Turkey's Pan-Turkism policy seeks to create a union of Turkish-speaking countries in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Alongside it, from a cultural standpoint, it is seeking to promote Western world customs and culture in this region through the spread of secular-

ism and open-air tourism to change the religious attitudes of the countries in this area. India's presence as an emerging and active economic power in this region is significant. Iran is the best way for India to be involved in the region. India, on the other hand, has always been looking for a way to escape the tension between itself and its neighbors, including Pakistan. (Karimipour et al., 2018: 222).

### **America and its Allies**

The Caspian, Caucasian and Central Asian countries after the Islamic Revolution of Iran were placed in a position to prevent the infiltration of Islamic culture, especially Islamic fundamentalism propagated by the West, into the context of "Iran phobia" and "Islam phobia". And this was under American leadership, and these countries were terrified and provoked by the media doctrine of the 'Everton Window' and the Fukuyama theories in the face of it.

The Republic of Azerbaijan because of its proximity and cultural-religious similarities to many of its people the choice between approaching America to relate to the free world economy and preventing Middle Eastern Islam from penetrating its nation's aspirations tends toward America. The influx of Western oil companies to invest in Azerbaijan's energy industry was the result of an approach that strongly stimulated Iran and Russia to counteract. Azerbaijan needs the Middle East to develop. This is a need not only for the economy but also for security. (Niyazi, 1994: 183)

US influence in the region was based on Turkey's past hegemony. Given the change in Russia's position and a tendency toward Iranian hegemony in the region, the result of these changes was the confrontation between the old hegemony (Turkey) and the new hegemony (Iran). Given the US presence in the



region and Turkey's shaky decisions in the face of world political currents, there is always the potential for this confrontation.

On the other hand, the newly established countries in the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus have been very close to the Middle East region due to cultural, religious and linguistic similarities and other cultural origins and at a time when new governments have emerged have defined 'development' in relation to the Middle East. On the other hand, the West's view of the "development" of the spread of Secular culture within the religious-emotional space created with the help of Turkey has been. The calculus of the West even relies on the paradox between the two hegemones of Islamic Iran and non-religious Russia. The West reiterates the belief that this strategic alliance will eventually collapse. Thus, it is necessary to preserve the alliance between itself and Turkey in the direction of attracting Armenia in view of the "Nagorno" affair so to provide an effective atmosphere for the separation of the two hegemones of the region.

### **Iran and Eurasia**

Given America's increasing efforts to disconnect between Iran and the Eurasian region, Iran's presence and influence are sometimes undeniable in terms of cultural and religious affiliations. The United States, but, to deal with this potential influence in different ways. First, with sanctions weapons, because any deal with Iran, especially oil deals will be minimized. The second American approach in this regard is to strengthen Israel's presence in the region, especially the more effective economic one. Iran, however, must step up its diplomatic efforts to help ease the tension between itself and Eurasia.

Although Iran's influence in terms of culture is greater than Turkey's, in this respect,

Iran must move from positions of national interest, rather than purely ideological, interests. Avoiding the atmosphere of doubt and skepticism will help greatly attract the elites of the region to Iran.

### **Conclusion**

Now the geopolitical system of the multipolar world is emerging in the Caspian, Caucasus, and Central Asia regions. The presence of Regional Political Powers like Iran sometimes seems to coincide with this event, but the expansion of globalization, the free market, and the explosion of information in this area indicate that the region is polarized. But the United States is making secret efforts to deal with this. There are several reasons for this event, including:

- 1- The quest for Americanization of the world rather than true globalization. America's efforts to play an important role in the geo-economic integration of the world have challenged all previous treaties.
- 2- The uselessness for America to paying costs in the Middle East and its tendency to the Trans-Atlantic world aimed at blocking Russian power in Eastern Europe.
- 3- Return to the old idea of dominating the 'heart of the earth' with a new approach to expanding the influence that lies within the field of "Neo-Colonial Geopolitics". In fact, the return to the new "Heartland" in the Caspian and Eurasia and its use of energy as a tool for the expansion and balance of geopolitical power by Trans-Regional countries.
- 4- Weakening of international organizations such as the United Nations and its branches, which results in

disrupting the geopolitical balance of World Political Powers.

The confrontation between the powers in the Caspian, Caucasus and Eurasia will never be limited to economic aspects. The final confrontation in this area will be between the US, and the Regional Political Powers. Although, such contrast has now taken place in the field of economics.

But such a confrontation would be an inevitable necessity if such events were continued in the world and in the Caspian, Caucasus and Central Asia. Under such circumstances, it is impossible to predict the Turkish government's approach. The alignment of hegemony like Iran and Russia is also hard to predict. But the new governments will have to choose in a paradoxical context between US demands for integration and their nations if Anti-Secular thinking develops. Now, with the weakening of NATO and the desire to pull out of the Middle East, some new military treaties have emerged. The issue of energy and its transmission has the greatest impact on the geopolitics of the region. The shift to global markets is a major factor in the boom in the economies of the region, but it has also become an instrument of divergence between countries where the role of Trans-Regional countries is very prominent. Iran and Russia have tactical views on how to confront the United States. Turkey, however, has become a geopolitical challenge in the Caucasus region. Competition between China and Russia over Kazakhstan's economy and oil is highly competitive and based on mutual respect. All these positions show the importance of the "Great Caspian Basin" and it's becoming a geostrategic region that despite the cooperation of some countries, but it looks like a competition with zero sums.

### **Farewell to war and the beginning of another war**

At the end of the Cold War, it was not very exciting to think of peace. In 1989, the whole world was waiting for a peaceful world and a world full of peace and happiness. The expectations of Liberals were not so misplaced that the new world would become a test sometimes less dangerous and more relaxed. The spears of war will no longer be used to kill human beings but will return to the farms and slaughter animals for human consumption every day. The share of peace will increase and the world economy will take effective steps towards poverty alleviation. Should there be an optimistic judgment in the Caspian and Eurasian region?

Given the region's share of the world's economy in the future, the economic battle between the regions' major and Trans-Regional Political Players will increase. For the future of the Caspian and Eurasia regions, four parallel geopolitical-economic projects can be predicted. The first is the Russian Geopolitical-Economic project, which response to the presence of Trans-Regional countries, especially the US and allies such as Turkey, despite apparent and limited opposition to it and aimed at limiting their power. Second Iranian Geopolitics- Economic Project due to Iran's Impact on Caucasus and Central Asia due to future Islamic awakening.

The third Atlantic Geopolitics- Economic project that Russia puts forward in relation to its interactions with "Near-Abroad" countries and the fourth is the Transatlantic Geopolitics- Economic project that we will find within Russia and in the Post-Putin era. War and peace in today's modern world is very complex and ambiguous. The war always ends and another war begins in a new form.

Although the nuclear war between the US and the Soviet Union was minimal after the

collapse of communism, another era of nuclear threats has begun with the dominance of the theory of Offensive Realism because many other countries also own this devastating weapon. Some of these countries, such as Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Belarus, India, and Pakistan, are located in the same area and adjacent to the Caspian Sea.

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