



Türkiye's Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus, Interaction and Confrontation With Russia

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Abstract

The aim of the current research is to examine Turkey's foreign policy in the South Caucasus in interaction and confrontation with Russia. The main question is, what effects have the relations between Russia and Turkey had on the political equations of the South Caucasus? The main hypothesis is that a set of political and security factors such as differences in foreign policy orientation, regional conflicts, geopolitical rivalries, neo-Eurasian thinking in Russia's foreign policy, and the doctrine of nuclear weapons. Negeri in Turkey's foreign policy has led to the divergence of political relations between Russia and Turkey in the region. And this issue has led to the formation of balance-oriented alignments in the South Caucasus region. In this research, the theory of the security group of the Bozan cargo area has been used as a theoretical framework and the descriptive-analytical method has been used as the main research method. The findings of the research show that the Caucasian countries entered the regional and global strategic spectrums without their will. The two countries of Russia and Turkey, with their ancient and different history and civilization, have great potential for cooperation in various economic, political, cultural and social fields, but for the last time they are under the shadow of intense ideological, political and military competition.

Keywords: Turkish Foreign Policy, South Caucasus, Interaction and Confrontation, Russia.

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Extended Abstract

Introduction

The relations between Russia and Turkey, as two major regional powers, have profound impacts on the political dynamics of the South Caucasus. This region, due to its unique geographical position acting as a bridge between Europe and Asia, as well as its rich natural resources, including oil and gas, has always attracted the attention of great powers. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus emerged as a strategic area witnessing significant changes in political and security equations. The closer relations between Russia and Turkey in recent years, particularly in economic, military, and political domains, could lead to a shift in the balance of power in this region. These changes not only affect the security and stability of the South Caucasus but may also influence the economic and social policies of the countries in this area. Furthermore, regional and extra-regional competitions in the South Caucasus, especially considering the interests of Iran and the United States, add further complexities to these equations. Turkey and Russia place significant importance on this region due to their historical ties with the South Caucasian countries and the geographical significance of the Caucasus. Additionally, the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown considerable geopolitical and geoeconomic sensitivity towards this region as a complement to its security and economic interests.

Data and Methodology

This research employs qualitative content analysis and coding of interview texts with experts. Initially, the interviews were fully transcribed and then carefully studied to identify key concepts and existing patterns. In the next phase, initial coding was conducted through open coding, which involved identifying the main topics and concepts related to the relations between Russia and Turkey in the South Caucasus. Subsequently, similar codes were grouped, and axial coding was performed to clarify the relationships between the codes and conceptual structures. This process enables researchers to gain a deeper understanding of the experts' perspectives and systematically and logically present the results of the analysis. It is noteworthy that 62% of the respondents hold doctoral degrees, while 38% have master's degrees. The expert group in this study consists of 85% men and 15% women. A total of 20 individuals were selected as the expert group based on purposive sampling until theoretical saturation was reached.

Results and Discussion

Based on the analyses provided by experts, the South Caucasus is significant for Russia not only from a security perspective but also economically, with the primary issue being oil or energy security for Russia. The oil element attracts attention from three economic perspectives. The first is the connection of Russian oil structures with this region, as the economy in the former Soviet Union was based on division of labor and interdependence centered around Moscow. The oil of the Caucasus is thus part of the overall interconnected economy of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). The second aspect involves external factors in the exploitation and exploration of oil in the Caucasus, primarily in Azerbaijan. A portion of Azerbaijan's oil is located on the Caspian Sea shores, and Russia is particularly sensitive to the participation of Western companies in the exploitation of these oil resources through bilateral contracts between Azerbaijan and these companies, linking Russia to Central Asia. Controlling the South Caucasus means maintaining Europe's energy dependence on Russia and strengthening Russia's



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international position as a major power. Therefore, the economic and oil-related issues in the Central Asian and South Caucasus regions are viewed by Russia as security matters, significantly influencing its security behaviors.

Conclusion

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the South Caucasus was introduced as a region with a power vacuum that attracted the attention of regional and extra-regional actors such as Russia, Turkey, the European Union, and the United States. In this context, Russia and Turkey have a particular sensitivity towards this region due to their geographical proximity. Both countries have sought to adjust their relations with the newly independent republics of the South Caucasus, leading to political and economic competitions between them. Turkey aims to expand its influence in the South Caucasus through soft power, cultural diplomacy, and cooperation with the West. In contrast, Russia, due to its national security concerns and the direct impacts of the South Caucasus on it, seeks to maintain its hegemony in the region. Despite the potential for cooperation, these two countries often face political tensions due to historical and ideological rivalries. Ultimately, the behaviors of Russia and Turkey in the South Caucasus can be analyzed through the lens of aggressive realism. Turkey seeks to enhance its power and national security through expanding its influence, while Russia aims to restore its power and strengthen its national security against NATO and Western threats.

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