

New Trends In Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy

Нові тенденції у зовнішній політиці Азербайджану

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Purpose. To determine the impact of the geopolitical transformation that took place in the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War on Azerbaijan's foreign policy course.

Method. Analysis-synthesis, historical, systematic approach, cause-and-effect.

Findings. The article explains the transition of Azerbaijan's foreign policy course from a passive and defense-oriented policy to a more active, balanced, and multi-vector policy after the Second Karabakh War. These innovations are justified by the tectonic shift towards Central Asia, the increase in initiatives at the subregional and international levels, the strengthening of a pragmatic, proactive and multipolar foreign policy line, and the rise of altruistic tendencies.

Theoretical implications. Azerbaijan's contemporary foreign policy combines realism, liberalism, and constructivism: prioritizing sovereignty and power, recognizing the importance of economic interdependence and cooperation, and orienting toward norms of stable coexistence. At the same time, the liberal-constructivist vector is strengthening through the development of mutually beneficial regional cooperation, particularly with Armenia, which creates a foundation of trust. The country's peace policy extends beyond the regional level, as evidenced by its participation in international peace initiatives.

Practical implications. Azerbaijan's modern foreign policy successes have led to the strengthening of the country's sovereignty, its rise to a leading position in the region, and its increasing influence in the international arena. These successes create a solid foundation for future development and further strengthen Azerbaijan's strategic importance.

Value. The study's value lies in systematizing changes in Azerbaijan's foreign policy within a conceptual framework that substantiates multi-vector policy, balanced diplomacy, and a focus on national interests, thereby strengthening its theoretical dimension. It also analyzes the state's behavior in regional and global contexts—especially after the Second Karabakh War—explaining mechanisms of adaptation to the evolving international system. Attention to logistics diplomacy, regional cooperation, and relations with the United States links practical outcomes with scholarly arguments, enhancing both academic and applied significance.

Paper type. Theoretical.

Мета дослідження. Визначити вплив геополітичної трансформації, що відбулася на Південному Кавказі після Другої карабаської війни, на курс зовнішньої політики Азербайджану.

Метод дослідження. Аналіз і синтез, історичний метод, системний підхід, причинно-наслідковий аналіз.

Результати дослідження. У статті пояснюється перехід зовнішньополітичного курсу Азербайджану від пасивної та оборонно орієнтованої політики до більш активної, збалансованої та багатовекторної після Другої карабаської війни. Ці новації обґрунтовуються тектонічним зсувом у напрямі Центральної Азії, зростанням ініціатив на субрегіональному та міжнародному рівнях, посиленням прагматичної, проактивної та багатополлярної зовнішньополітичної лінії, а також зростанням альтруїстичних тенденцій.

Теоретична цінність дослідження. Сучасна зовнішня політика Азербайджану поєднує реалізм, лібералізм і конструктивізм: пріоритетність суверенітету та сили, значення економічної взаємозалежності й співпраці, а також орієнтацію на норми стабільного співіснування. Водночас посилюється ліберально-конструктивістський вектор через розвиток взаємовигідної регіональної співпраці, зокрема з Вірменією, що формує підґрунтя довіри. Миротворча політика країни виходить за межі регіону, що підтверджується участю в міжнародних мирних ініціативах.

Практична цінність дослідження. Успіхи сучасної зовнішньої політики Азербайджану призвели до зміцнення суверенітету держави, її виходу на провідні позиції в регіоні та зростання впливу на міжнародній арені. Ці досягнення створюють міцну основу для подальшого розвитку й додатково посилюють стратегічну значущість Азербайджану.

Цінність дослідження. Цінність дослідження полягає у систематизації змін у зовнішній політиці Азербайджану в межах концептуальної рамки, що обґрунтовує багатовекторність, збалансовану дипломатію та орієнтацію на національні інтереси, тим самим посилюючи її теоретичний вимір. Також проаналізовано поведінку держави в регіональному та глобальному контекстах — особливо після Другої карабаської війни — з поясненням механізмів адаптації до трансформації міжнародної системи. Увага до логістичної дипломатії, регіональної співпраці та відносин зі США поєднує практичні результати з науковими аргументами, підвищуючи як академічну, так і прикладну значущість дослідження.

Тип статті. Теоретичний.

Key words: Second Karabakh War, Geopolitical Protectionism, Tectonic Shift, Altruism, C5+1.

Ключові слова: Друга карабаська війна, геополітичний протекціонізм, тектонічний зсув, альтруїзм, C5+1.

Introduction

In recent years, Azerbaijan's foreign policy has undergone significant transformation, shaped by post-conflict realities, changing global power dynamics, and new economic opportunities. Traditionally based on a balanced, multi-vector strategy, Azerbaijan is now moving toward a more assertive, pragmatic, and connectivity-driven diplomacy.

These changes show that Azerbaijan is evolving from a reactive state focused on territorial conflict into a proactive middle power shaping regional geopolitics and economic networks.

Theoretical Background

The study of new tendencies in Azerbaijan's foreign policy is grounded in several key theories of international relations that explain how states behave in a changing global system. These theoretical approaches help interpret Azerbaijan's strategic choices, partnerships, and priorities.

Although the theoretical results of Azerbaijan's foreign policy are currently more likely to be based on the predominance of liberalism and constructivism, one cannot ignore realistic views. It is impossible to completely abandon realism in a region like the South Caucasus.

The concept of multi-vector foreign policy is central to understanding Azerbaijan's approach. This strategy involves balancing relations with major global and regional powers—such as Turkey, Russia and USA—without becoming overly dependent on any single actor. This reflects elements of both realism (balance of power) and pragmatism.

Transport corridor diplomacy is another theoretical dimension. Projects like the TRİPP demonstrate how Azerbaijan uses its transport and communication potential as a tool of foreign policy to gain strategic influence and economic advantage.

Finally, regionalism and connectivity theories help explain Azerbaijan's growing role in transport and logistics networks linking Europe and Asia. These theories emphasize infrastructure, trade corridors, and regional cooperation as drivers of foreign policy behavior.

Problem Statement

In recent years, Azerbaijan's foreign policy has undergone significant transformation. Particularly after the Second Karabakh War, the country has entered a new phase in which its international role, strategic priorities, and diplomatic behavior are being redefined. These developments raise important academic and practical questions that require systematic analysis.

The core problem lies in understanding how and why Azerbaijan's foreign policy is evolving from a relatively balanced and status-quo-oriented approach toward a more proactive, assertive, and multidimensional strategy.

Another dimension of the problem concerns the interaction between national interests and external pressures. Azerbaijan must navigate complex relationships with global and regional powers while preserving sovereignty and strategic autonomy.

Furthermore, there is a need to assess the implications of these new tendencies for regional stability in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan's growing role in transport corridors raises questions about economic integration, geopolitical competition, and long-term security arrangements.

Therefore, the central problem of this research is to identify, analyze, and explain the emerging trends in Azerbaijan's foreign policy, determine their driving factors, and evaluate their impact at national, regional, and international levels. Addressing this problem contributes to a deeper theoretical understanding of small and medium-sized states' behavior in a rapidly changing international system.

Results

After the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan continues to make significant achievements in the

formation of a new system of relations in the South Caucasus. First of all, that war managed to save the South Caucasus from the “Gray Zone”, separatism and secession that had taken its hostage for the last two centuries. This also created a favorable environment for the damage to the pillars of Russia’s protectionist system, which had taken root in the region for more than two centuries, the emergence of a new possible foreign leader figure (the USA), and the systematic weakening of the forces opposing the opening of extraterritorial transport corridors in the South Caucasus. The South Caucasus has turned from a seemingly stagnant space into a dynamic competition arena, as well as a theater of struggle between transregional powers (Israel, India, Pakistan, etc.).

Although the current geopolitical reality in the South Caucasus is calculated to create peace and trust, it is too early to express a firm opinion about its sustainability. Because even if the dominance of traditional military threats within the region is sufficiently put an end to, this does not mean that they are buried once and for all. The separatist regions and Russian military bases that continue to maintain their presence in Georgia are quite a serious factor. The failure to sign a final peace agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia may serve the destructive plans of revanchists and their foreign sponsors.

The new geopolitical conditions have also created the basis for the clash of geopolitical interests of transregional players in the South Caucasus. As an example, the contradictions in India-Pakistan and Iran-Israel relations can be noted (Najafov, Z. N., 2025). The Russian-Ukrainian war has also left its mark on the geopolitics of the South Caucasus. As for the latter, Russia's involvement in Ukraine has created the basis for the activation of supporters of an independent political course in the region and a rapid departure from the classical geopolitical orientation. This can be observed in the closer relations between Armenia and the US and the European Union, the beginning of Azerbaijan’s multi-vector policy towards the USA, and other events.

The 44-day war has also dealt a crushing blow to the traditional bloc competition in the region. The alliance between Russia-Iran-Armenia that has existed for the past 30 years has completely collapsed. Armenia’s distancing itself from Russia and strengthening cooperation with the US and the European Union (the deployment of the European Union’s civilian mission along the border with Iran) has not been met with any ambiguity by Iran. Iran’s pressure on Armenia over the Zangezur corridor, and in return its opening of the Araz corridor with Azerbaijan, has managed to sow seeds of doubt in the relations between the two former allies.

The Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia alliance, on the other hand, has acquired a more durable and deterrent character. The normalization of relations between Armenia and Turkey has freed the South Caucasus from ideological narratives and paved the way for a transition to pragmatic and constructive relations.

Azerbaijan is not satisfied with the successes it has achieved after the Second Karabakh War, but is systematically working to consolidate the positive results of the victory and spread it to the region and beyond. As a logical result of these activities, the following can be noted as new strategic priorities of Azerbaijan’s foreign policy course:

1. Rapid transformation of the regional geopolitical protectionism system. Although the Second Karabakh War ended with Russia’s mediation, in the long term this was characterized as a weakening of its influence in the South Caucasus. Because although Russia emerged as an individual winner in that war, the alliance it led as a whole suffered defeat. Russia was not satisfied with this and decided not to share the final victory with anyone by excluding the OSCE Minsk Group from the war resolution process. This course of events led to the strengthening of Turkey’s position in the region and, for the first time since 1991, resulted in the formalization of a geopolitical condominium in the region (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 2013). Turkey’s policy in the region, not as a member of the NATO bloc, but individually, allowed it to protect the South Caucasus from transregional influences together with Russia and to apply the joint cooperation model in Azerbaijan (Nagorno-Karabakh) after Syria and Libya (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025, December 26).

Although this model was perceived as competitive cooperation, it was highly unlikely that it would be sustainable. These assumptions were based on Turkey's membership in NATO and its supply of Bayraktar UAVs to the aggressor after Russia's military intervention in Ukraine.

On the other hand, it was not excluded that Turkey would stand in solidarity with the democratic world, not with totalitarianism and tyranny, in the Russian-Ukrainian war. By signing a document on military alliance with Russia and Turkey, Azerbaijan, on the one hand, de jure assessed these two neighbors as leading figures in the post-conflict stage, and on the other hand, it created the basis for the establishment of geopolitical pluralism. The transition of the Azerbaijani army to the small model of the Turkish army means the application of NATO standards in the construction of this army. Thus, after the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan succeeded in replacing the classical dominance model in the South Caucasus with a geopolitical condominium, thus creating new geopolitical opportunities for the re-Westernization of the region. It is known that although integration into the Euro-Atlantic space was Azerbaijan's strategic vector in 2007, Russia's military intervention in Georgia in 2008 and Crimea in 2014 pushed cooperation with the West/NATO into the background in terms of national security considerations. The magnificent victory in the Second Karabakh War, Turkey's entry into the South Caucasus, Russia's fall into the "Ukrainian quagmire", Iran's serious blows in the 12-day war in May last year, N. Pashinyan's establishment of close relations with the United States and his commitment to the peace agenda indicate that a fertile moment has arrived for Azerbaijan to choose in favor of the United States.

The Joint Declaration signed by the leaders of Azerbaijan, the USA and Armenia at the Summit held in Washington on August 8, 2025, as well as the initialing of the draft "Agreement on the Establishment of Peace and Interstate Relations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Republic of Armenia" and other agreements at the Summit held in Washington with the participation of the leaders of Azerbaijan, the USA and Armenia, as a witness, have allowed the formation of new geopolitical realities in our region, the creation of favorable conditions for sustainable peace and development in the region. The Washington Summit also reached an agreement on the "Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity" (TRIPP) project, which envisages ensuring unhindered connectivity between the main part of the Republic of Azerbaijan and its Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic. The Republic of Azerbaijan will remain committed to bilateral, direct and principled dialogue in order to further advance the peace process in 2026. In this context, in order to ensure the signing and ratification of the already initialed peace agreement, the full implementation of the obligations in the Constitution of Armenia to eliminate the remaining territorial claims against Azerbaijan and to ensure unhindered communication under the TRIPP project is of particular importance.

In order to become the favorite of the South Caucasus, the United States must definitely achieve the signing of a peace treaty between Azerbaijan and Armenia, put an end to the bankruptcy of the clerical regime in Iran, prevent the anti-American plans of the Sino-Russian alliance in Georgia, direct the ethno-ideological potential of Turkey and the Turkic world against India, Iran and Russia, and provide comprehensive support for the normalization process between Armenia and Turkey.

2. Tectonic shift towards Central Asia. (C5+1). If Azerbaijan once chose the Euro-Atlantic space as a place of integration, then after the Second Karabakh War, the biased attitude of the old continent to the country's fair victory in the Second Karabakh War gave rise to a revision of priorities in the foreign policy course and geopolitical orientation. Among the new geopolitical directions, the Central Asian region is of particular importance.

The Central Asian republics and Azerbaijan are united by common and business interests in the field of historical ethnic (except for Tajikistan) and religious identity, political and economic independence and security. The main priorities of business interests are the safe delivery of rich hydrocarbon resources to Europe. It is known that Azerbaijan is the most suitable strategic window to Europe for Central Asia (Zbigniew Brzezinski, 2013, C. 155). This idea was also confirmed by Z.

Brzezinski. Currently, the strengthening of Azerbaijan, its transformation into a real regional leader and the increase in subregional influence create more favorable conditions for the Central Asian states to access Europe. On the other hand, the closer relations between Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries with the United States (C5+1) have given them the opportunity to strengthen their sovereignty and secure their business interests under a more reliable umbrella.

Over the past 35 years, including the Second Karabakh War, the development of historical friendly and fraternal relations with the countries of Central Asia has been consistently, actively and successfully continued on the basis of mutual trust and strategic partnership. The intensity of mutual visits has once again demonstrated the high level of relations and cooperation, and the special importance attached to the Central Asian region within the framework of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Only in 2025, 14 reciprocal visits of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan to 3 Central Asian countries, as well as 14 reciprocal visits of the Presidents and other high representatives of those countries to Azerbaijan, were carried out. In total, in the past three years, 14 visits of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan to Central Asian countries, and 23 visits of the leaders of Central Asian countries to Azerbaijan took place (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Azerbaijan, 2025, December 26, C. 2-3).

The acceptance of the Republic of Azerbaijan as a full member of the Consultative Council of the Heads of State of Central Asia at the 7th Consultative Meeting of the Heads of State of Central Asia held in Uzbekistan on November 15-16, the unification of our countries in a single geopolitical and geoeconomic space, the transformation of cooperation in Central Asia from the C5 format to the C6 format, being an important diplomatic achievement, allowed mutual trust and strategic partnership to enter a new stage. During the year, the second meetings of the Supreme Interstate Councils with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, meetings of relevant intergovernmental commissions with Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan were held. Thus, on the one hand, Azerbaijan's accession to the C5 may give impetus to the transformation of the Central Asia-Caspian-Black Sea macroregion into a new energy and transport communication Heartland of Eurasia in the near future and to the C6+1 format in the near future. Even Turkey's accession to this format cannot be ruled out.

3. Geopolitical and geoeconomic benefits of the TRIPP corridor.

Transport corridors are high-tech logistics systems connecting production and consumption regions. They are currently the main geopolitical factor determining the zones of influence of countries, economic integration and the level of regional security. They change the structure of geopolitics, turn transit countries into active players, influence the redistribution of global trade flows, are used as a means of exerting pressure or strengthening partnerships.

The main geopolitical functions of transport corridors are considered to be the following:

1. As a tool of influence and integration: the creation of transport corridors, such as the "One Belt, One Road" Initiative or the North-South Corridor, develops new geopolitical partnerships and ensures the economic presence of major powers in strategically important regions.

2. Changing the status of transit countries: countries through which the corridors pass (for example, in Central Asia) gain the opportunity to increase their political influence, turn their geographical location into economic and diplomatic advantages.

3. Economic security and sustainability: the sustainability of transport routes in the context of sanctions and conflicts directly affects the economic independence of states.

4. Regional development: transport corridors stimulate the development of neighboring territories by creating infrastructure (ports, terminals, centers) that attract investment and change the socio-economic landscape of regions.

The development of transport corridors is closely related to the competition between global powers for control over key trade routes, making them one of the most important factors in the modern geopolitical landscape.

Undoubtedly, the TRIPP (Zangezur) corridor, around which multilateral military-political and geo-economic games were held after the Second Karabakh War, is proof of this. The naming of Zangezur as TRIPP (Trump Route for International Peace and Prosperity) as a result of the meeting of the leaders of the United States, Azerbaijan and Armenia in Washington in August 2025 is a moment that reflects the strategic interest of the United States in this corridor.

The TRIPP corridor is a strategic initiative that strengthens the presence of the United States in the South Caucasus and Central Eurasia, creating an alternative to the sensitive Black Sea routes. By integrating with the Middle Corridor, it changes East-West logistics and turns it into a key geo-economic tool for the reconstruction of regional power.

Some geopolitical and geo-economic moments can be noted as the main aspects of the value of the TRIPP corridor. First, let's note the geopolitical aspects:

1. Strengthening the US in the region: The route supported by Washington facilitates the development of previously underutilized territories, strengthens the role of the US as a key figure and strategic partner in the region, and forces those who oppose the corridor to retreat.

2. Restructuring regional dynamics: TRIPP changes the balance of power, reduces the influence of traditional players, and facilitates the long-term integration of the South Caucasus into the system of Western interests.

3. Security: The project creates a reliable alternative to the routes through the Black Sea, which are vulnerable to risks due to ongoing conflicts.

Geoeconomic aspects include the following:

1. Integration with the Middle Corridor: TRIPP strengthens the role of Azerbaijan and the Central Asian countries as key transit hubs between China/Asia and Europe.

2. Economic development: Infrastructure investments within the corridor stimulate trade and economic growth in the region.

3. Transport diversification: The development of new logistics routes makes the Middle Corridor a key strategic route that can compete with the northern and southern routes.

So what geopolitical and geoeconomic advantages will this corridor bring to Azerbaijan if it is implemented? The implementation of the TRIPP corridor will ensure Azerbaijan's status as a key transport hub between Asia and Europe, bring in about \$3 billion in revenue per year, and strengthen its economic sovereignty. For the Turkic world, this means the creation of a direct land route connecting Turkey, Azerbaijan and Central Asia and the increase in the geopolitical influence of the region against the background of the development of the Middle Corridor (Azerbaijan News).

As for geoeconomic benefits, the corridor will provide direct access from Turkey to the Caspian Sea and further to Central Asia through Azerbaijan, will allow the creation of a direct physical corridor connecting the Turkic states and strengthening their political and strategic interaction. It will significantly strengthen Azerbaijan's position as an indispensable participant in the international East-West transport route, will facilitate the elimination of the transport blockade of Nakhchivan and the establishment of a direct connection with the main part of Azerbaijan. The TRIPP corridor will radically change the logistics map of the South Caucasus, reduce dependence on other routes and increase Azerbaijan's geopolitical weight.

4. The growth of altruism in Azerbaijan's foreign policy. In the modern system of international relations, the foreign policy of states is not only based on national interests, but also encompasses the principles of global well-being and cooperation. In this context, altruistic values – that is, taking into account the interests of other actors and promoting the common good – are gaining increasing importance.

Altruism is explained in the theory of international relations mainly within the framework of the liberal and constructivist approaches. According to these approaches:

states act not only with force and security, but also with values and normative principles;

international cooperation creates mutual benefit;

solving global problems requires collective action.

From this point of view, altruistic policy acts as an important tool that increases the state's "soft power" potential.

Altruistic approaches serve to strengthen Azerbaijan's international image and expand its diplomatic influence. At the same time, the need to balance this policy with national interests is emphasized.

Azerbaijan has taken certain steps in this direction in its foreign policy in recent years, increased its activity in international organizations, and demonstrated a more open position towards peace initiatives.

Altruistic components in Azerbaijan's foreign policy manifest themselves in several areas:

1. Humanitarian diplomacy. Azerbaijan contributes to international solidarity by providing humanitarian assistance to various countries. This activity has intensified especially during the pandemic.

2. Activity in international organizations. Azerbaijan plays an active role in the Non-Aligned Movement, defending the interests of developing countries and promoting the principle of global justice.

3. Multiculturalism and dialogue initiatives. The country hosts platforms that promote interfaith and intercultural dialogue, which serves to strengthen peace and mutual understanding.

One of the important steps taken in this direction is Azerbaijan joining the Peace Council as a founding member in February 2026. This platform, an initiative of the US President, aims to promote regional stability and global peace. Azerbaijan's participation in this council is considered an indicator of the country's new international status and strategic importance (Azerbaijan News).

The Peace Council is an initiative promoted by the US, which envisages solidarity for the sake of regional and global peace. As a founding member of the council, Azerbaijan acts as an active partner contributing to strengthening peace in the region and the world. Activities in this platform strengthen Azerbaijan's role in international security and solidarity in its foreign policy.

Conclusion

After the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's foreign policy course has undergone serious transformations. New priorities and strategic vectors have been identified. The old rules of the game in the region have been replaced by new ones. The geopolitical struggle has shifted from separatist conflicts to competition for transport corridors.

The Second Karabakh War, of which Azerbaijan was the architect, has created a broader and more competitive order in the region, including new and transregional actors. This order has become a theater of extra-state struggles (Israel-Iran and India-Pakistan conflicts).

The increasing role of altruistic values in Azerbaijan's foreign policy is an indicator of the country's more active and multifaceted diplomacy. Joining peace initiatives and expanding international cooperation strengthens Azerbaijan's position in the global arena.

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Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

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