

M.G.Musayev

*Baku State University, Azerbaijan  
(E-mail: vusala.musayeva@gmail.com)*

## **The Caspian Region as a political object**

Each independent state puts foreign policy according to its national interests. The national interests of the state are its territorial integrity, sovereignty and the people's interests and national security. In a democratic society, the Heads of State or Government, for decision-making are trying to strike a balance between national interests and the needs of the population. In foreign policy should reflect the interests of the people. In this sense, the Caspian region is an important object of regional policy for all the countries bordering the Caspian Sea.

*Key words:* national interests, the Caspian Sea, oil, foreign and domestic policy of Azerbaijan, national security.

Every independent state leads its own specific foreign policy that corresponds to its national interests. The national interests of a state include such issues as its territorial integrity, sovereignty, the interests of its people and national security. In a democratic society while making decisions the heads of the state and the government try to build a balance between the national interests and demands of its people. The foreign policy must also reflect the interests of the people, because the Constitution provides for their approach, activities and freedom of socio-political and spiritual life.

The second important issue in the foreign policy strategy is the national security of the state. While building bilateral or multilateral relations, these issues are always considered the priorities of foreign policy and in the international system states openly declare them to the other side.

Foreign policy also includes such issues as the relations of a state with its bordering neighbors and international organizations, joining projects and expressing opinion regarding the ongoing events in the region.

The theoretical analysis of the current state of the real power centers and the regional and international relations of the modern world are absolutely crucial for an independent state which is defining its foreign policy strategy and wishes to join interstate regional and international relations. The place and the role of every state, which has chosen the path of independence, among the world countries depend on which development model it has chosen, which international power center it inclines its economic-political and security interests towards and which center it creates cooperation, partnership, friendship relations and, most importantly, strategic alliances with.

The success of Azerbaijan's foreign policy strategy during independence is explained by the fact that our country not only manages to adapt to the ever changing international environment, but also to become the regional leader. Some of the specific characteristics of Azerbaijan's foreign policy are carrying out national interests, strengthening independence and sovereignty, active foreign policy strategy targeted at restoration of territorial integrity and creating a balance among the actors in and outside the region, with peculiar and at times conflicting policies. These political directions and strategic choices are defined by the following influential factors:

- The Armenian aggression towards Azerbaijan (military occupation, ethnic cleansing, violation of rights of around a million Azerbaijani refugees and internally displaced people and destruction of a great part of historic and cultural heritage in the country by the Armenians) plays the main role in the formation of security provision and foreign policy in Azerbaijan.
- Global processes. Azerbaijan reinstated its independence at a time when the international relations system was facing fundamental changes. The events, occurring in the last 20 years, show that the system, in essence, is still competitive. States lead different and at times conflicting foreign policy goals. If it turns out to be permanent, this competition will negatively affect the global and regional security environment.
- Strategic geographic location. Azerbaijan's geographic location is of great strategic importance. Being located on the crossroads of major trade ways on the East-West and North-South transport and energy corridor gives the country the opportunity to become an energy and infrastructure center.

- Rich natural resources. The fact that Azerbaijan has great natural resources does not only serve the development of the country and wellbeing of its people, but also is a great factor in the strengthening of the national security, political independence and sovereignty of the country. Development of the rich hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Sea and their transfer to the world markets later became the main direction in the policy, called Azerbaijan's energy strategy. Being founded by the national leader Heydar Aliyev and successfully carried out by President Ilham Aliyev, this strategy is the cornerstone of Azerbaijan's foreign policy.
- Threats and risks to security in the modern world. The non-state actors in the international arena, such as international terrorist groups, military separatist movements, ethnical and religious extremism, organized crime networks, as well as illegal migration, narcotics and human trafficking, distribution of mass destruction weapons, sabotage risks at the major energy and transport infrastructure and cyber-attacks that have become the latest phenomenon, are some of the factors that seriously influence the global and regional security environment.

The region Azerbaijan is located in is of great geopolitical and strategic importance. Considering the sensitivity of the region, the common interests of both the USA and Russia in this area, Azerbaijan carries out a balanced policy in both its neighborhood policy and its relations with the countries outside the region.

It should be noted that the reaction of the regional countries to the ongoing processes and their level of participation are very different. For example, Armenia's foreign policy does not correspond to modern requirements, thus its participation in the international projects regarding the region is almost nonexistent. Armenia also has a minimum influence on the formation of security system, development of political cooperation and improvement of diplomatic activity in the South Caucasus. Azerbaijan's foreign policy, on the other hand, is completely different. The main principles of Azerbaijan's foreign policy were defined by Heydar Aliyev. He said to the people of Azerbaijan on 29 December 2000 upon starting a new century and the third millennium: «The main purpose of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is to build beneficial relations with all countries of the world on the basis of equal rights, to develop them and to efficiently use these bonds to strengthen the international positions of the Republic of Azerbaijan and develop the country's economy, science and culture. The main principles of Azerbaijan's foreign policy are to respect the interstate relations regulated by international law norms, to respect the sovereign rights of all countries, solve all conflict situations through peace and negotiations, build mutually beneficial economic, scientific and cultural cooperation and eliminate all obstacles for interstate relations.»

The active role Azerbaijan has been playing in the formation of the geopolitical environment in the region proves that the foreign policy principles are constructive and fully correspond to the modern conditions. Now international projects regarding the region cannot be carried out without Azerbaijan's participation. Azerbaijan is considered one of the main participants in all programs on the formation of world energy security system. These programs are even impossible to carry out without Azerbaijan's consent.

The analytical articles printed in foreign mass media constantly note the fact that the dynamics of geopolitical, economic, energy and other processes of the South Caucasus are always closely connected to Azerbaijan's policy. Azerbaijan has been given a special place in the concepts on the formation of Black Sea-Caspian Sea security system, prepared by the USA and the European Union.

The oil and gas resources that Azerbaijan develops jointly with foreign companies in the national sector of the Caspian Sea have turned the country into a major actor in the world energy market. At present the Western countries and the USA consider Azerbaijan one of the most stable and reliable partners in energy sector and show Azerbaijan the necessary help to reach the world energy market. At this new millennium and its shift to global economy, Azerbaijan is successfully integrating into the universal economy system of the world and cooperates with the European Union, World Trade Organization, International Monetary Fund, the World Bank and other organizations.

The tenth paragraph of the Constitution of the Republic of Azerbaijan reads that Azerbaijan builds its relations with other countries and the foreign world based on the principles of international law norms and the country's interests.

The aims of independent statehood in Azerbaijan demand a many-direction foreign policy, including strengthening independence, providing security, territorial integrity and economic interests, etc. At present the country leads a varied and balanced policy in order to protect the independence, to eventually pull it out of the traditional political influence circle, to efficiently use the economic, political and cultural relations that have formed historically for state interests, to provide a righteous place for Azerbaijan in the relations system

between the East and the West, with the condition of not offending the fundamental interests of the regional countries.

As always, Azerbaijan stands in the center of the geopolitical interests of the super and regional states of the world in the Caspian. Azerbaijan has once again become the political and economic center in the Caspian region. The famous American geostrategy expert Z.Brzezinski noted: «Despite having limited territory and population, Azerbaijan is a very significant country in the geopolitical plane with its great energy resources. It is like the cork to the bottle, where all the riches of the Caspian Sea and the Middle Eastern basin are preserved» [1; 62].

The actors of the «Great Game» played in the Caspian basin (the USA, Russia, China, Turkey, India, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Iran, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia, Japan and the European Union) are well known. The leading countries exploit the ethnic conflicts in order to preserve their influence in the region. The famous researcher on the Caspian basin Suat Parlar highlights this side of the issue and writes: «The Caucasus has had its share of the bloody wars for oil and is still suffering from them.» [2; 13].

Another famous researcher Sinan Oghan writes: «The events around the Caspian have turned into a big game. The strongest states and famous companies of the world are all in it.» [2; 14].

The deepening of the war for the Caspian basin will not do anything good for the region. It is not a coincidence that Alfred Nobel, who became one of the biggest oil barons of the world, being the owner of oil in the Caspian region, said: «Oil, blood and politics are all mixed up in the Caucasus.» [3; 6].

The Assistant to the US President Dick Cheney also clearly described the games, played in the Caspian basin. He said in his speech at the conference of oil companies held in Kazakhstan in 1998: «I don't remember any other place in the history that turned into the most strategic spot in the world overnight like the Caspian basin.» [2; 15].

Researcher E.Khatun Kilijbeyli writes that at the «Greater Middle East and NATO» conference held in Brussels in 2004 the USA clearly stated their intention of gaining control of the energy resources of the Near East and the Caucasus within the framework of this project. Kilijbeyli also speaks of the USA's plans to take control over the energy resources of the Caucasus basin within the «Greater Middle East» (GME) project [4].

From political and geoeconomic point of view, Azerbaijan's position in the issue regarding the status of the Caspian Sea is of great significance for Russia, Iran, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Georgia, Armenia and many other countries.

Political analyst Z.Brzezinski considers that state independence of many Middle Eastern countries is directly connected to Azerbaijan. He also noted that «if Azerbaijan is under complete control of Moscow, the state independence of the Middle Asian countries will be regarded as something insignificant» [1; 67].

All of these geopolitical realities have found their scientific and political reflection in Azerbaijan's foreign policy and diplomacy regarding the Caspian Sea. Even if different claims were made regarding the Caspian region during the first years of Azerbaijan's independence, the status issue became a more urgent topic in interstate relations after the «Contract of the Century» was signed in 1994. Azerbaijan's serious attempts in solving the occurring conflicts through political ways, based on historic experience and international law norms, partiality in positions of other parties, participating in the discussion, as well as the opinions and remarks of the western countries regarding the processes in the Caspian region have all increased. We think the activities of these countries in this sphere demand a thorough research that would reflect the systematic and objective approach.

Another essential of Azerbaijan's oil strategy is to resolve the new legal status of the Caspian as soon as possible jointly with other Caspian states and securely transfer the rich oil and gas resources to be extracted from the Azerbaijani sector of the sea. Regarding the solution of the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the main duty of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is to efficiently use the rich natural resources of the Caspian Sea regarding the demands of the regional countries and the entire world based on international law norms and principles, kind friendship and neighborhood relations and with respect to territorial integrity and sovereignty of the countries.

Among the five Caspian countries, the Republic of Azerbaijan demonstrates the most constructive, consistent and scientifically founded approach in the solution of the new legal status of the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan's foreign policy doctrine regarding the Caspian Sea prepared under the president of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Heydar Aliyev, is also being accepted by the official circles of other Caspian countries [5; 262].

The problem has still not been resolved because the Caspian countries do not demonstrate a constructive approach and base on their own national interests, rather than the international law norms. One of the main obstacles is the issue of whether the Caspian should be given the status of a sea or a lake. This status

should define the main division principles of the Caspian from the viewpoint of international law. Azerbaijan's position regarding the international-legal status and division of the Caspian is based on international law norms and the experience gained in the region. This position has been defined considering Azerbaijan's national interests in the region and the geographic situation of the Caspian Sea.

Thanks to Azerbaijan's successful oil strategy and its foreign policy, which is its integral part, the country managed to demonstrate a constructive position and fight for the provision of its national interests. This has been one of the biggest achievements for Azerbaijan on the eve of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

Azerbaijan's position on the sovereignty of the Caspian shelf is based on many ground principles of the international law. Azerbaijan clearly states in its foreign policy that every Caspian country has the right of sovereignty for its corresponding sector. The Caspian must be divided into sectors and the rights of every country for its sector must be protected by the international law norms. Azerbaijan has clearly stated its position and considered its territory adjoining to the corresponding territory of the Caspian Sea an integral part of Azerbaijan in its Constitution, adopted on 12 November, 1995 [6].

In 1991–1998 when Russia and Iran highlighted the importance of joint exploitation of the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan proposed that dividing the Caspian into national sectors would be a more optimal way and many Caspian countries and other interested parties supported this idea. Russia's position was backed by Iran, and Azerbaijan by Kazakhstan. Turkmenistan supported Russia and Iran through diplomatic means and demonstrated a harsher position towards Azerbaijan. There is a historic reality behind Azerbaijan's idea of dividing the Caspian into national sectors and every Caspian state being the full owner of their national sector. The ancestors of the Azerbaijanis, regardless of whether they were free or dependent on other states, always lived around the Caspian and used the waters and other natural and biological resources the Caspian Sea had to offer [7].

According to the official position of the Azerbaijani government, whether the Caspian is called a lake or a sea must be based on scientific geographic principles. According to international definition a sea is a part of the ocean that has more or less separated from the land and underwater relief heights. The Caspian does not correspond to these requirements and has the status of a lake. That is why, the fact that the Caspian is called a sea is only conditional and its exploitation should be based on the requirements of the lake status. Thus, according to international law norms, the territory of the Caspian should be divided into sectors among the Caspian states according to their bordering shores. The Republic of Azerbaijan supports the position of dividing the Caspian Sea based on a centerline method which is drawn considering the points located in equal distances from the sideways and opposite countries and modified with the consent of the parties. This method is recognized in international practice, considers the geographic and legal characteristics of the Caspian Sea and the practices that have already formed in the Caspian and can be used to all the Caspian states.

According to the division proposed by Azerbaijan, the points where the shores intersect with country borders are connected with straight lines and by intersecting these lines with the centerline, which passes through the middle of the Caspian from north to south, the water zones of the Caspian states are defined. Previously the Caspian Sea was divided between the USSR and Iran according to the border points of the shores. Iran owned the part south to the straight line that connected its borders with the borders of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. At present, Iran still owns that part, protecting and exploiting it according to the international law.

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М.Г.Мусаев

**Каспий аймағы саясаттың нысаны ретінде**

Мақалада әрбір тәуелсіз мемлекет өзінің ұлттық мүдделеріне сәйкес сыртқы саясатты жүзеге асырады. Мемлекеттің ұлттық мүдделеріне оның аумақтық тұтастығы, егемендігі, халық мүдделері мен ұлттық қауіпсіздігі жатады. Демократиялық қоғамда шешім қабылдау үшін мемлекет және үкімет басшылары ұлттық мүдделері және халықтың қажеттіліктері арасындағы тепе-теңдікті сақтауға мәжбүрлі. Сыртқы саясатта халықтың мүдделері көрсетілуі тиіс. Автор, осы мағынада, Каспий аймағы Каспий теңізімен шекаралас барлық елдер үшін аймақтық саясаттың маңызды нысаны болып табылатындығын ерекше атап өтеді.

М.Г.Мусаев

**Каспийский регион как объект политики**

В статье отмечено, что каждое независимое государство осуществляет внешнюю политику в соответствии со своими национальными интересами. К национальным интересам государства относятся его территориальная целостность, суверенитет, интересы народа и вопросы национальной безопасности. Подчеркнуто, что в демократическом обществе главы государств или правительств при принятии решений пытаются установить баланс между национальными интересами и потребностями населения. Во внешней политике должны быть отражены интересы народа. Автором выделено, что в этом смысле Каспийский регион является важным объектом региональной политики для всех стран, граничащих с Каспийским морем.

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