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PRINCIPAL STARTING POINTS AND CONCEPTUAL VIEWS IN THE GEOPOLITICS OF AZERBAIJAN **PRINCIPALES PUNTOS DE PARTIDA Y VISTAS CONCEPTUALES EN LA GEOPOLÍTICA DE AZERBAIYÁN**

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ABSTRACT

Geopolitics is a method of studying foreign policy to understand, explain and predict international political behavior through geographic variables. At present, this field of political science has gained special relevance since it is almost impossible to dissociate spatial-temporal relations from the development of states. The aim of this article is to discuss the main points and conceptual views of the geopolitical context of Azerbaijan. For this, the main research methods used were document analysis and historical analysis. The work identifies the main strengths and geopolitical risks of Azerbaijan as well as the historical factors that conditioned the emergence of the nation as one of the main actors in the Caucasus region. It is considered then that the implementation of the regional leadership of Azerbaijan should be carried out taking into account the following general principles: 1) disturbances in the balance of internal and external activities should not be allowed, 2) the mechanisms to regulate the application of interests Geopolitical activities must be adjusted to the international situation and to the practice of world powers, 3) the structure of activities must conform to the national potential of the country, internal needs and advantages in international processes. For this, the establishment of objectives must be conditioned by efficiency and the logic of need.

Keywords: Geopolitics, national interests, geopolitical context.

RESUMEN

La geopolítica es un método de estudio de la política exterior para entender, explicar y predecir el comportamiento político internacional a través de variables geográficas. En la actualidad este campo de las ciencias políticas ha ganado especial relevancia dado que es casi imposible desvincular las relaciones espacio-temporales del desarrollo de los estados. El objetivo de este artículo es discutir los principales puntos y visiones conceptuales del contexto geopolítico de Azerbaiyán. Para esto, los principales métodos de investigación usados fueron el análisis de documentos y el análisis histórico. En el trabajo se identifican las principales fortalezas y riesgos geopolíticos de Azerbaiyán así como los factores históricos que condicionaron el surgimiento de la nación como uno de los principales actores de la región del Cáucaso. Se considera entonces que la aplicación del liderazgo regional de Azerbaiyán debe llevarse a cabo teniendo en cuenta los siguientes principios generales: 1) no deben permitirse perturbaciones en el equilibrio de las actividades internas y externas, 2) los mecanismos para regular la aplicación de los intereses geopolíticos deben ajustarse a la situación internacional y a la práctica de las potencias mundiales, 3) la estructura de las actividades deben conformarse de acuerdo con el potencial nacional del país, las necesidades internas y las ventajas en los procesos internacionales. Para esto el establecimiento de objetivos debe estar condicionado por la eficiencia y la lógica de la necesidad.

Palabras clave: Geopolítica, intereses nacionales, contexto geopolítico.

INTRODUCTION

According to Deudney (2013), geopolitics may be understood as the analysis of the geographic influences on power relationships in international relations. The word geopolitics was originally coined by the Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellén about the turn of the 20th century, and its use spread throughout Europe in the period between World Wars I and II (1918–39) and came into worldwide use during the latter. However, in contemporary discourse, geopolitics has been widely employed as a loose synonym for international politics.

While there is really little point in trying to establish a definition of the term, in a simplified sense there are two distinct understandings of geopolitics. First, geopolitics offers for many a reliable guide of the global landscape using geographical descriptions, metaphors, and templates such as 'iron curtain', 'Third World', and/or 'rogue state'. Each of these terms is inherently geographical because places are identified and labelled as such. It then helps to generate a simple model of the world, which can then be used to advise and inform foreign and security policy making. Second, the focus of attention is on how geopolitics actually works as an academic and popular practice. So rather than simply assume that labels such as 'iron curtain' and 'axis of evil' have a certain heuristic value, we proceed to question how they generate particular understandings of places, communities, and accompanying identities (Dodds, 2007).

The fact that geopolitics has become more pertinent in our day and age seems to be associated with an understanding that spatial-temporal factors should legitimately dominate in all spheres of human activity. The thesis that nothing exists in the world outside space and time (the most objective existential indices) can be considered the methodological foundation of this dominance of geopolitical interests. Consequently, the objective description of any phenomenon or object should correlate with an explanation of their spatial-temporal parameters. Since any state as a political phenomenon is realized within specific spatial and temporal boundaries, its interests should be defined in strict correlation with the specifics of its spatial-temporal boundaries (Huseynov, 2010).

In this sense, the Caucasian region is a unique geopolitical and ethnopolitical formation. The fact that it has historically consisted of two parts, the North and the South, has determined the way these parts interact both within the region, as well as with external forces. The main subregions in the Caucasian region are the following: the North Caucasian (which consists of the constituencies of the North Caucasian Federal District established on

19 January, 2010—Daghestan, Ingushetia, Kabardino-Balkaria, Karachaevo-Cherkessia, North Ossetia, Chechnia, and the Stavropol Territory) and the South Caucasian (which includes the Azerbaijani-Georgian and Armenian territorial segments). Despite the seeming fragmentation of the Caucasus in terms of ethnoterritorial features, the main power centers in the region are nevertheless interrelated. It is this particular phenomenon that determines the Caucasus' conflict potential which arose due to historic contradictions born of ethnoterritorial rivalry (Prokopenko, 2010).

According to Shafee (2010), domestically the states of the region continued to suffer from ethnic conflicts, for example the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Kenan, 2009; Fikret, 2012), but they managed to build viable statehood, and make progress on market reforms with Azerbaijan as the leading economic power. Taking this into account, is important to analyze the geopolitical context of Azerbaijan, its strengths and potential risks that can affect it. Then, the main focus of this research will be the above mention, for which first, the basis of geopolitics will be debated. Document analysis and historical analysis were used as the main research methods, so the research corresponds to the qualitative type.

DEVELOPMENT

Proper geopolitical analysis is very important for any country and to for this the methodological basis of the analysis must be correct. Geopolitical analysis combines a number of aspects but only when putting them together a real result is revealed. Geopolitics analyzes geopolitical processes and events, seeks solutions to existing problems in the scientific field and it seeks to clarify the nature of issues related to the study and meaning of the complex development of countries and their territorial sharing processes.

Geopolitics also studies the problems that can and are likely to affect the change of the reality of political processes affecting the geo-space by appropriate methods and tools, and analyzes the means and ways of directly influencing these processes. To do this, geopolitical research does not differ in the method or object of research, but in the purpose for which it is set. For example: it is possible that a country wants to expand its geopolitical sphere of influence. In this case, the task before him is to study the events and processes that may hinder the realization of this intention. On the other hand, maybe any country wants to maintain the geopolitical status quo around itself. In this case, the negative changing elements must be identified and their cancer-like geopolitical metastases must be prevented.

Geopolitics encompasses a set of multivariate models, methodological principles, research methods and procedures that will define and/or change existing realities, as a set of directly feasible programs, recommendations and territorial-political communication technologies aimed at achieving real geopolitical benefits. Geopolitics also defines the participants of territorial and political events and their composition such as:

1. States and other political geographical entities and institutions within them.
2. Regional (territorial) groups and the reasons for their political, economic, social, cultural and military concentration.
3. Institutions of regional, local, global and geopolitical influence of ideological origin.
4. Conceptualization of geopolitical events and participants in decision-making processes.
5. Application of the structural model of the area in the analysis of the geopolitical situation.
6. Level of military, political, ideological, cultural and social well-being, regional and global interests of the forces involved in political geographical processes.
7. The ratio of existing forces and their probabilities of change in the near and long term;
8. Territorial and global process modeling.
9. Management of geopolitical events and identification of risk factors.

It is impossible to imagine geopolitical research separately from complex research. Thus, since geopolitics deals with the study of processes that are taking place or are likely to take place in a particular area, and it must be able to draw conclusions from the development dynamics of any geopolitical process or event. These characteristics make the field obligatorily transdisciplinary.

For this reason the scientific research apparatus and methodological base of geopolitics is developed by specialists, or groups of specialists, with political, military, economic, cultural and social knowledge on the basis of in-depth analysis and comparisons.

Azerbaijan is the most important country in the South Caucasus region in terms of strategic, economic and geopolitical aspects. Having a coast on the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan is very rich in natural resources such as oil and gas, and therefore it has been a country of interest to many global and regional actors from ancient history to the present (Yilmaz & Yorulmaz, 2021). In addition to its resources Azerbaijan is also located at the crossroads of major Eurasian land and air transportation corridors. For

this reason, since gaining independence, the Azerbaijani government has actively attempted to develop the country into a bridge between Europe and Asia (Valiyev, 2018) rising the status of the country not only in the region but the world.

The Republic of Azerbaijan is an active participant in regional and secular political, economic and military processes and it has defining features at the regional level which constitute advantages for the country. Among these it can be highlighted:

1. It is the largest country in the South Caucasus in terms of demographic potential. Despite the diversity of national composition, the dominance of statehood consciousness it has been formed within the population of the country.
2. Azerbaijan is the largest country in territory in the South Caucasus but at the same time it borders more countries. Many international transit routes pass through the territory of the country as was stated before.
3. Azerbaijan's economic potential allows it to be represented at the highest level in the world market. The country is an exporter of oil and gas products of strategic importance.

In a number of cases, Azerbaijan has a leading and dominant position in regional processes. The above-mentioned advantages allow Azerbaijan to influence the essence, course, form and features of these processes. It can be said that due to these factors of complex support: the largest country, the richest country and the fact that it is one of the "knot" countries in world political processes the country not only participates in the processes, but sometimes "authorizes" them, shaping its course, determining the actors, or becomes one of the leading voices.

Related to this great influence had the conceptual approaches of the national leader Heydar Aliyev which were based on deep intellect, useful experience and method of timely action. The deep intellect of the national leader Heydar Aliyev was reflected in his understanding of the essence of the issues, as well as in his conclusions, which were predictive for the future. The national leader preferred a sustainable, systematic and deep-seated political course to activities that seem hasty and seemingly quick success. That is why today Azerbaijan is determinant in the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus. Heydar Aliyev also curated throughout the nation the most strategic issues in the former USSR, and gained useful experience that would complement the intellectual element of geopolitical thinking in internal and external relations. Another important point is to do any action on time, combining deep intelligence and useful experience. All the

steps taken by the national leader in terms of foreign policy and geopolitical planning were taken on time and in a timely manner.

Azerbaijan's partnership is primarily based on the realization of the country's economic potential. If it is possible to say so, Azerbaijan's geopolitics is based on geoeconomic models. The importance of the realization of Azerbaijan's national economic interests and success at the level of geoeconomic development is more evident at the level of modern international economic relations. In this sense, the oil strategy, which reflects the geo-economic development of the country, reflects not only the national economic interests, but also the interests of the coalition (interstate).

This expands the range of realization of the country's national economic interests not only today and tomorrow, but also in the near and long term. Such conditions themselves pave the way for the formation and development of the country's economic diplomacy. It is no coincidence that since 1994, the concept of "oil diplomacy" has become widespread in Azerbaijan (Kerimli, 2012).

The countries investing in Azerbaijan not only ensured their mutual economic interests, but also saw in reality that Armenian propaganda was based more on myths. After the economic upswing Azerbaijan began to use the opportunities skillfully for its cultural development, becoming the most developed country in the region in terms of improving living conditions (Hunter, 2017). This development has made Azerbaijan a leader in the Caucasus. But also, another important condition for gaining independence, building and strengthening the democratic state of Azerbaijan was the existence of the national leader Heydar Aliyev, a historical figure (Huseynova, 2004).

Great attention was also paid to the expansion of cooperation with international organizations in the foreign policy of national leader Heydar Aliyev. In addition to being a member of international organizations, Azerbaijan regularly and actively participates in their work and effective cooperation, which is important to convey the problems of the country to the world community. In this regard, the signing of the framework document of the "Partnership for Peace" program by President Heydar Aliyev on May 4th, 1994 was one of the most important steps taken to strengthen Azerbaijan's international position. The significance of this program for Azerbaijan is that the country has gained the opportunity to cooperate with European countries that are members of NATO and the United States in the framework of the world security system, as well as the civil rules of international relations. This, in turn, have allow the Azerbaijani army to cooperate with NATO military structures for peace, to hold joint trainings and maneuvers, to

benefit from their army-building experience, training and so on.

In addition to providing an opportunity to act together in the field, the country's participation in this program has created favorable conditions for the implementation of the set goals. Azerbaijan's cooperation with NATO should be assessed in terms of several key factors of our country's foreign policy strategy. First, the young Azerbaijani state attaches special importance to cooperation with international organizations in its foreign policy. Secondly, Azerbaijan is interested in cooperation with all member states of international organizations and has a multilateral diplomatic policy. Third, Azerbaijan's state of war requires it to be in contact with the international community by all means and ways, and to involve it more in the solution of independence problems. These three factors played a key role in Azerbaijan's accession to NATO. Today, activity in this area is one of the priorities of the foreign policy of the independent Azerbaijani state, and it is of special importance in terms of expanding and deepening relations with NATO to accomplish Azerbaijan's integration into the world community to achieve the direct representation of its interests.

On the other hand, the Partnership and Cooperation Agreement (PCA) was signed in Luxembourg on 22 April 1996 between the European Union and the Republic of Azerbaijan, providing for cooperation in trade, investment, economy, legislation, culture, immigration and the prevention of illicit trade. The signing of this agreement is considered one of the most successful pages of Azerbaijan's foreign policy. This agreement, which is of great historical significance for the state and people, plays a key role in expanding Azerbaijan's relations with European structures and institutions, especially in the direction of integration.

Azerbaijan's membership in the Council of Europe in the direction of integration into European institutions has provided a new and very prestigious platform for the objective presentation of the important problems of the republic to the world community. Thus, at the meeting of the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe held at the representative level on January 17, 2001, a decision was made to accept the Republic of Azerbaijan as a full member of the Council of Europe. This decision was the result of the national leader's far-sighted, domestic and foreign policy and purposeful activities in this direction. Shortly afterwards, on January 25, with the participation of President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev, an official ceremony was held in Strasbourg on the occasion of the country's membership in this organization and the tricolor flag of the state was hoisted. Highly appreciating this event, national leader Heydar Aliyev said: *"Azerbaijan's*

accession to the Council of Europe is not only the recognition of an independent, sovereign, democratic, secular state, but also the beginning of a new stage in the development of Azerbaijan as an equal member of the European family.”

Later, this political course of the national leader was continued by the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan, Mr. Ilham Aliyev. The republic, which has already revived and gained the opportunity to kineticize its potential energy, has moved from strengthening its position in foreign policy to expanding its sphere of influence. The Republic of Azerbaijan has intensified regional integration processes as a catalyst and has been at the center of this work. Ilham Aliyev has gained great respect and prestige in the world as a professional politician with deep knowledge in the history of international relations. He has served as head or member of the Azerbaijani delegation to the United States, Britain, Turkey, France, Russia, Ukraine, Switzerland, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Slovakia, Poland, Georgia and others. He has developed official visits to countries, including state visits, and delivered speeches at many international conferences and congresses.

Not only a South Caucasus country like Georgia, but also a world power like Russia, as well as regional leaders Turkey and Iran took part in the regional integration processes as Azerbaijan's partners. At the same time, Azerbaijan has provided opportunities for fair and proportional participation in the geopolitical sphere to a number of Western countries, including the United States. What did that mean? Leading states have realized that it is right to speak in the language of mutual benefit with Azerbaijan, whose geographical borders are not so large. The Republic of Azerbaijan has skillfully used regional “nodes of activity networks” in its balance policy. When the spirit of latent imperialism as well as neo-colonialism was activated in the deep doctrines of a number of world states, Azerbaijani diplomacy put those countries before the facts. Azerbaijan has entered the secular political and economic processes, as well as the so-called “game” of self-affirmation, not chaotic, but principled and conceptual. It should be noted that among the countries of the South Caucasus, this is unique to Azerbaijan.

However, geopolitical risks are among the important issues to be considered in Azerbaijan's regional geopolitical policy. Geopolitics is the conduct of state policy taking into account the geographical position of the country. This is a complex procedure and automatically combines a large number of factors. In turn, the risks that arise during the implementation of this policy include many factors. These includes the risk of foreign aggression (even occupation), the collapse of the state under the influence of

internal forces, the reduced ability of the state to defend its interests in the international arena - the risk of sovereignty, political risk, and domestic risks-. Thus, geopolitical risks are strategic in nature and global in scale of damage. Previously, these risks were considered fundamental risks, as a result of which they were in the category of “force majeure”. Also, the current level of globalization raises the issue of risk management. International organizations (UN, IAEA, OCDE, WTO, etc.), public authorities, transnational corporations, national elites, ethnic groups, diasporas, political parties can act as subjects of geopolitical risk management. Geopolitical risk management tools include foreign policy, demographic policy, law, fiscal policy, and industrial policy. Therefore, when studying geopolitical risks, ideological, ethnopsychology, interethnic relations, mental characteristics, geocultural and so on different factors need to be taken into account.

Regarding geopolitical risks and the need to manage them, the above allows to determine the anatomy of these risks in the South Caucasus and to formulate a corresponding foreign policy. In the South Caucasus region, these risks are manifested at three levels: 1) specific forms of global geopolitical risks in the particular region, 2) risks arising from the historical, ethno-political, socio-cultural, and statehood traditions of the region, 3) political, geographical and ethno-demographic risks arising from threats to the socio-cultural, economic and territorial integrity of society. Then risks arise from the relations of the South Caucasus with neighboring countries, threats to regional integration, threats to the development of relations between the states of the region, the claims of the neighbors to territories, and risks arising from conflicts between energy security and other areas of security in the South Caucasus, as well as the risks posed by frozen conflicts.

Given the risks in the region, it is not easy to take them into account in Azerbaijan's foreign policy since the state must consider the link between the risks manifested at different levels. Then since the state's foreign policy has priorities for a specific period of time, a certain hierarchy should be expected in taking into account geopolitical risks. However, Azerbaijan remains committed to international integration, both legally and strategically which is reflected in the development strategy of Azerbaijan to the future.

CONCLUSIONS

Each state has its own geopolitical plans and goals, depending on its strength. States that have a conceptual approach to realize their future development and territorial interests consider it appropriate to follow geopolitical

processes in parallel. Parallel research helps to form the real picture correctly and objectively.

However, without defining the importance of geopolitical goals and steps to be taken, it is impossible to carry out the researches in a practical way and to conduct them at the required level in terms of the results to be achieved. In this regard, the researches in geopolitics should identify the domestic and foreign policy needs of different countries, and their tendencies in order to ensure their interests in the territories.

In the case of Azerbaijan, a significant role in the development of the country and in increasing its geopolitical influence was played by the proactive and timely attitude of the national historical leader Heydar Aliyev. The successful management of the economy and its vision for the integration of the nation in the international political scene have made Azerbaijan an important factor in the processes of the region.

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