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Transformation of Iran's Geopolitical Strategies in regional and bilateral negotiations on the status of the Caspian Sea

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Definitions

Territorial sea is a belt of coastal waters extending at most 12 nautical miles from the baseline of a coastal state, regarded as the sovereign territory of the state.

Territorial waters - an area of water where a sovereign state has jurisdiction, including internal waters, the territorial sea, the contiguous zone, the exclusive economic zone, and potentially the extended continental shelf (these components are sometimes collectively called the maritime zones. Vessels have different rights and duties when passing through each area defined by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). States cannot exercise their jurisdiction in waters beyond the exclusive economic zone, which are known as the high seas.

International law is the set of rules, norms, and standards generally recognized as binding between nations, aims to promote the practice of stable, consistent, and organized international relations.

Treaty - an international agreement concluded between States in written form and governed by international law, whether embodied in a single instrument or in two or more related instruments and whatever its particular designation.

IRU - International Road Transport: refers to the transportation of people and goods by road across international borders. It plays a crucial role in facilitating trade, economic growth, and mobility worldwide. The International Road Transport Union (IRU) is a global organization that represents the interests of bus, coach, taxi, and truck operators in promoting sustainable and efficient road transport .

The IRU was founded in Geneva on 1948, with the aim of facilitating international trade by road transport and contributing to the reconstruction of war-torn Europe. It started as a group of national road transport associations from eight Western European countries and has now grown to include member associations and associate members from 73 countries across five continents.

The IRU collaborates with its members, related organizations, and industries to define and promote policies of common interest, monitors activities, legislation, policies, and events that impact the road transport industry and cooperates with all stakeholders involved.

TIR - Transports Internationaux Routiers (TIR): The IRU initiated the TIR System based on the TIR Convention, which was established in 1959 and now has almost 70 contracting parties across continents. It allows for the movement of goods across international borders without the payment of import or export duties and taxes, using secure vehicles or containers and internationally accepted TIR carnets.

International Conflict -A controversy, disagreement, quarrel or warfare between or among two or more nations or countries, often requiring involvement or monitoring by other members of the global community

The Balance of Power Theory in international relations suggests that states may secure their survival by preventing any one state from gaining enough military power to dominate all others. If one state becomes much stronger, the theory predicts it will take advantage of its weaker neighbors, thereby driving them to unite in a defensive coalition.

Abbreviations

AIB - Asian Investment Bank

ASEAN - Association Southeast Asian Nations

BRICS - Russia, China, India, Brazil and South Africa

CSCC - Cooperation Council for the Caspian Sea States

CSTO - Collective Security Treaty Organization

ECO - Organization of Economic Cooperation

EU - European Union

GCC –the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf

IRGC (Sepah) - Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps

NSRI - New Silk Road Initiative

NATO - North Atlantic Treaty Organization

OIC - Organization of the Islamic Cooperation

PCA - Partnership Agreement

SCO - Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SEZ - Special Economic Zone

UAE - United Arab Emirates

USA - the United States of America

WTO - World Trade Organization

Introduction

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the number of countries bordering the Caspian Sea increased. Currently, five countries are members: Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Russia [1]. Previously, only Iran and the Soviet Union had a common border. When these countries began various activities in the Caspian Sea, questions arose about its legal status. Key issues affecting the geopolitical interests of the littoral states and external actors are:

- 1) Hydrocarbon resources (oil and gas). This could change the situation in the world energy market, become one of the main sources of budgetary revenue for nation-states, and attract foreign direct investments to stimulate economic growth.
- 2) Development of transportation routes to world markets. On the one hand, this meant opportunities, but also many challenges, since all Caspian littoral states, except for Iran and Russia, are landlocked.
- 3) Security in the Caspian Sea and surrounding areas, especially the Caucasus (the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan).
- 4) Geopolitical interests of external parties in involving neighboring countries in various security projects, such as NATO expansion and military cooperation with Western countries.
- 5) plans and partially implemented to place military bases and military related infrastructure in and around the Caspian sea. the decision on the Caspian sea status could change its international character, as depending if the Caspian sea is a lake would allow only littoral states be active on the sea, but recognition of it as a sea would internationalize it. For Iran various politics around the Caspian sea despite challenges would provide an opportunity to involve the states around the sea into a number of dialogue platforms, thus to some extent would facilitate the process of isolation due to sanctions overcome [2].

Consequently, the five countries convened in Tehran in 1992 to establish the Caspian Sea Cooperation Organization. The primary objective of this organization was to regulate the exploration and exploitation of both living and non-living resources and assets within the Caspian Sea. Iran initially insisted on maintaining the division of 41% and the management of navigation matters within this division. This indicates that Iran aims to secure 42% of the Caspian Sea's resources, citing the principle of parity established in the 1921 and 1940 agreements [1].

Under this arrangement, Iran would maintain a 50% share, while Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan would collectively hold the remaining 50%. In light of their historical connection to the Soviet Union, the aforementioned countries have become the successors to its territorial claims. Consequently, Iran has asserted its desire for a partition of resources, which has been met with resistance from these countries. The contention arises from the fact that the sea in question is considered a closed sea, thereby entitling each riparian state to an equal share of 20%. Turkmenistan expresses its support for Iran's stance, while Azerbaijan opposes this notion and emphasizes the significance of distributing the resources of the Caspian Sea among the countries that border it. Azerbaijan proposes that the distribution

should be based on the principle of extending the continental shelf of each country, as well as considering the length of their respective coastlines and the area they possess along the sea. Azerbaijan says that Iran only gets around 13-14% of the Caspian Sea, just the part along its own coast. But Azerbaijan think it should have a bigger share, including parts of the sea that got a lot of oil and gas. Meanwhile, the Iranian side don't really got much of these resources, which makes the dispute even more complicated. The rapid pace of events and transformations in the region has compelled Iranian foreign policy to undergo multiple adjustments in order to adapt and respond effectively [2].

The topic has been actualized by a number of related issues:

- development of various Caspian sea related projects and dialogue platforms initiated by Iran would facilitate creation of a special geopolitical zone covering Iran, as part of the Middle East, Southern Caucasus and Central Asia plus Russia and China
- If Iran take part in projects related to the Caspian Sea, it can help build shared interests and create better ways to deal with outside pressure, specially from Western countries. Also, it might help Iran to handle the international sanctions and find ways around them more effectively.
- Central Asian state could develop a number of pipeline projects and those related to them to get to the world markets thus avoiding pressure from Russia
- energy resources for most of the Central Asian and Caucasian (Azerbaijan) states have been major external trade product, plus attracting big inflow of FDI, therefore, their dependence on development of Iran related proejcts has been of big value.

The degree of scientific development of the problem:

Many researchers, especially in political science, have been really interested in studying Iran's foreign policy and how it affects politics in Central Asia. Even though there's a lot of studies on this topic, there's still not much detailed research that fully looks at all the different sides of Iran's foreign policy and what it really means for the Caspian Sea area. Additionally, the significant role that Iran plays in resolving various crises in the Caspian Sea—an essential component of its foreign policy—is insufficiently covered. Within both Iranian and Central Asian academic circles, there is a distinct lack of specialized monographic or dissertation studies dedicated to examining the evolution of Iran's foreign policy and its subsequent impact on political processes in the Caspian region.

Research in this area allows a deeper understanding of the state of affairs in world politics. The works of Mujtahed Z.B., Nejat A., J.Adeebfar, Bayrouz M., Tamer, Farid Alloush, Fawzi Darwish, Shahi Muhammad, Tafzali B., Atai, Farhad Geranmayeh, Badawi, Mustafa Dessouki Kasbah and others, which made it possible to better understand the trends and changes in international relations, taking into account which the foreign policy of Iran developed and evolved.

Studies focusing on the historical, political, and socio-economic dimensions of Iran have garnered significant attention. The examination of authors such as

Bazhanov E.P. and Tsygankov P.A. holds significant relevance in the analysis of Iran's contemporary foreign policy and economics. The writers have a particular focus on the transformative era in the regions of the Middle East, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. The examination of Iran's historical and cultural legacy, as well as the evolution of its foreign policy, has been the subject of scholarly inquiry by notable Iranian scholars such as Mehdi Sanai, Gudarzi P.M., Kavom Abdul Ali, Mashirzade Humayra, and other others.

The present stage of Iran is characterized by a significant focus on works that examine the characteristics of its internal political and economic growth. The works of M. Muminov are of significant interest. The author places significant emphasis on the challenges pertaining to Iran's domestic progress, with a particular focus on the country's resource foundation. Scholarly investigations of Iran's foreign policy facilitate the examination of the progression of Iran's engagements in the global domain. In this analysis, the works of Zhanibek Saurbek, Tsalik S., Syroezhkin K., Aydin A., Shadrina K., Kınık H., Erkan S., Temirbulatov A.M., Baran Z., and Muminov A. examine Iran's actions in the realm of foreign policy during a challenging period of reorientation.

One notable contribution among the literary works of many authors is the monograph authored by M.K. Sadjadpour, a researcher from Iran, titled "Theory and Practice of Iran's Foreign Policy" [3]. This scholarly book extensively analyzes the primary orientations and key objectives of Iran's foreign policy.

The development of Iran's foreign policy has been addressed by several Iranian, Russian, and Central Asian authors, covering various elements of this subject matter. Extensive research has been conducted on several aspects concerning the progress of Iran's foreign policy system, the growth of its economy, and its resource potential. Simultaneously, a multitude of scholarly publications have been dedicated to examining the multifaceted issues pertaining to the Caspian region in its entirety.

Researchers from different backgrounds, including Iranian, Kazakh, Arab, and European-American scholars, have studied the legal status of the Caspian Sea. They looked at many academic works to understand its legal aspects. Their studies have added important insights into the international legal standing of the Caspian Sea, as well as the exploration of maritime law concerns that are closely associated with this matter. Specifically, their research has focused on topics such as the demarcation of the continental shelf and other maritime areas, the international legal framework governing succession, and the resolution of international judicial disputes.

The author of the dissertation also used the works of foreign authors, such as: Brzezinski, A. Berke, E Brown, P. Globe, A. Yakovides, Jeffrey Mankoff. , Herzig Edmund, Terry Keeler, Salim H., Al-Bassiouni S., and Farah Al-Zaman Abu Shair.

There is quite an extensive body of research on Iran's foreign policy in relation to the status of the Caspian Sea. To determine the direction of these studies, these studies were divided into the following blocks.

First section: A Literary Review of Books and References Related to the Importance of the Caspian Sea to Iran:

For Iran, the Caspian Sea is really important because of where it's located, its economic benefits, and its history. There are many books and sources that give useful information about this subject. Here is a literary review of some relevant sources:

"The Law & Politics of the Caspian Sea in the Twenty-First Century: The Positions and Views of Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, With Special Reference to Iran" by Bahman Aghai-Diba. - This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the Caspian Sea's historical, cultural, and economic-political perspectives. It explores the current positions of the countries bordering the Caspian Sea, including Iran, and provides insights into the legal and communication documents relevant to the dispute [4].

The author, Dr. Aghai-Diba, is an expert in international law and economic affairs, making this book a valuable resource for understanding the importance of the Caspian Sea to Iran.

The author, Togrul Babali, provides insights into the geopolitical challenges and opportunities related to Caspian energy resources. In the book "Caspian energy diplomacy, since the end of the Cold War"[5]. This book focuses on the energy diplomacy surrounding the Caspian Sea, particularly after the end of the Cold War. It examines the changing dynamics of energy politics in the region and the implications for Iran's interests in the Caspian Sea [5].

The next book "Eurasia's Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia?" The book edited by Robert Bedeski and Niklas Swanström looks at energy and geopolitics in Eurasia, including the Caspian Sea. It discusses how China, Russia, and Central Asia compete and cooperate over energy resources. The chapters offer useful information about why the Caspian Sea is strategically important for Iran and nearby countries.

Second section: A Literary Review of Books and References Related to Law and International Agreements about the Caspian Sea

Like mentioned before, this study takes a deep look at the political and legal issues around the Caspian Sea. It focuses on what the neighboring countries think about it, with a special focus on Iran's perspective. "The Legal Definition of the Caspian Sea" by Rodrigo Labardini presents an exhaustive examination of the Caspian Sea's legal status [7]. Labardini explores the evolution of control from a bipartite arrangement between the USSR and Iran to a complex, multi-state interest involving all five littoral countries. The book talks about old legal rules, possible oil and gas resources, and the ongoing argument about whether the Caspian is a lake or a sea. It also looks closely at the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea (CLSCS) and how it affects sovereignty, shipping, underground resources, and environmental protection[7].

"The book *The Caspian Sea: A Quest for Environmental Security* by Igor S. Zonn, Aleksey N. Kosarev, and Michael H. Glantz looks at the environmental and security problems of the Caspian Sea. It talks about the legal agreements that help the countries around the sea work together to deal with environmental issues and keep the region safe [8].

Providing a thorough analysis of the Caspian Sea's legal and political difficulties, this edited volume discusses various international agreements and the complex legal status of the sea. The book offers insights into the geopolitical tensions and cooperative efforts among the bordering nations.

"The book **The Caspian Sea: A Quest for Environmental Security**, edited by Rafis Abazov, also talks about the environmental and security issues in the Caspian Sea region. It looks at the challenges facing the area and how they are being addressed. It highlights legal aspects of resource management and the importance of international cooperation in addressing these issues [9,45p.].

"The Caspian Sea: Legal Framework for a Joint Exploitation of Its Resources" by Elena Kuznetsova centers on the legal mechanisms enabling the joint exploitation of the Caspian Sea's resources. It includes discussions on international agreements, the demarcation of maritime boundaries, and the principles governing resource management among the littoral states.

Third section: A Literature Review of Iran's International Relationship with Countries Neighboring the Caspian.

The article **The Legal Status of the Caspian Sea** takes a close look at why the Caspian Sea is strategically important, mainly because of its rich mineral resources. KINIK and ERKAN explore the complicated process of dividing these resources among the countries bordering the sea—Iran, Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. They also point out the major diplomatic and legal issues these nations face in reaching agreements. [10,56 p.].

The article mainly looks at the 2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which tried to settle old disputes about borders and resources. It examines what the convention means for Iran, showing both its advantages and restrictions on Iran's strategic and economic interests. The authors argue that while the agreement helps with cooperation and resolving conflicts, it also makes it harder for Iran to claim its maritime rights and reach offshore resources[10, 15 p.].

Additionally, the article discusses Iran's diplomatic efforts and legal strategies to establish a fair and sustainable regime for the Caspian Sea. This includes Iran's negotiations with neighboring states and its participation in multilateral forums aimed at enhancing regional cooperation and security.

"Have International Sanctions Impacted Iran's Environment?" by Kaveh Madani. - This study explores the environmental challenges faced by Iran and examines whether international sanctions have had an impact. The article talks about many problems like water shortages, unsustainable farming, water pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, air pollution, and how to manage solid waste. The article provides insights into the environmental consequences of Iran's international relationships and the need for sustainable practices [11, 29 p.].

Fourth Section: A Literature Review: Economic Importance of the Caspian Sea to Iran

Ali Mahdi's book "Energy and US Foreign Policy: The Quest for Resource Security after the Cold War" investigates the significant influence of energy resources on the formulation of US foreign policy, particularly in the post-Cold War era [11, 32

p.]. The analysis includes a detailed discussion of the Caspian Sea region, emphasizing its vast energy potential. For Iran, the Caspian Sea is an important economic resource because it holds a lot of oil and gas, which are key for the country's energy security and economic growth. Mahdi looks at how these resources impact geopolitics, showing how Iran's economic interests in the Caspian are influenced by global energy policies and the strategies of major world powers [12, 58 p.].

Brenda Shaffer's book "Energy Politics" provides a comprehensive exploration of the geopolitical and economic dimensions of energy politics, with a focus on the Caspian Sea region[13, 59p.]. The work underscores the competition and collaboration among the Caspian littoral states, including Iran, in exploiting the region's abundant energy resources. Shaffer examines how these resources are pivotal to Iran's economy, driving its foreign policy and regional strategies. The book details the interplay between energy resource management and economic stability, emphasizing the critical role that Caspian Sea hydrocarbons play in Iran's economic landscape[13, 69 p.].

"Energy and Conflict in Central Asia and the Caucasus" by Robert Ebel and Rajan Menon delves into the complex energy dynamics within Central Asia and the Caucasus, extending to the Caspian Sea region [14, 48 p.]. Ebel and Menon analyze the economic consequences of energy resources for the countries bordering the Caspian Sea, including Iran. The discussion highlights how energy reserves are not only a source of economic prosperity but also a catalyst for regional conflicts and strategic rivalries. For Iran, the Caspian Sea's energy resources are vital for sustaining its economic growth and securing its energy needs. The book also explores how regional cooperation and conflicts over these resources impact Iran's economic and geopolitical strategies [14, 52p.].

Purpose and objectives of the dissertation: The dissertation research aims to track Iran's evolving stance on Caspian Sea issues, including legal status, security, and transportation routes. It also delves into shaping the sea's international legal status, analyzing Iran's proposals. The study's main tasks include examining Iran's foreign policy genesis, identifying legal norms for the Caspian Sea, studying contractual practices, and global experiences in maritime delimitation, and considering Iran's foreign policy.

- Tracing Iran's evolving stance on Caspian Sea issues
- Analyzing Iran's proposals for the sea's legal status
- Examining Iran's foreign policy genesis
- Identifying legal norms for the Caspian Sea
- Studying some global experiences in maritime delimitation

The dissertation connects the achievement of the study's goal with the resolution of several key tasks, including:

- Examination of the development of Iran's foreign policy regarding the international legal status of the Caspian Sea.
- Identification of principles and establishment of international legal norms that should determine the international legal status of the Caspian Sea.

- Study of Iran's and other coastal states' international contractual practices concerning the delimitation of maritime spaces.
- Investigation of global experiences in maritime delimitation, determining a rational regime for the management of natural resources, and establishing effective mechanisms for protecting the marine environment.
- Analysis of the International Court of Justice's decisions and practices related to maritime boundary disputes.
- Development of recommendations for establishing a new international legal status for the Caspian Sea, considering Iran's foreign policy.

The field of Asian studies enjoys a lot of attention worldwide because of the interactions of events and freedoms that concern the Asian axis, and it forms a symbiotic relationship between the field of specialization and the subjects concerned with the study.

Its foundation for awareness of theoretical and practical trends on the cosmic level, which provides us with tools for analyzing the phenomenon and transferring it from its abstract level to the practical and the realistic level.

The practical significance of this dissertation research is highlighted by its relevance to the international legal status of the Caspian Sea. The results of this study can help future research on this topic and improve courses like **Foreign Policy of Iran**, **International Maritime Law**, and **Peaceful Means of Settling International Disputes**. Also, its insights are useful for regional experts working on the legal issues of the Caspian Sea, especially those representing Kazakhstan in international groups and organizations [15].

The Problem of the Study:

This research aims to identify Iran's political and economic trends concerning the Caspian Sea, particularly amid the competition for energy resources in the region. As an important player in the region, Iran faces difficulties because it is in a weaker position compared to big powers like Russia, China, and the U.S., which have different strategic goals in the Caspian. This study looks at how these countries compete for geopolitical control and energy security. It examines Iran's role, how it deals with these powers, and what political strategies it uses to gain economic benefits and bypass U.S. sanctions. The research also considers Iran's efforts to keep good relations with the European Union

Regarding oil and gas pipelines, the study focuses on a key question: ****How did Iran handle negotiations with Caspian Sea countries, and what were its main strategies in dealing with powerful nations like Russia, China, and the U.S.??*** [16, 14 p.]

The research tries to reach the strategies that Iran tried to practice to obtain a large share of energy resources in the Caspian Sea and win the Russian and Chinese player on its side in front of the United States of America through the following sub-questions:

- What is geopolitical importance of the Caspian Sea regionally and internationally?

- What is the legal formula for the Caspian Sea?
- How was an agreement reached between the states bordering the Caspian Sea to distribute his wealth and the most important bilateral negotiations?
- What are the dimensions and implications of the intense competition between the major powers for control of the region, and Iran's relationship with each of them?
- What are the indications and future scenarios facing Iran in the Caspian Sea in particular and the major countries in general?
- Do the countries of the Caspian Sea comply with the agreement on the peaceful use of the Caspian Sea?

Research novelty:

The specific elements of the novelty of the study are as follows:

- a theoretical and methodological approach to study aspects of the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in terms of cooperation projects put forward by its leadership regarding the status of the Caspian Sea;
- evolution of the Iran's position towards the Caspian sea related issues due to changing geopolitical situation – regional and global;
- establishment of the role of the Caspian sea in the complex of Iran's foreign policy strategy in Central Asia in general, and in relations with each of the littoral states;
- the ideological factor of the Iran's foreign policy has been revised, stressing less the export of Islam but emphasizing cultural and civilizational proximity;
- Iranian leadership has to count that the Caspian sea and Central Asia have been primarily Russian spheres of influence and has to promote multilateral politics in all issues around the Caspian sea;
- Iranian leadership aims to create a new region around the Caspian sea that would allow it to overcome the regime of international sanctions [17, 25 p.]

The object of the research is the development of Iran's foreign policy on the Caspian Sea related issues.

The subject of the research is the study and analysis of the evolution of Iran's strategy to the Caspian sea issues and peculiarities of Iran's foreign policy and the contradictory processes of its influence in the Caspian region.

Study hypotheses:

- Consistent with the previous problem and the questions arising from it, the following hypotheses must be examined and tested:
- Even though some officials and governments in the Caspian region have their own opinions, the international community mostly sees the Caspian Sea as kind of a unique lake with a special legal status. This means that coastal countries can deal with their disputes using international legal principles, like rules about shared water bodies and the law of the sea

There were some old agreements between Russia (when it was the Soviet Union) and Iran, like the 1921 Treaty and the 1940 Treaty on Navigation. These treaties weren't just about fishing but also covered other areas. Even after the USSR

broke apart, they still had some effect, but new independent countries started making their own agreements

There's a lot of debate about how the Convention on maritime law (especially Article 122) works for the Caspian Sea. Some official documents and research use terms like "continental shelf" and "seabed zone," but since the Caspian isn't like other seas or lakes, it's unclear if these laws really fit

Some people suggested adding extra rules from the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea to the Caspian, but that idea doesn't really work well because there's no system for arbitration. Any changes to the legal status or borders of the sea would need all the countries to agree. But some countries, like Azerbaijan, already made legal claims over certain areas—like in 1995, when it added part of the Caspian Sea into its constitution. This caused some issues because not everyone agreed with it

The Caspian Sea is super important because of its oil and gas, which makes it valuable not just economically but also politically. The competition for these resources could create tensions between the powerful countries involved [21, 350 p.].

-To reach an agreement among the nations bordering the Caspian Sea basin, negotiations between the concerned countries were necessary. As a result, Iran forfeited a significant portion of its historical share of the revenue from the Caspian Sea [22, 47 p.].

-Iran negotiated its portion of the Caspian Sea in addition to managing its relationship with the countries bordering the Caspian Sea due to the necessity for these countries to have a route for moving oil through Iran and Russia

-Iran, in its foreign policy—especially during the Caspian Sea negotiations—tried to keep strengthening ties with Russia and China, since both countries support it against the U.S. sanctions. [23, 220 p.]

-The political game in the region, mostly focused on energy and oil and gas pipelines, determines how Iran deals with the countries surrounding the Caspian Sea. This will have an impact on Iran's relationship with those countries. [24, 122 p.]

- Despite having concluded an agreement in the past for the peaceful use of the Caspian Sea, Russia is flagrantly violating its commitment to use the Russian part of the sea for military purposes against Ukraine, which constitutes a topic of interaction in Iranian foreign policy [25].

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

To achieve the outlined research objectives and validate the hypothesis, this study adopts a diverse mix of theoretical perspectives and research methodologies. The research process begins with a historical analysis to trace the evolution of events and policies over time. This is followed by the application of comparative analysis, event analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis—each contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of the subject. Among the most significant theoretical

contributions to political science is the study of international relations, which serves as a key foundation for understanding how political actors behave and interact within the global arena

Given the broad scope of this research—spanning historical developments, geographical considerations, political dynamics, and economic factors—the study requires a multidisciplinary approach. The complexity of the topic, which involves analyzing international, regional, and state-level interactions, necessitates the integration of various research methodologies. These include

Historical Analysis: To examine past events and their influence on current policies

Descriptive Method: To provide a detailed account of relevant political and legal frameworks

Case Study Approach: To explore specific instances of Iran's foreign policy decisions concerning the Caspian Sea

Inductive Reasoning: To draw broader conclusions from specific observations and case studies

Comparative Study: To identify similarities and differences between Iran's approach and those of other Caspian states

This methodological diversity is crucial due to the interdisciplinary nature of political science, where various factors—ranging from historical precedents to contemporary geopolitical strategies—interact in complex ways. By employing this multifaceted approach, the study aims to produce a well-rounded analysis of Iran's foreign policy, shedding light on both the theoretical and practical implications

Additionally, an in-depth examination of international relations theories will be instrumental in assessing Iran's approach to the Caspian Sea negotiations. By analyzing these theoretical perspectives, it becomes possible to track recurring patterns, anticipate future developments, and understand the strategic reasoning behind Iran's foreign policy decisions. The following sections will explore the relevance of different international relations theories in shaping Iran's interactions with other Caspian states

:

1) The Theory of Realism:

This theory is based on the assumption that states pursue their own national and security interests. In the context of Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea, its actions can be explained by the presence of strategic interests related to maritime security and natural resources in the region, as Iran considers the Caspian Sea a vital region for it, through which vital maritime navigation routes pass and in which important natural resources such as oil and gas exist, and it is keen to Iran seeks to enhance cooperation and bilateral relations with the Caspian Sea countries, in order to achieve common interests and make the most of the marine resources in the region. These countries include Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. On the

other hand, Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea faces some challenges, including competition. With other countries in the region exploiting marine resources and developing maritime capabilities, political and security tensions in the region, such as border disputes and territorial disputes, and environmental impacts and pollution resulting from human and industrial activity in the region [26].

2) World System Theory:

This theory emphasizes the dynamics of hegemony and balance within the international system, making it particularly relevant for analyzing Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea. Iran's approach in this region is largely shaped by its interactions with other major powers and its ongoing efforts to sustain a balance of power.

At the core of this strategy, Iran prioritizes fostering relationships with neighboring Caspian states, including Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. Through economic partnerships and security cooperation, Iran aims to establish a stable regional environment while safeguarding its own strategic interests. These diplomatic efforts underscore Tehran's broader objective of maintaining cordial relations with its regional counterparts to counter external pressures.

However, Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian region does not exist in isolation; rather, it is influenced by broader geopolitical conflicts, such as those in Syria and Iraq. Tehran's involvement in supporting allied factions in these conflicts has implications for regional stability, shaping its strategic positioning in the Caspian Sea. The shifting alliances and security challenges in the Middle East inevitably affect Iran's ability to assert its influence and negotiate favorable agreements with its Caspian neighbors.

In pursuit of expanding its regional and international footprint, Iran employs a dual strategy that combines soft power initiatives—such as economic diplomacy and cultural influence—with military capabilities when necessary. Viewing itself as a dominant regional actor, Iran seeks to reinforce its role within the Caspian framework, ensuring that its strategic and economic interests are preserved. Its diplomatic maneuvers and security policies in this region reflect a broader effort to counterbalance the influence of external powers while reinforcing its standing as a key geopolitical player[27].

3) Conflict and Cooperation Theory:

This theory suggests that states deal with each other through cooperation and conflict. In the case of Iran, Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea can be seen as an attempt to cooperate with neighboring countries in the region while at the same time preserving its strategic interests.

Historically, the Caspian Sea has had great strategic importance for Iran, as it is considered the only sea corridor linking Iran to the outside world. Iran is considered one of the largest countries overlooking the Caspian Sea and possesses

important strategic interests in the region, including maritime security, oil, and natural gas.

Iran follows a foreign policy aimed at enhancing cooperation with neighboring countries in the Caspian Sea, through economic, trade, and cultural cooperation. Iran seeks to strengthen bilateral relations with neighboring countries and expand the scope of cooperation in multiple fields such as maritime transport, maritime industries, tourism, and culture.

However, it also faces challenges and conflicts in the Caspian Sea. There are potential areas of conflict between Iran and neighboring countries, such as disputes over maritime borders and natural resources, and the region has witnessed tensions in the past due to these issues.

In addition, global powers play a role in Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea. Iran seeks to preserve its independence and strategic interests in the region and deals with global powers with caution in accordance with its national interests.

4) Regional System Theory:

This theory focuses on relations between countries within a specific regional framework. In the case of Iran, Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea can be analyzed based on its interaction with near and distant countries of the region and its impact on security and stability in the region. Several aspects can be analyzed in this theory.

a) Cooperation and competition: Iran seeks to enhance cooperation with countries in the region in various fields such as economy, security, and the environment. At the same time, Iran faces challenges and competition with other countries in the region, such as Russia and Turkmenistan, with regard to natural resources, oil, and gas.

b) Security and stability: The Caspian Sea is considered a strategic region for Iran, and Iran is keen to maintain security and stability in the region. Security issues such as combating terrorism and maritime and border threats are among the priorities of Iran's policy in the Caspian Sea.

c) International Relations: Iran's policy in the Caspian Sea affects the international relations of neighboring countries. Iran is considered a major partner in the region and seeks to strengthen bilateral relations with the countries of the region and other countries.

d) Economic interests: Economic interests play an important role in Iran's policy in the Caspian Sea, Iran is taking advantage of the region's natural resources, oil and gas, and is working to promote trade and investment in the region [28]

Approbation of the research results: The dissertation was written at the al-Farabi Kazakh National University's Department of the Middle East and South Asia. The author's published works reflect the issues raised in the dissertation and the proposals made for determining Iran's foreign policy with respect to the international legal status of the Caspian Sea:

Sofia, Bulgaria, XVth International Scientific and Practical Conference Aside from the VI International Scientific Conference "Farabi World," there will also be the International Scientific and Practical Conference "relation between the Central Asian

countries and and the arab world" and the International Scientific and Practical Conference "Przemysl nauka I studia" 2019 Poland.

Iran's foreign policy regarding the international legal status of the Caspian Sea is reflected in the works published by the author in online magazine «edu.e-history.kz» and SCOPUS (Titolo Rivista: RIVISTA DI STUDI SULLA SOSTENIBILITA).

Research Sections:

The research consists of three sections with theoretical introduction and conclusion:

The first section: The Caspian Sea, the Heart of New Geopolitics.

The second section: The Legal Status of the Caspian Sea and Iran.

The third section: Geopolitical balance of Powers in the region and Iran.

1 The Caspian Sea, the heart of new geopolitics

1.1 The Geostrategic Location and Geological Structure of the Caspian Sea

The Caspian Sea has long been recognized as the largest enclosed body of water on Earth, holding significant hydrological importance. Geographically, it is positioned between Europe and Asia, bordered by five littoral states: Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the east, Iran to the south, and Azerbaijan to the west. Beyond its sheer size, the Caspian Sea serves as a vital reservoir of water, a crucial source of food, and an energy hub for the nations along its shores. The region is also home to a diverse ecosystem, hosting numerous plant and animal species that are unique to its waters.

This paper explores the geographical significance of the Caspian Sea, its strategic location, and its overall importance. Situated between 36° to 47° North latitude and 46° to 54° East longitude, the sea spans an extensive area of approximately 143,000 square miles (370,000 square kilometers), making it the largest inland water body in the world. Additionally, it holds a substantial volume of around 78,200 cubic kilometers, reinforcing its status as a critical hydrological and ecological asset for the surrounding nations.



Figure - 1 Caspian Sea division (Source: <https://warsawinstitute.org/caspian-summit-consequences-region/>)

The Caspian Sea is located in a region that is geologically active, and as a result, it has undergone many changes over time. The sea was formed approximately 5.5 million years ago during the Pliocene era, as a result of the collision of the Eurasian and African tectonic plates. Over time, the sea has gone through periods of contraction and expansion, and its shoreline has shifted significantly. The sea's level has also fluctuated over time, with significant drops in the 20th century due to human activity and climate change.

Throughout the course of history, the Caspian Sea has been bestowed with numerous appellations, with its present designation being a comparatively recent phenomenon. In ancient times, the body of water referred to as the Khazar Sea, and in Persian, it was denoted as Daryā-ye Khazar. The body of water often referred to as the Caspian Sea in English was historically denoted as Kaspiyskoye More in the Russian language, while in Turkmen, it was alternatively recognized as Garagum or Hazar.



Figure - 2 Caspian Sea at al-Idrisi world map (Source: French National Library, http://classes.bnf.fr/idrisi/grand/9_05.htm)

The origin of the name “Caspian” is somewhat unclear, but it is believed to have come from the ancient Caspi tribe that lived in the region. According to some sources, the Caspi tribe was a people who lived in the region before the arrival of the Scythians. Other sources suggest that the name may have originated from the ancient city of Qazvin, which was located near the southern shores of the sea.

The names of the Caspian Sea varied on the maps of Eastern geographers and early Muslims (Persians and Arabs), for historical, cultural, and linguistic reasons. Its name was: al-Khazar Sea according to al-Istakhri and Ibn Khurdadbeh, and al-Gorgan Sea according to al-Masoudi and Ibn Hawqal. Al-Biruni and Nasser al-Din al-Tusi used the name: Abhar Sea, while al-Maqdisi and Ibn Battuta called it: Haraz Sea, which means “the distorted sea” in Persian, and refers to its irregular shape. It is the Mazandaran Sea according to Yaqut al-Hamawi, the Burhan Sea according to Ibn al-Faqih al-Hamdani, the Tabaristan Sea according to Ibn al-Nadim, and the Nishapur Sea according to Ibn Rusta. Some Arab geographers used the name: the North Sea. Other names for the Caspian Sea include Hyrkani Sea, Astrabad Sea, Abeskon Sea, Dilam Sea, Khorasan Sea, Dehistan, Ajam, and Bab al-Abwab Sea. Research shows that the names Caspian and Hyrkany were the oldest names in use. These names were not exclusive but were used interchangeably according to region, language, and

culture. Some names have changed over time, while others have disappeared completely.

The Iranian Greater Islamic Encyclopedia Center states that some historical evidence indicates that Abeskon was an important port; For this reason, the Caspian Sea was attributed to it and was referred to as the Abeskon Sea. Perhaps the solution to this contradiction lies in the fact that “the island of the Abeskon Sea” was known as the island of Abeskon, by way of deletion and implication [29].

The Caspian Sea is an important resource for the countries that surround it, providing water, food, and energy. The sea is rich in oil and natural gas, and it is estimated to hold approximately 50 billion barrels of oil and 8.4 trillion cubic meters of natural gas. The sea also supports a thriving fishing industry, with many species of fish that are unique to the region [30, 3p.].

In addition to its economic importance, the Caspian Sea is also a vital part of the region’s cultural and ecological heritage. The sea is home to many endemic species of plants and animals, including the Caspian seal, the sturgeon, and the Caspian gull. These species are under threat from human activities such as pollution, overfishing, and habitat destruction.

The Caspian Sea is a unique and fascinating body of water that is of great importance to the region in which it is located. It has undergone many changes over time, and its nomenclature reflects its complex and diverse history.

Prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea was characterized as a closed body of water, conceptually divided but not practically divided, particularly between the two nations who perceive themselves as the lawful successors to the area, namely the former Soviet Union and Iran. The majority of the shores of this sea were encompassed by the Soviet Union, accounting for over 85% of its borders. The remaining 15% fell within the boundaries of Iran. This distribution persisted until the dissolution of the Soviet Union, at which point four newly formed countries inherited the 85% previously held by their Soviet neighbor. Consequently, the geopolitical map of the region underwent a redefinition. However, this shift did not destabilize the Iranian borders that had been established during the Soviet era. The countries that emerged from under the Soviet umbrella, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, now form an axial triad in the region [31, 13 p.].

The Caspian Sea, the largest enclosed body of water on Earth, is situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia in Central Asia. Its strategic location and geological significance have made it a crucial hub for global energy resources and trade.

Bordered by five countries—Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the east, Iran to the south, and Azerbaijan to the west—the Caspian Sea has historically served as a vital commercial gateway. Positioned at the intersection of major trade routes, it has long facilitated connections between the Silk Road, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean, reinforcing its role as a key economic and geopolitical region.

The Caspian Sea’s geological structure is complex and varied, with a mix of shallow and deep water, mud volcanoes, and underwater ridges. It is classified as a

“young” sea, meaning that it was formed relatively recently in geological terms, about 5.5 million years ago. It is also unique in that it is not connected to any oceans or seas, making it a “closed” body of water [32, 4 p.].

The Caspian Sea possesses abundant natural resources, namely oil and gas. The country in question possesses oil and gas reserves that are believed to rank among the most substantial globally, with certain estimates suggesting that its oil reserves exceed 50 billion barrels. The aforementioned factors have contributed to the region's significance in the global energy landscape, as it is home to prominent oil and gas producers and exporters such as Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan.

At the same time, there is another complicated aspect—the geological structure of the Caspian Sea is the presence of both deep and shallow water, mud volcanoes, and subsea ridges. It is called the "young" sea of the world. In other words, relative to the geological history—a relatively late formation of the Caspian Sea occurred 5.5 million years ago. Unlike all the other seas, it has no links and does not enter the oceans and their waters; therefore, the Caspian is "closed." Another distinction of the Caspian Sea is the enormous amount of natural resources—oil and gas. The Caspian Sea, the largest enclosed body of water on Earth, is situated at the crossroads of Europe and Asia in Central Asia. Its strategic location and geological significance .have made it a crucial hub for global energy resources and trade

Bordered by five countries—Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the east, Iran to the south, and Azerbaijan to the west—the Caspian Sea has historically served as a vital commercial gateway. Positioned at the intersection of major trade routes, it has long facilitated connections between the Silk Road, the Black Sea, and the Mediterranean, reinforcing its role as a key economic and geopolitical region [33, 18 p.].

For decades, the five nations bordering the Caspian Sea—Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan—have been engaged in complex negotiations over its legal status and the equitable distribution of its vast natural resources. The primary legal dilemma has revolved around whether the Caspian should be classified as a sea or a lake, as this designation carries significant implications under international law. If defined as a sea, maritime law principles, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), could apply, granting each nation exclusive economic zones (EEZs). Conversely, if classified as a lake, its resources would be divided equally among all littoral states, requiring a fundamentally different legal framework. The ambiguity surrounding its classification fueled prolonged debates and legal disputes among the coastal states, as each sought to maximize its economic and geopolitical advantages. The region's rich hydrocarbon reserves, estimated to hold more than 50 billion barrels of oil and nearly 9 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, further intensified competition and strategic maneuvering. The Caspian's geopolitical significance is also underscored by its role in global energy security, as key players such as Russia and Iran seek to maintain influence over resource distribution and pipeline routes, while Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan look to expand their energy exports to European and

Asian markets. Following years of diplomatic negotiations, shifting alliances, and geopolitical maneuvering, a landmark agreement was reached in 2018 with the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea (CLSCS). This historic accord granted the Caspian a "Special Legal Status," a designation distinct from traditional classifications of seas and lakes. The agreement established a comprehensive legal framework governing issues such as territorial demarcation, sovereignty rights, environmental protection, and resource exploitation. Under this framework, the surface of the Caspian is designated for shared use, allowing freedom of navigation for all five states, while the seabed and subsoil resources are divided based on bilateral agreements. Despite this progress, unresolved tensions remain, particularly regarding the rights of each country to develop offshore energy fields and construct trans-Caspian pipelines without the consent of all littoral states. Iran, in particular, has expressed concerns over the division of resources, as its share of the Caspian remains relatively limited compared to other coastal nations. The convention also raises broader geopolitical implications, as major powers such as Russia and China continue to exert influence over regional energy corridors, while Western interests seek alternative routes to access Caspian energy reserves. Ultimately, the Caspian Sea remains a focal point of economic, political, and environmental contention, with ongoing negotiations shaping the region's strategic landscape. The 2018 agreement marked a significant milestone, yet the evolving dynamics of international relations and energy security will continue to influence the future of Caspian governance.

This class is significant as it ensures fair sharing of its resources among the states involved. The agreement also stipulated rules for determining maritime boundaries, with notably improved accuracy and cooperation between the republics in close proximity to the Caspian Sea. Since the Caspian Sea lies on a unique geological basin, the land surface is covered with several mud volcanoes, which have become tourist attraction sites and scientific research centers. The terrestrial stages of mud volcanoes are formed by periodic eruptions of mud, gas, and water; the eruptions are fed by gas and water of high pressure from deep beneath the earth's surface. In addition to its natural resources, the Caspian Sea is rich in biodiversity, including many types of flora and fauna. The sturgeon is found in the Caspian Sea, which produces valuable caviar. On the other hand, the Caspian seal faces extinction because of over-harvesting, while the sea's environment provides a habitat for numerous migratory birds, attracting birdwatchers and environmentalists [33, 19 p.].

Despite all its natural beauty and importance, the Caspian Sea still has more than enough environmental challenges. Major threats come in the shape of oil and gas production, overfishing, and habitat destruction. However, some struggle with the solution, which implies a network of protected areas and a set of conservation programs. In general, geostrategic position, and geological structure of the Caspian Sea make it a world region of significant importance, because its natural resources, trade routes, and geopolitical importance have determined the past and will determine the future of the region. Its geological structure is rather complex and diverse and it is legally and ecologically problematic, therefore considered an attractive area for

scientific research and exploration, while the Caspian Sea is still a subject of improvement and change.

The Caspian Sea, sometimes denoted as the Caspian Sea basin, is an inland aquatic body, which is located in the heart of Eurasia. Its five littoral countries include Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan. The Caspian Sea is often considered to be a unique hydrologic feature because of its status since it is the largest enclosed aquatic body on the Earth. It is also a natural borderline between Europe and Asia. The region's strategic geographical location and rich natural resources make it a subject of enormous political, economic, and environmental importance. This dissertation seeks to give a thorough analysis of the geographical location of the Caspian Sea with an emphasis on its physical description, borders, climate, and geology.

The geographical coordinates of the Caspian Sea lie within the range of 36 degrees to 47 degrees north latitude and 46 degrees to 54 degrees east longitude. The surface area of this body of water spans around 143,000 square miles (370,000 square kilometers), so establishing it as either the largest lake or the smallest sea, contingent upon the specific definition employed. According to the source [34, 13 p.], the dimensions of the sea are estimated to be around 750 miles (1,200 kilometers) in length from its northernmost point to its southernmost point, and roughly 270 miles (430 kilometers) in width at its widest section.

The Caspian Sea receives its water supply from a number of significant rivers, such as the Volga, Ural, Terek, and Kura, in addition to other smaller rivers and streams. The marine body is encompassed by many mountain ranges, such as the Caucasus Mountains situated in the western region, the Elburz Mountains located in the southern area, and the Kopet Dag Mountains positioned in the southeastern direction. The average depth of the sea is roughly 184 feet (56 meters), while its maximum depth reaches over 3,360 feet (1,025 meters) in the southern region of the sea [34, 14 p.].

The Caspian Sea, the largest enclosed inland body of water on Earth, is bordered by five nations: Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the southeast, Iran to the south, and Azerbaijan to the west. The sea is surrounded by a diverse range of landscapes, including vast arid deserts, expansive steppes, dense forests, and imposing mountain ranges. These varied geographical features not only shape the regional climate but also influence the economic and strategic priorities of the bordering states. For decades, the legal status of the Caspian Sea has been a subject of intense dispute among its littoral nations. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the emergence of newly independent states—Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan—complicated prior agreements between the Soviet Union and Iran regarding maritime governance.

As a result, the five bordering nations have engaged in prolonged diplomatic negotiations spanning over two decades to establish a legally binding framework governing the utilization and exploitation of the Caspian's waters and resources. The core of the dispute lies in the classification of the Caspian as either a sea or a lake, a

determination that has far-reaching implications for the distribution of its vast natural resources.

If defined as a sea, international maritime law, including the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), could be applied, granting each nation exclusive economic zones (EEZs) over their respective coastal areas. In contrast, if classified as a lake, the entire water body and its resources would be divided equally among all five states, necessitating a fundamentally different legal framework. This disagreement has led to numerous territorial claims, with each nation seeking to maximize its share of the Caspian's estimated 50 billion barrels of oil and nearly 9 trillion cubic meters of natural gas reserves. Despite years of negotiations, achieving a definitive resolution remains a challenge.

While the 2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea represented a significant step forward by granting the sea a "Special Legal Status," critical issues such as maritime boundary delineation and the rights of non-littoral states to access the Caspian's waters remain contentious. Iran, for instance, has voiced concerns over what it perceives as an unfair division of resources, given that its share of the Caspian is significantly smaller compared to the other coastal states. Similarly, disputes over the construction of trans-Caspian energy pipelines, particularly those intended to bypass Russian influence, continue to fuel tensions among the involved nations. In addition to legal and geopolitical complexities, the Caspian Sea is characterized by significant climatic variability due to its unique geographical positioning between two major climate zones.

The northern part of the region falls within the temperate climate zone, experiencing colder winters and moderate summers, whereas the southern portion belongs to the subtropical zone, marked by hotter temperatures and higher humidity levels. Several environmental factors influence these climatic conditions, including the proximity of arid Central Asian deserts, the presence of high-altitude mountain ranges, and the direction and strength of prevailing winds. This combination of legal disputes, geopolitical interests, and environmental challenges underscores the Caspian Sea's complexity as a critical geopolitical and economic region. With ongoing diplomatic efforts, the future of the Caspian remains uncertain, as nations continue to navigate the delicate balance between cooperation and competition in securing their interests in this strategically vital body of water.

The Caspian Sea basin exhibits a climatic pattern characterized by warm summers and frigid winters, wherein temperatures fluctuate within the range of 20° to 40°. The southern sides of the sea have higher temperatures and increased humidity compared to their northern counterparts, primarily attributed to their geographical proximity to the subtropical zone. The climate of the sea is subject to variation based on altitude, whereas greater altitudes are characterized by lower temperatures and increased precipitation [35, 7 p.].

The basin of the Caspian Sea is situated within a geologically dynamic zone, leading to significant transformations throughout its history. The formation of the sea occurred roughly 5.5 million years ago in the Pliocene epoch, as a consequence of the convergence between the Eurasian and African tectonic plates.

The Caspian Sea, with a surface area of approximately 373,000 square kilometers, holds the distinction of being the largest enclosed body of water on Earth. It is situated between the latitudes of 37° and 47° north and the longitudes of 47° and 55° east. Geographically, it is bordered by five countries: Russia to the northwest, Iran to the south, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the southeast, and Azerbaijan to the southwest. This configuration creates a unique geopolitical axis within the region [36, 148 p.].

In the context of geopolitical literature, the countries that share borders with the Caspian Sea are commonly referred to as the "five independent Central Asian Republics" - namely Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. However, there are varying interpretations of the region's definition, with some scholars adopting a narrower perspective that confines it to the independent republics that emerged from the dissolution of the Soviet Union. This region is considered significant as it represents the central core of the Eurasian continent. The current under discussion is exemplified by Geoffrey Hoyler, a prominent expert in the field of Central Asian politics [37, 7 p.].

The second stream, as depicted in Encyclopaedia Britannica, pertains to a specific geographic region. This region encompasses the southeastern portion of the Urals and the Caspian Seas, extending northwest towards China and Mongolia. Furthermore, it stretches from the northernmost part of southern Siberia in the north to the northern regions of Iran and Afghanistan in the south [19].

This region exhibits distinct characteristics, which are reflected in its geographical location within Enslavement, its lack of a sea outlet, and the subsequent emergence of the name Central Asia. Consequently, the Caspian Sea holds significant geopolitical importance as the sole means through which Central Asian nations can conduct their economic affairs and establish connections with the international community. This circumstance has facilitated the involvement of major powers since the 19th century in exerting control over the region and extending their influence. As a result, the region faces considerable challenges in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's collapse.

The origin of the name Caspian Sea is shrouded in mystery and debate. The earliest known reference to the sea comes from Greek historian and geographer Herodotus, who referred to it as the "Hyrcanian Sea," named after the nearby Hyrcanian forests. The name Caspian first appears in Western sources in the 16th century, when European explorers and traders began to visit the region. Some scholars believe that the name comes from the Caspi, a people who lived in the region in ancient times, while others argue that it derives from the ancient Persian word "khazar," meaning "salt sea." Still, others suggest that the name may be derived from the ancient Sanskrit word "kapish," meaning "sea monster," a reference to the sea's legendary creatures. Despite the many theories, the origin of the name Caspian Sea remains a matter of debate and speculation.

The Caspian Sea has taken several names, some of which are called the Sea of the Khazars and the Caspian Sea, which are the two most common names in global sources and circles, in addition to other names such as the Mazandaran Sea and the

Gorgan Sea, and its name is the Caspian Sea due to the spread of a tribe in the name “Casp” in the southern shores of this sea. While its name is the Khazar Sea, due to the spread of the tribes of the Jewish Khazars, which is confirmed by many researchers who have dealt with the history of the Khazars that they are peoples of Turkish origin and settled in the north of the Caspian Sea. And despite the importance of this region, the name of the Caspian Sea is the most widespread, whether in Arabic or in English, unlike some Persian books that still call it the Khazar Sea [19] .

The largest river running into the Caspian Sea is the Volga River from Russia, followed by the Terek River from Russia, the Ural River from Kazakhstan, and the Kura River from Azerbaijan. All of these rivers significantly influence the geological structure of the Caspian Sea, making it less saline compared to other bodies of water, with salinity levels ranging between 10 and 13 grams of salt per liter. This is three times less salty than the world's oceans.

The Caspian Sea can be divided into three levels: the first being from the northern side, with shallow features representing about 0.9% of the total area; the middle side represents about 36%; and the southern side represents about 64% of the total volume. The depth of the sea ranges from about 10 meters on the Russian coasts to 188 meters to 788 meters in the central parts, and increases to around 960 meters in the south near the Iranian coast, with a maximum depth of 1023 meters.

In terms of biological diversity, the Caspian Sea is rich in fish, with approximately 87 species that play an important role in international trade. This wealth of marine life makes the Caspian Sea a focal point of global interest. The Caspian Sea Basin is also fed by a combination of large and small rivers that bring freshwater from the surrounding regions. These rivers are crucial for the ecology, economy, and culture of the Caspian region, providing water for irrigation, hydroelectric power, and transportation while supporting the diverse flora and fauna of the area.

This dissertation focuses on the main rivers that feed the Caspian Sea Basin, discussing their origins, characteristics, and importance.

The Volga River stands as the largest river in Europe and holds paramount significance as it flows into the Caspian Sea. Stretching approximately 2,300 miles (3,700 kilometers), this majestic river meanders through central Russia, linking numerous key urban centers and water passages. Encompassing an expansive area of about 1.4 million square miles (3.6 million square kilometers), the Volga River basin ranks among the most extensive river basins globally.

Originating in the Valdai Hills situated in central Russia, the Volga River traverses various regions such as Tver, Yaroslavl, and Kazan before converging with the Caspian Sea. Renowned for its rich and distinctive ecosystem, the river nurtures a diverse array of flora and fauna, boasting over 3,500 species, including sturgeon, salmon, and the coveted caviar.

The Volga River plays a pivotal role in Russia's economy and cultural tapestry by furnishing water for irrigation, generating hydroelectric power, and facilitating transportation networks. Furthermore, the river's delta serves as a vital breeding

sanctuary for numerous avian species, notably pelicans and flamingos, enhancing the region's ecological diversity and vitality [37, 150 p.].

The Ural River is the second-largest river flowing into the Caspian Sea, with a length of approximately 1,509 miles (2,428 kilometers). The river originates in the Ural Mountains in Russia and flows through several regions, including Kazakhstan and the Atyrau Province of Western Kazakhstan, before reaching the Caspian Sea [40].

The Ural River basin covers an area of approximately 70,000 square miles (180,000 square kilometers) and supports a diverse ecosystem of plants and animals, including the critically endangered Caspian sturgeon. The Ural River is an essential source of water for agriculture and industry in the region, supporting several large cities, including Oral and Atyrau. The river also plays a vital role in transportation, providing a link between Russia and Kazakhstan [38, 25p.].

The Kura River is the longest river in the South Caucasus region, with a length of approximately 863 miles (1,391 kilometers). The river originates in Turkey and flows through Georgia and Azerbaijan, before emptying into the Caspian Sea. The Kura River basin covers an area of approximately 65,000 square miles (168,000 square kilometers) and supports a diverse ecosystem of plants and animals, including the critically endangered Caspian sturgeon and the Caucasian leopard. The Kura River is a crucial source of water for agriculture and industry in the region, supporting several large cities, including Tbilisi and Baku. The river also plays a vital role in transportation, providing a link between Azerbaijan and Turkey [39].

The Terek River is a river in the North Caucasus region of Russia, with a length of approximately 354 miles (570 kilometers). The river originates in the Caucasus Mountains and flows through several regions, including North Ossetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan, before emptying into the Caspian Sea. The Terek River basin covers an area of approximately 12,000 square miles (30,000 square kilometers) and supports a diverse ecosystem of plants and animals, including the endangered Caspian seal [40].

The Caspian Sea is an important body of water at the crossroads of several key geopolitical regions: between Europe and Asia, astride China, Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the Middle East. This location and its resources have made it a critical area of interest for nations around the globe, hence several disputes have constantly arisen over ownership and resource extraction. This will be the chapter where the geopolitics of the Caspian Sea are reviewed, representing its history, resources, and current challenges.

The Caspian Sea has served as a crossroads for thousands of years, given numerous evidence of settlements and trade during ancient times. Thus, the most important transit route goes through it, connecting the Middle East, Central Asia, and Europe in the west-east direction. Many empires and nations over time had the desire to control the Caspian Sea and its surrounding territories. At the time when the Soviet Union existed, the Caspian Sea was shared among the Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, while the northern shoreline was shared between Iran

and Russia. Yet after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the legal status of the Caspian Sea became a subject of contention among the newly sovereign states.

Rich in various major natural resources—oil, gas, and caviar—it is estimated to contain about 50 billion barrels of oil and 8.4 trillion cubic meters of natural gas, making it one of the world's biggest hydrocarbon reserves. The tremendous oil and gas deposits of the Caspian Sea attracted interest from the leading superpowers and oil companies, and thereby an enormous investment was directed to the exploration and drilling projects. Extraction of the resources resulted in increased economic development and employment in the region, but was accompanied by various environmental and social issues.

The Caspian Sea's complicated legal status, with no clear laws and standards available for the region, developed the platform for numerous arguments of its ownership and the exploitation of its resources. The five littoral states have struggled to come to some legal agreement, and thereby no clear laws and standards are available for the region. Hence, disagreements over maritime borders, fishing areas, and resource extractions have been made, sometimes even leading to military operations.

There have also been various environmental issues from the oil and gas extraction in the Caspian Sea. The region is simply destructed by the oil rising, habitat loss, and pollution, which has caused enormous damage to the flora and fauna of the sea.

The geopolitical significance of the Caspian Sea is rather great. Its geographical position, resources, and background have made it an area of great interest by nations all over the world. Complicated legal status of the sea, however, leads to the issues of ownership, exploitation of resources, and environmental damage. States bordering the sea should ensure its sustainable development and the resources of the sea by cooperation in reaching explicit laws and standards. It is a superhuman effort, since it should be fortified with firm intentions of cooperation, transparency, and protection of environmental and other values important for the long-lasting stability and prosperity of the region.

Before referring to the geopolitical importance of the Caspian Sea, it is necessary to explain the relationship of Geopolitics to Political Geography. Geopolitics is nothing but a branch of political geography and geopolitics is a science that emerged as a result of the interest of geographers in the relationship between political geography and state power. The definition of “Rudolf Kjellén”, which was influenced by Friedrich Ratzel’s ideas, the father of geopolitics, he is the author of the development of the concept of geopolitics, and it can be defined as: “That relationship between international political forces and the geographical environment” [41, 45 p.]

To understand the geopolitical importance of Caspian Sea, we must use the approaches theoretical geopolitics which considered about the importance of geographical spaces and water bodies, and their role in building the power of the state in international relations. And among the pioneers of geopolitical theories , we find the thinker “Halford Mackinder” in his book entitled (Democratic ideals and reality),

he is part of the English school that focused on studying the strategy of straits and sea ports, and he presented (the theory of HeartLand), as he believes that three quarters of the globe is covered by the water of the seas and that the land occupies only a quarter of its area, just as the unity of the seas and their connection to each other justifies to call it (Global Ocean), and it also acknowledges that there is a relationship between the events of history and battles and wars with geographical factors, and thus it presents a unique relationship between the political forces in the world in light of geographical factors, and on the basis of the distribution of water and land on the surface of the earth, and reached several facts, can be summarized as follows:

- That three quarters of the globe are occupied by water and water bodies to form one unit, it is called (Global Ocean).
- The last quarter of the Earth's area is represented by the land, and most of this land is represented by the three continents (Africa, Europe, and Asia), thus representing one unit called (World Island).

He believes that World Island is the region of the HeartLand, which represents a great part of Eurasia, and this region extends from the Volga River in the west to Siberia in the east and from the Himalayas in the south to the Arctic Ocean in the north. It also includes most of the Iranian plateau in the southwest, and most of the Mongolian highlands in the southeast. Macander indicated that this region represents the so-called (Inner Crescent), from the marginal continental countries [42, 35 p.].

This region contains many natural resources and is rich in mineral wealth [43, 18 p.] and then whoever controls this region can control the world, in his famous saying, "Whoever rules Eastern Europe controls Heart Land, and whoever controls the Heart Land controls World Island, and whoever controls World Island controls the whole world." [44, 36 p.]

Nicholas Spykman is also considered one of the most important geopolitical scientists, and in his study he reached several conclusions that:

- The geographical location of the country is of great importance in drawing its foreign and domestic policy together.
- The limited ability of HeartLand to dominate the world.
- The Center of mass in the former Soviet Union is located in the European part, not the Asian part.
- Geography is the primary determinant of national policy formulation. The most important thing that was proposed by "Spykman" is (RimLand Theory), which he published in his book (Geography of Peace), which is the area which he called "marginal belts," which is also called (the land edge) in his famous saying: "He who rules Eurasia controls the world," which represents the chessboard on the basis of which the struggle for global sovereignty continues [45, 25 p.].

Hence, the geopolitical importance of the Caspian Sea becomes clear, given that this sea window has enormous energy resources, which are considered one of the most important components of the state, to maximize its power. The Caspian Sea is located within HeartLand region, which represents an important part of the Eurasian continent, it suffices that the region has its own characteristics that differ from other

political units, that is, its containment of scarce resources, and thus whoever controls them controls the world.

Also, the geographical dimension is determined by the countries that have a view of the seas and oceans and thus remove the economic isolation from the rest of the world, according to what was stated in “Mahan” theory that the length of the coasts and the quality of the ports represent more important factors than the land extension, and this is the case of Central Asian countries bordering the Caspian Sea, where it has a role in laying new economic pillars in the region, especially as it suffers from economic weakness compared to its neighbour, the Russian Federation, for example, as confirmed by “Zbigniew Brzezinski” in his book entitled (The Grand Chessboard), that who controls the Eurasian continent, which represents (The New Great Game), Controls the whole world, because of its geopolitical weight at the global level, especially since geopolitical studies moved during the end of the Cold War from the regional dimension to the global dimension, whereas, controlling the Eurasian continent provides the central base for global sovereignty, so that it is the starting point towards extending influence over the region through two basic steps:

First: Identifying the Eurasian countries with geopolitical dynamism, which in turn possesses the necessary power to bring about an important shift in the international distribution of political power.

Second: Identifying the Eurasian countries with a critical geopolitical position, which have a catalyst position for the active geostrategic players in the region, [46, 47 p.] and it seems that the Caspian Sea falls within this scheme, which made it a geopolitical axis of global polarization.

Before talking about the geological structure of the Caspian Sea and its relationship to the hydrocarbon resources present in the region, we must first have to go on what is meant by Hydrocarbons, Which is a chemical term that denotes the various petroleum compounds in all their states (gaseous, liquid, or solid). Petroleum was known for more than 5,000 years, and the origin of the word petroleum is taken from the Latin language, which means rock oil. Petro + Oleum “Oil” = rock oil, and it is a simple substance in terms of composition because it contains from the chemical point of view two elements (hydrogen + carbon), [47] and involves oil production in turn five stages of exploration, extraction, transportation, refining, and distribution and marketing.

Petroleum forms in the ground at different depths from its surface and moves through the porous sedimentary rocks until it is found in impermeable layers and collects in Petroleum Traps, Its formative age ranges between the antiquity of the decade (Paleozoic), and between the modern era (Cainozoic). As for the theories explaining the emergence and development of petroleum, chemists define them through three theories, namely the biological or organic theory, the chemical theory and then the mineral theory. The theory of biological origin recognizes that petroleum may have been from the remnants of some living organisms, especially micro-marine life, and gradually turned into sedimentary rocks. And this theory is the most acceptable to modern scientists, as for the inorganic or mineralogical theory, it was formed as a result of exposure to some metal carbide deposits in the ground, which

are found in the folds of Volcanic Rocks. As for the chemical theory that assumes that some hydrocarbons were formed in an ancient time by combining hydrogen with carbon, then spreading into the ground and then turning into petroleum oil [48, 166 p.]

As for the origin of the formation of the Caspian Sea, it was formed as a result of downward movements in the earth's crust caused by tectonic movements that led to the formation of newly formed torsional mountains, and the Caspian Sea Basin forms one of the eastern parts of the ancient (Tethys Sea) that began to develop beginning in the Paleocene era with the movements of forming the range of the Himalayan mountains, and it is certain that the oil fields have spread in the Caspian Sea, considering that it was part of this sea, especially in light of the preponderance of the owners of the organic theory, on which the study confirmed that the Continental shores containing stagnant water is a suitable place for organic deposits converting to carbon [49, 401 p.]

The Caspian Sea consists of five major geological basins which can be listed as follows:

It extends for a distance of 400 kilometers in a northwest-southeast direction, and it reaches a depth of 900 meters, bounded on the west by the Kura Basin, and on the east side is the unity of the coastal lands of Turkmenistan, and on the south the torsional chains that extend to the Caucasus and Yezutalish Mountains, and on the north borders Absheron Peninsula, The geological history of this basin goes back to the Teriraty, which in turn consists of sedimentary rocks up to a depth of 20 km, and formed with the Jurassic period until the beginning of the Pliocene. The triple age is represented by Eocene carbonate record and the carbonate record for the Oligocene and Miocene era. It contains many oil fields represented in (Azari, Shiraj, and Shah Dinar) [50, 13p.].



Figure – 3 South Caspian Basin (Source: https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian_Sea)

North Caspian Basin

It is located in the northern basin at the eastern side of the Russian plate, and extends to the eastern coast the Caspian Sea, which is also known as (Pri-caspian), and goes back to the end of the Paleozoic Era. And there are two important fields, which are the Tengiz field Karachaganak field; each of them reaches a depth of between 2-3-5 m.

North Usturt Basin

It spans both Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan and has an area of 240 000 km²; it lies to the south of the northern basin of the Caspian Sea; it is bounded to the northeast by the low torsion of the Chekar and Mojodzar; to the east by the Ural mountains; its sedimentary rocks are up to 12 km thick; and its sedimentary cover consists of the following consequence [51, 7 p.]; Carboniferous, Permian-Cretaceous, Paleogene, and Neogene epochs. More than half of the world's oil and natural gas reserves are found in rocks that formed during the upper and middle Jurassic (60%), the Triassic (10%), the Cretaceous (21%), and the Eocene (the remaining 8%) [51, 7 p.].

Mangyshlak Basin

This basin is located within the territory of the State of Uzbekistan, and it is located in the western part of the Turan plate of the Paleozoic era, and this basin crust is divided into two parts and was formed during the Paleozoic Era, while the second

part of it may have been in the early Paleozoic era and the rocks of this era consist of Devonian rocks and the beginning of the Carboniferous era.

Amu Darya Basin

This basin is located in eastern Turkmenistan and western Uzbekistan, on an area of up to 370 thousand km, and the remaining distance of it, which reaches 57,000 km, is located in the lands of the neighbouring country, especially in Afghan lands, and this basin consists of rocks of the Jurassic period, the middle and the lower, in addition to Paleocene carbons era , this basin contains about 120 fields of natural gas, and discovered it in western Uzbekistan, and 40 % in eastern Turkmenistan, which is known to be a basin of natural gas than oil , which does not exceed 4% [52, 3 p.].

It can be said that the geological basins that make up the Caspian Sea provide us with a general concept about the exported rocks capable of generating oil and natural gas, and as studies have confirmed that the Jurassic and Lower Cretaceous periods are among the most important geological times of the Caspian Sea, and they contain huge quantities of oil and liquefied gas, which makes it is considered one of the most important oil basins in the world compared to other oil basins.

In conclusion, the geostrategic location and geological structure of the Caspian Sea make it a region of immense significance for the countries that surround it. The Caspian Sea's location between Europe and Asia has made it a vital transit point for trade and transportation, while the region's geological structure has made it a valuable source of natural resources such as oil and gas.

The Caspian Sea's importance as a transit point is reflected in the infrastructure development of the surrounding countries. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have all invested heavily in developing their port facilities and transport networks to take advantage of the Caspian Sea's strategic location. The sea's location between Europe and Asia has made it a valuable conduit for trade and commerce, with goods moving in both directions.

The geological structure of the Caspian Sea has played a pivotal role in shaping the economic and political landscape of the surrounding countries. This vast inland water body is situated in a resource-rich region, boasting substantial reserves of oil and natural gas beneath its seabed. The discovery and subsequent extraction of these hydrocarbon resources have been transformative for nations such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, turning them into key players in the global energy market. The economic benefits derived from oil and gas exports have facilitated large-scale infrastructure development, including the construction of extensive pipeline networks, refineries, and export terminals that connect the region to international markets. These developments have not only bolstered national economies but have also attracted significant foreign investment, further solidifying the Caspian's importance in global energy geopolitics.

However, the strategic and geological significance of the Caspian Sea has also been a source of persistent disputes among its littoral states. The ambiguity surrounding its legal status—whether it should be classified as a sea or a lake—has

complicated efforts to establish clear maritime boundaries and resource-sharing agreements. Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have each staked claims to specific portions of the Caspian, often leading to conflicting territorial assertions. The competition over lucrative oil and gas fields has fueled tensions, prompting prolonged negotiations over how the seabed and its vast resources should be divided. Although the 2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea marked progress by establishing principles for cooperation, key issues remain unresolved, particularly concerning pipeline construction, military presence, and the rights of external actors in the region.

Beyond its geopolitical and economic significance, the Caspian Sea faces serious environmental challenges that threaten its long-term sustainability. Decades of oil and gas exploitation, industrial activity, and unregulated shipping have led to severe pollution, adversely affecting the sea's delicate ecosystem. Contamination from oil spills, untreated industrial waste, and agricultural runoff has deteriorated water quality, endangering marine life and reducing fish populations, particularly sturgeon, which are crucial for the region's caviar industry. Additionally, climate change poses an increasing threat, with shifting weather patterns and rising temperatures contributing to changes in water levels, salinity, and biodiversity. The sea's fluctuating water levels, which have historically undergone periods of rise and decline, are expected to be further exacerbated by global warming, potentially leading to coastal erosion, habitat loss, and disruptions to local communities reliant on fishing and agriculture.

The Caspian Sea stands at the crossroads of economic opportunity, geopolitical rivalry, and environmental vulnerability. While its vast energy reserves offer economic benefits, the region must navigate complex diplomatic negotiations and implement sustainable environmental policies to ensure that resource exploitation does not come at the cost of ecological degradation. The future stability of the Caspian region will depend on continued cooperation among its bordering nations, the establishment of clear legal frameworks, and the adoption of environmental safeguards that balance economic growth with ecological preservation.

1.2 Energy Capabilities of the Caspian Sea and its Importance in the Global Economy

The issue of interest today is the transfer of the power center to the oil-producing countries in the process of influencing the international system. Thus, a question may be raised that: what is the importance of oil today in international politics and how does oil affect it? It is noticeable that oil prices, production, and the control of supply and demand have become among the oil-producing countries, as oil is a vital resource to maintain the national security of the state. The inability of the state to achieve its energy security may lead to the use of military force. Oil is no longer limited to the struggle between politics and oil. It transcended into a real

struggle between oil companies themselves to control oil areas and markets, and oil played a fundamental role, especially with the First World War, when the need for oil as fuel appeared in war operations and the Second World War opened to the warring country to fight for oil, as American oil export embargo to Japan, which prompted the latter to attack the base (Pearl Harbor), at the end of 1941, as well as the invasion of Germany to Russia in 1941, the aim of this invasion was to occupy the Soviet position in “Baku”, the capital of the former Soviet Azerbaijan.

After the Cold War the focus of America’s strategy was attempt to prevent Europe-Asia from being linked to the oil-rich Middle East region, especially Iraq in the former regime, and Iran, which were far from US control, and after the events of September 11, 2001, Iran’s power has grown in the development of its nuclear program and its possession of energy resources, which made it an axis of evil that threatens America’s interests in the Middle East. The same is true for Iraq because the state’s possession of economic power becomes an influential player in international politics [53, 64 p.]. The emerging markets are the Middle East as well, especially since America is the first consumer and the largest importer of energy, but China also after its economy has become the fastest growing in the world, which has increased their enormous energy needs, as it ranked second among the major oil consumers, consuming about (3-6) million barrels of oil per day, but America may reach more than 20 million barrels compared with China, while India is the fifth largest consumer of oil in the world, as it consumes 3.7 % of global consumption, the government of India published projected energy consumption for the year 2025 could reach 196 million tons between 2011 to 2020, rising beyond 364 million tons for the period from 2024-2025. European Union consumption of oil, exception of Norway, Britain and Romania, were up to 90% of Oil and 70% of gas by 2020, which opened the door to competition between the powers over the acquisition of global oil supplies by any means, and this applies to the role that the Caspian Sea plays in international politics, as it is the focus of polarization of eastern and western powers as well [54, 26 p.].

The most important feature of the Caspian Sea, which is its containment of the enormous energy resources, which in turn express a strategic change, whether in previous historical episodes or at the present time, especially since the nineteenth century knew the city of “Baku”, the oil capital of the world, a major role in the intensification of the conflict in the region, and the concern was not With the riches of the Caspian Sea in the contemporary period only, but its roots go back to what has been written by historians, headed by Al-Masoudi Islamic historian, who in turn saw that the city of Baku is a source for the arrival of ships transporting oil from the region, as well as what was mentioned in the book (The Secret of Secrets to the World) Abu Bakr Al-Razi, who confirmed that the use of petroleum in an oil lamp, which he called “al-Nuqata”, and the same thing in the Middle Ages , where the city of Baku was the focus of attracting Europeans through trade, which applies to the description presented by the “Marco Polo”, one of the Italians travellers, where he said : “This material or this oil is not edible, but good as fuel” [55, 28 p.].

The state of Azerbaijan is one of the most important ancient regions in the world in the field of oil extraction. Going back to 1877, we find that the British

traveller and writer Charles Martin, who confirmed that oil was exported from Baku 2,500 years ago, especially from the Absheron Peninsula, it was It is considered a sacred land for the followers of Zoroastrianism, which was also confirmed by the Greek historian, “Strabo” in the early first century AD, who described the western shores of the Caspian Sea as being superior to the wonders in Egypt. As for the more detailed information about oil in this region appeared three centuries later and that. When “Yaqut al-Hamawi” (1179-1092) wrote in his book “Mujam al-Buldan”, that the state of Azerbaijan is made up of two syllables, namely “Azhar” which means fire in Persian language, “Baijan” which means keeper or stockist meaning “house of fire” as a great oil country [56, p. 39].

Europeans had their same special interest in Baku city, as the English missionary John Cartwright described it when describing the city of “Baku” as a vast area for docking and it is a profitable city for those who want to trade in it, and a country from which oil flows for the purpose of lighting.

The references cited by travellers and geographers about oil in that region, especially in “Baku” are evidence of the historical dimension of the importance of oil and its escalation in the region, especially “Baku”, according to the saying that “oil is considered the Kingdom and Baku is its crown”, while in the era of Tsarism Russian control, as the Caspian Sea region was among its interests, which manifested itself in its war against Persia in order to gain control of Baku, in view of the importance of the region’s oil to the Russians, that was written by Prince Mikhail Vorontsov, who was the first deputy of the Russian Tsar in 1847, saying: “I have been authorized to discover new oil in the Bibi-Ei Bat area in Baku, on the coasts of the Caspian Sea”, and the Russian government has worked to enact a set of laws that regulate the extraction of oil, and the most important event is the role played by the coming of Tsar Alexander III to the throne of the Russian Empire, and the important performance of his finance minister, Count Sergei Witte in the field of industry that led to the Russians being able to build a pipeline from Baku to the Black Sea ports in 1901.

Foreign companies also had role, especially Nobel family’s interest in oil in the Caspian Sea, where the Nobel Brothers Oil Company was established in 1879 in Baku, in addition to the Rothschild’s companies that came to work beginning in 1892 under a company called “Caspian Black Sea Oil Company.” After that, “Royal Dutch Shell” was able to annex Rothschild Company in 1911, to be the companies controlling the First World War. Thus, the Soviet forces succeeded in controlling the city of Baku and nationalized more than 165 oil companies in the state of Azerbaijan, and the situation remained the same until the secession of Azerbaijan in 1920, as a result of the Russian Civil War [57, 30 p.].

When the Second World War began, the Germans realized that provide oil is a prerequisite to defeat Russia, and if they can not securing oil will lead to the disaster, which had already happened and so Adolf Hitler’s argument to the Marshall Erich von Manstein: “If we cannot grab Baku oil, we consider that we have lost the important thing in the Ural-Volga region” came true [58, 59p.] During the Soviet era, the Caspian Sea became gradually marginalized due to the discovery and investment

of important fields in the Urals-Volga region and then in Siberia. The Soviet Union's products from the Caspian Sea no longer represented more than 3% of the Soviet Union's production. The era, that is, under the Cold War, Turkmenistan, unlike Azerbaijan, played a tangible role in the production of gas in the Soviet Union, the demise of the Soviet Union and the Central Asian and Caucasus countries gain independence led to the stimulation of the interest of Western oil companies and Western countries tended to enter the midst of the New Great Game [59, 121p.].

Discussing the estimated quantities of oil within the Caspian Sea during the period following the Cold War, especially when compared to other leading oil-producing regions, remains an area of considerable uncertainty among scholars specializing in Central Asian and Caspian Sea affairs. However, what seems widely believed is that the Caspian Sea holds a vast amount of energy potential, potentially surpassing reserves found in both the North Sea and the East Asia regions. As stated by (D. Yergin) and (Thone Gustafso) from Cambridge Energy Research Associates in an article published by the New York Times, the Caspian's oil and gas resources might be second only to those of the Middle East. Furthermore, in 1996, the French Foreign Minister, Hervé de Charette, described the Caspian Sea as the "new oil El Dorado," emphasizing its significance as the most promising area for energy expansion in the foreseeable future. Various studies started emerging around that time, suggesting that the substantial demand for Caspian Sea energy could position it as either a competitor or even an alternative to the Arabian Gulf. According to a report released by the U.S. State Department, the Caspian Basin region is home to oil resources that may reach 200 billion barrels, which would represent approximately 16% of the world's petroleum reserves. However, the accuracy of these projections has been called into question by several researchers. One of the most significant critiques came from a 1998 study published by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, which estimated that the actual oil reserves of the Caspian Sea fell between 25 and 35 billion barrels. Additionally, more precise figures were provided by the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA), which estimated that the proven reserves of the Caspian region range from 18 to 31 billion barrels, while the potential reserves could be anywhere between 250 and 270 billion barrels. If these figures hold true, the Caspian's reserves would amount to nearly a third of the Middle East's total oil supply. This would also mean that the Caspian contains more than double the oil reserves found in the North Sea, which holds about 17 billion barrels, and surpasses even the proven reserves of the United States, estimated at approximately 22 billion barrels. Regarding natural gas, the Caspian's reserves are also substantial. The proven gas reserves are estimated to be around 170 trillion cubic feet, while the potential reserves are projected between 243 and 248 trillion cubic feet. Despite varying opinions on the precise estimates of oil reserves, there is greater consensus on the region's natural gas reserves. The combined proven gas reserves of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan exceed 236 trillion cubic feet, which is equivalent to more than 60 million barrels of oil in energy terms. Focusing on the leading oil and gas-producing nations in the Caspian region—Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan—it is evident that Kazakhstan has emerged as the dominant energy

powerhouse in Central Asia. Since the year 2000, Kazakhstan has significantly increased its oil production, reaching 4.1 million barrels per day. By 2020, the country had produced approximately 85.7 million metric tons of oil and condensate. Projections indicate that crude oil production is expected to remain stable through 2021, with an anticipated increase in the following years, potentially reaching 185 million metric tons within the next five years. This upward trend further solidifies Kazakhstan's status as the leading energy producer among its regional counterparts, outpacing Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan [61, 40 p.].

To deepen more about the estimates of oil reserves in the Caspian Sea, we must study each country separately with comparison the capabilities Energetic according to geographical distribution as follows:

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan is positioned within the Khazar region, lying along the eastern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains and bordering the western coast of the Caspian Sea. It shares its frontiers with Russia to the north, Georgia to the northwest, Armenia to the west, and Iran to the south. Being among the smallest independent Islamic republics, Azerbaijan extends across nearly 86,600 square kilometers [61, 41p.]. Despite its relatively compact size, the nation is endowed with significant energy reserves. Reports from 2002 estimated that Azerbaijan had approximately 1.2 billion barrels of crude oil and 4.4 trillion cubic feet of liquefied gas. By 2005, its gas reserves had reportedly expanded to 4.8 trillion cubic meters, while by 2007, oil reserves were approximated at 28.3 billion barrels, and gas resources stood at 23.93 million cubic meters. These figures reinforce Azerbaijan's increasing role in the international energy landscape, with its petroleum industry being governed by an array of contracts focused on exploration, extraction, production, and distribution.

Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan, situated deep within the Asian continent, extends across the northern and eastern peripheries of the Caspian Sea. It shares boundaries with Russia to the north and China to the east, while its southern limits are defined by Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan boasts extensive shorelines, measuring 1,894 km along the Caspian Sea and 1,070 km along the Aral Sea. Spanning a vast territory of 2,717,300 square kilometers, Kazakhstan stands as one of the largest republics in the region. As of 2002, its crude oil deposits were estimated at 5.4 billion barrels, and gas reserves at about 65 trillion cubic meters. By 2005, oil reserves had reportedly surged to 396 billion barrels, while gas deposits reached approximately 106 trillion cubic feet. By 2010, oil output had reached around 1.6 billion barrels, with gas reserves standing at 354 billion cubic meters. By 2022, Kazakhstan's established hydrocarbon reserves, both on land and offshore, were estimated at 4.8 billion tons, equivalent to over 35 billion barrels, while further potential reserves within the Caspian Sea were expected to exceed 17 billion tons. In terms of gas resources, Kazakhstan's confirmed reserves stood at 3 trillion cubic meters, with probable reserves projected at 5 trillion cubic meters. Due to its immense resource

wealth, Kazakhstan has become a prime destination for foreign energy investment, which has substantially contributed to the nation's economic expansion [61, 19 p.].

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan, a landlocked country in Central Asia, shares its borders with Uzbekistan to the north, Kazakhstan to the northwest, Afghanistan to the east and southeast, Iran to the south, and the Caspian Sea to the west. It covers an extensive area of approximately 488,100 square kilometers. The country's hydrocarbon potential is significant, with crude oil reserves estimated at 600 million barrels and natural gas reserves at roughly 120 trillion cubic feet in 2002. By 2005, the estimates suggested that oil reserves had reached 0.5 trillion barrels, whereas natural gas reserves stood at 102 trillion cubic feet. By 2010, the country's daily crude oil output was about 216 thousand barrels, while gas production amounted to 4.42 billion cubic meters. As a key global supplier of natural gas, Turkmenistan ranks among the top four nations with the largest proven reserves [62, 45p.].

Iran

Iran, which borders the Caspian Sea to the south, shares its northern and eastern frontiers with Russia and Kazakhstan, respectively, while it is bounded by Turkmenistan to the east and Azerbaijan to the west. The Caspian Sea is a strategic economic asset for Iran, containing significant hydrocarbon reserves. As of 2002, Iran's crude oil deposits were estimated at 89.7 billion barrels, accounting for approximately 8.7% of global reserves, whereas its gas resources stood at about 812.3 trillion cubic feet. Some projections suggest that potential reserves may reach as much as 15.1 billion barrels of oil and 11 trillion cubic meters of gas. Despite facing political and security constraints, Iran continues to play an influential role in the global energy sector, ranking second in terms of oil reserves. In 2005, Iran contributed around 5.1% to the world's total oil output, producing roughly 4.05 million barrels per day. By December 2017, its proven natural gas reserves were estimated at 1,191 trillion cubic feet, making it the second-largest in the world. Though international sanctions have impeded Iran's ability to fully exploit its Caspian Sea resources, the country remains an energy powerhouse [63, 98p.].

The Russian Federation

In 2002, Russia's crude oil reserves were calculated at 48.6 billion barrels, with gas reserves estimated at around 1.7 trillion cubic feet. By 2010, the country was ranked as the global leader in proven natural gas reserves, which stood at 44.8 trillion cubic feet. Despite the lack of confirmed data regarding Russia's hydrocarbon reserves within the Caspian Sea, its natural gas production and export volumes were recorded at 219 billion cubic feet in 1990 and 30 billion cubic feet in 2000. However, geopolitical factors—such as its strategic rivalry with Iran over Caspian Sea resources, security concerns, and regional conflicts like the war with Georgia—continue to complicate Russia's energy landscape. Nonetheless, Russia remains an essential energy supplier, particularly within European markets [64, p. 38].

Conclusion

The energy potential of the Caspian Sea region is characterized by ongoing uncertainties and fluctuating figures reported by energy agencies. According to the International Energy Agency's 2012 assessment, the region is believed to contain between 4% and 10% of global oil reserves and approximately 6.7 to 9.2 trillion cubic meters of liquefied natural gas. It is estimated that around 70 billion barrels of oil in the region are recoverable, with Kazakhstan accounting for the majority share of this wealth. However, the extent of Iran's and Russia's actual reserves remains ambiguous, creating obstacles for foreign investors and complicating efforts in exploration and refining. [65, 21p.].

To summarize, the Caspian Sea's energy resources have elevated it to a significant position as a competitor in the international energy market. The abundant oil and gas deposits in the sea have had a profound impact on the economies of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. These riches have provided these nations with a major source of income and investment capital. The extraction of these resources has resulted in the construction of a substantial amount of infrastructure, such as pipelines and refineries, for the purpose of transporting and processing oil and gas.

The energy market around the world accurately reflects the significance of the Caspian Sea's role in the world's energy supply. The reserves of the sea are an essential component in satisfying the ever-increasing need for energy around the world, particularly in Europe and Asia. Because of the development of new extraction technologies, the resources of the Caspian Sea are now more accessible, which increases the potential contribution that these resources could make to the global energy market.

Because of its oil resources, the Caspian Sea has emerged as a prominent actor in world politics in recent years. The oil and gas reserves in the region have made it a significant negotiating chip in negotiations between countries, particularly those between the countries in the surrounding area and their larger neighbors, Russia and Iran. These negotiations have focused on the region's future. The competition among the countries that border the Caspian Sea for access to the sea's resources has resulted in tensions and disputes between those countries, many of which have not been completely resolved [66, 120p.].

In spite of the significance of the Caspian Sea's possibilities in the field of energy, the region is nevertheless faced with a number of important obstacles. The extraction of resources from the basin has resulted in the destruction of the surrounding environment, including pollution caused by the production of oil and gas as well as shipping. It is anticipated that climate change will have a substantial impact on the Caspian Sea as well, with increasing sea levels and shifting weather patterns having the potential to have an effect on the region's agricultural practices, infrastructure, and biodiversity.

The oscillations that have occurred in the international energy market have also had an effect on the Caspian Sea's energy capability. The shift toward renewable

energy sources and the development of new technologies have led to a decline in demand for fossil fuels, including the oil and gas that are taken from the Caspian Sea. This decrease in demand is a direct result of the shift toward renewable energy sources. This has resulted in a drop in pricing as well as a reduction in investment in the energy industry of the region.

Despite this, the energy resources of the Caspian Sea continue to be a key contributor to the economy of the entire world. The oil and gas deposits in this part of the planet are a significant source of energy for the expanding population of the world, and the development of new technology is making these resources easier to access and more cost-effective. It is expected that competition for access to the resources of the Caspian Sea will continue. This competition is being pushed by the increasing need for energy around the world as well as the significance of energy security in international relations [67, 69p.].

1.3 Caspian Oil Development and its Implications for Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)

The beginning of the second millennium witnessed the signs of a qualitative change in the field of global energy sources, according to what was indicated by the International Energy Agency report issued for the year 2011, that the world is at the beginning of what has been termed the “golden age of gas” or what has been called the “shale gas revolution.” A case has been opened to study the geopolitical effects of this golden age on the countries producing primarily conventional gas and shale gas. Shale Gas is a natural gas, which is generated inside the rocks that contain oil, by the action of heat and pressure, and to release this gas, a horizontal drilling and hydraulic fracturing process must be carried out using (water + sand) to maintain its porosity increases, and this technology is available up to an hour in the United States of America. The discovery and production of shale gas revolutionized the energy industry in the first decade of the second millennium. According to a recent study prepared by the US Energy Information Administration, which covered 41 countries around the world, it showed that shale gas reserves exist in each of China at a rate of 1,100 trillion cubic feet, followed by Argentina at a rate of 802 trillion cubic meters, Algeria at a rate of 707 trillion cubic meters, America at 665 trillion cubic meters, and Canada at a rate of 573 trillion cubic meters [68], but the question that remains is the extent to which these countries are able to exploit these new energy capabilities compared to the advanced technologies of USA? The question was not easy to answer, as the circumstances and the environment differ from one country to another, unlike America, which is the reason for its success in experimenting with shale gas is the availability of many factors, including geological factors, tax exemptions and the availability of active service industries. As for Western European countries, for example, it received opposition due to environmental damage and damage to the ecological balance [69, 41 p.].

But the important issue remains the success of the exploration process for Shale gas, because its success means obtaining cheap liquefied gas in the global

markets, and thus leads to a decline in global demand for gas from the countries producing it by the traditional way, and another focal point can be indicated which is the cost and methods of transporting gas. What remains to be transported by sea is a main pillar of global gas trade, and decoding isolation of countries that lack this vital substance in commercial transactions, and what remains is disputed the extent of the impact of shale gas on countries producing traditional gas such as the Caspian Sea countries, Iran and other Gulf countries, compared to the cost and availability of shale gas we find that it is available in regions that lack energy security, such as the United States of America and China as for the oil countries, it is imperative to develop national oil companies in order to deal with this phenomenon successfully [70, 41 p.].

Despite what has been developed mechanisms to explore shale gas, conventional gas remains popular in global markets, and this is evident in the long-term agreements concluded between the countries of Europe, Russia, and the Caspian Sea countries to obtain traditional fossil fuels, America itself is still seeking to develop the energy sector in the Caspian Sea, where it is working to revive South Asia pipelines to transport Turkmen gas to India after containing the situation in Afghanistan.

But this does not mean that shale gas does not pose a threat, as the countries of Europe themselves are working to approve exploration for shale gas, as they formed a new lobby in order to convince European institutions to grant the right to exploration despite the environmental damage that may be caused to countries that have new alternative energy [71, 45 p.].

The same is true for North America (United States and Canada), which collectively contributed to the acceleration of the development of liquefied natural gas in that region of the world, as several agreements were signed by Cheniere Energy company Under a Sabine pass project with British Gas where the first phase of the project was completed with the Spanish group GAZ Natural, and second phase with the Indian company Gall, as well as granting Energy Council of Canada a significant export license for the project Kitimat in the Canadian province “British Columbia” thus indicates that the prices in the US markets remain low, unlike the Asian markets. The current changes in the gas market have also contributed to the creation of essential factors that, along with the traditional factors, have redound to stabilizing the share of gas in the energy mix, and the most important of these changes is the unconventional gas boom in North America and the transfer of interest in it in other regions of the world, and technological development in the LNG industry, (the concept of floating units) and the growing acceptance of natural gas as an aid to renewable energy [72, 89p.].

But despite these incentives it can be said that in the medium term keeps Asia and the Middle East’s most important specially “CIS” (Russia and Turkmenistan), where it will have a role in promoting international control so as to contribute their trade through pipelines by more than 4%, and the high rate export between Turkmenistan and China, which was estimated at about 30 billion cubic meters in 2019, while the power generation industry in industrialized countries remains the

driving force for the growth of gas demand, due to its competitive price advantage..[73]

The continuous reductions in crude oil prices in the international market by the petroleum monopolistic companies have led to instability in the prices of crude oil, and thus clearly affected the fluctuation of the oil revenues obtained by the oil-producing countries, which led to the interest of these countries in looking at the attempt to create a capable system. On setting competitive prices and opening the field for dialogue between producer and consumer so the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries was established (OPEC), In September 1960 at Baghdad conference, and delegates from five countries attended (Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Kuwait, Iran, and Venezuela) [74, 71 p.].

This organization aims to unify and develop the oil policies of member states and protect their interests, and an effective role in setting pricing policies, in order to ensure price stability in global markets, and to work on developing productivity policies in a manner that is characterized by regularity and efficiency. To ensure the interests of producing and consuming countries, the establishment of this organization had several achievements, including:

- Adding sovereignty to the oil concessions system, where oil concessions regulate international companies the right to adjust prices without referring to the relevant countries.
- Directing international companies to take into account the interests of the producing countries, as a result of the global companies ignoring the interests of the producing countries.
- Establishing the marketing rationale, as the oil companies opened a rationale for about 4.5 Cents per barrel for marketing, and in the year 1968 OPEC canceled these justifications, which led to an increase in the revenues of producing countries from a barrel of oil [75, 112 p.]

Before talking about OPEC's position in the global oil market, we try to determine the factors affecting the determination of trends in the global oil market. Economic analysts agree that energy will be the focus of the golden age of the twenty-first century, and given that the balance of supply and demand is no longer sufficient to determine or control prices. The oil market has become affected by other factors:

Economic Factors

Many variables are included within these factors, including the fundamental change in the oil market. At the beginning of the current century, the oil market witnessed a wide demand for energy, as is the case with China, meaning that the market exited from the dealings between producers and consumers for other parties to interfere in the game, which made the matter more complicated. Even OPEC no longer has a decisive role in determining prices in the face of Western interference in its decisions, and the other side is the imbalance between demand and supply, as OPEC was forced to raise its production under the pretext of preserving its right in the oil market until its production reached its maximum, but its influence on the oil market is weak.

Likewise, speculation in the stock market, as it has become an important player in the market, including companies, banks, financial institutions, and even individuals, so that they have become influential elements in trying to change the equation of oil markets to achieve their political and economic goals within the goals of the new international system [75, p.12] The other point is the tax policies imposed on oil and the profits that Western oil companies recede to sometimes exceed three times the income of oil-producing countries.

Political Factors

Among these factors are the political and security turmoil in the Arab and Islamic worlds, Iraq, and Afghanistan. USA's war on Iraq has greatly affected the oil wells in the region, as well as the US war on Afghanistan, which is working to get closer to the Caspian Sea's wealth. and the situation between Iran and America worsened, which made the Iranian oil heading towards the East instead of the West (to Asia instead Europe). in addition to the Russian foreign policy towards the countries of Central Asia, the Russian-Iranian intervention in Syria and the sanctions that were imposed on Russian companies that deal with the Syrian regime.

Strategic Factors

Included within this heading is the conflict between OPEC and the International Energy Agency, which determines whether OPEC is a central actor in the decisions to determine global oil prices, especially since the decisions have become in the hands of the major oil-consuming powers (especially USA and China), an example of what happened the invasion of Iraq. It was part of a bold strategy, planned by the neoconservatives and major oil companies in the world, such as Exxon Mobil, British Petroleum, and the money and banking men, and that strategy was extended to contain the remaining oil resources in the world.

Environmental Factors:

For example, natural disasters, the state of the climate, and agreements to protect the environment, the United Nations climate agreement held in 1992, and the 2002 Kyoto Protocol , which is the most important global environmental agreement, but we find a paradox in adhering to global environmental standards, especially in industrialized countries [76, 36 p.]

The role and market of OPEC and its impact on the aforementioned factors can be included in the management of the global oil market, and in the face of fierce competition between companies and other productive forces. What can be said about the spare production capacities of OPEC countries is a decrease rather than an increase as a result of the combination of several factors, such as an acceleration of increase the global demand for oil, the decrease in the growth in supplies outside OPEC and the decrease in investment outside the oil industries, which made the ability of the global oil system unable to face the imbalances of demand and supply, especially in times when the oil market witnessed a number of events such as what happened in the Asian crisis of 1997, where it decreased Oil reached its lowest level, which was less than \$10 a barrel in 1998. Since that time, OPEC adopted a strategy to achieve balance in the oil market, and the main objective of this strategy was to raise prices after the great collapse that it witnessed during the crisis.

And for reference only, the term price volatility is used to describe the price fluctuations of a commodity and that volatility is measured by the ratio of the daily or weekly differences, and the term “Volatility” considered a measure of instability, and it expresses price fluctuations in the global market as characterized by uncertainty and lack of confidence in the future of the markets, as well as the degree of risk in return on prices [77, 25p.]

The most important point remains is that relationship which ranging between the producer and the consumer, and the predominant in any dialogue is the necessity to recognize that the energy relationship between the two sides raises some concerns that could affect the interests of each party, and given that energy issues have many aspects of the events that the oil market is witnessing such as supply disruptions and price shocks, and therefore each party intends to maximize its share of the profit through price control or taxation on petroleum products, and it is clear that the problem of profit distribution is a zero-sum game, leaving a narrow space for dialogue and negotiation between the two sides, and the most important can be included. The focal points that could be an obstacle to serious dialogue between producing countries (OPEC) and consuming countries are as follows:

a) Supply Security Concerns

Whereas, the concerns of consuming countries regarding the security of their oil supplies are one of the problems of that relationship, and that the core of these concerns is the concept of Oil-dependency, the most important problem of these concerns is the exposure of oil flows to disruptions such as the domestic and international oil network, environmental problems and terrorist attacks on oil installations, which may affect oil prices and production capacity on both matters, especially at the long-term level.

b) The Case for Consulting and Demand Security

The dynamics of supply and demand in the oil market may result in some disturbances that have a major impact on oil supplies and prices, so the unfair distribution of oil reserves could occur. With him a significant variation occurs in the oil market, as the decision to extract and develop these reserves is linked to the actors in the state and the extent to which they are affected by political and economic factors.

c) Climate Change Agenda

Recent concerns about fossil fuels on the environment added another dimension to the problem of energy, at present many consuming countries consider the issue of climate changes not less important than the energy security issue, in the example, there are production concerns of environmental on access issues to wilderness areas Arctic, for example, and the issue of associated gas movement [78, 58p.] and in the mobility stage there are concerns about sedimentation in pipeline and tankers accidents, while in the stage of consumption, there are concerns about the health effects caused by the burning of petroleum products.

d) Interdependence

Acknowledging the existence of the energy problem does not necessarily mean that producing and consuming countries will seek cooperation. What is important in cooperation is that the interests of each party are linked in three aspects:

- That each side faces a common energy problem.
- One-sided actions to address the energy problem could undermine the interests of the other.
- Neither side can solve the energy problem or at least reduce its effects by pursuing policies that differ from the other party; therefore all parties have interests in ensuring the smooth flow of oil from surplus areas to deficit areas.

Therefore, what can we say about the instability of oil prices affects both parties, as the concerns of producers are offset by concerns of consumers, for example an increase in taxes on consumers affects the size of the future market for producing countries, and the search by oil-consuming countries for new spaces for alternative energy leads to suspicion. The uncertainty on the part of producing countries on traditional energies and the role that OPEC affirms is the commitment of its member states to provide adequate supplies to global markets to achieve stability and economic prosperity and encourage sustainable development, and work to achieve balance in energy markets to set a stable price for oil, and confirm the relationship between security The global economy to provide oil and demand security, and to expand dialogue between producers and energy consumers, as large reserves of oil will continue to play a role in the global market [79, 63 p.]. As the statistics of International Energy Agency (IEA) indicate the demand for oil will increase, which will reach 30 million barrels per day in 2030 despite the fact that the financial crisis of 2008 made the task of predicting prices difficult as a result of severe price fluctuations, and the demand for energy declined to some extent from the Arab side [80, 12 p.].

After we tried to study the effective role of OPEC in the global oil market, and the interdependence relationship between energy producers and consumers and the determining factors of that relationship, and we continued that the reserves and production levels of the oil-exporting countries still play a pivotal role on the energy map of the world, we are trying to realize the extent of the impact of the energy capabilities of the Caspian Sea is on the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries in terms of quality, competitive prices and global markets, especially if we take the approach of competition for oil prices, which may be the main variable in the field of view of the extent to which the Caspian Sea has been able to create a suitable atmosphere for foreign investment at the lowest cost, and the ability to meet global energy reserves Especially in the oil-hungry countries of Europe, and in front of the major challenges facing the European Union countries, an example of this is Ukraine, which sees its counterfeiting with gas coming from Russia that threatens its national security and trying to contain it under the Russian umbrella, and today the role has become greater for Qatari-Ukrainian cooperation on supply to Ukraine. With gas to reduce the Russian role in the region and prevent gas crises like what happened in a years 2006-2009 [81, 120p.] Therefore, it is necessary to look at the position of Caspian oil on the geopolitical map and its effectiveness in energy supplies in exchange for raising its economy in the first place, and protecting its interests with the European Union countries. Before entering this position, it is worth noting the advantages of Arab oil over others. Other types of oil include:

-The costs of Arab oil production are much cheaper than the costs of oil production in other regions, as Kuwaiti and Saudi oil each include as the cheapest oil in the world, as the cost of capital expenditure per barrel produced is less than one dollar compared to 15 dollar, the cost of producing one barrel in the United States of America.

-Most of the Arab oil deposits are close to the surface of the earth and do not need large drilling, as the reservoirs are less than 100 meters deep, like the northern fields in Iraq.

-Geographical location regions petroleum production represents an integrated center for the production, export and marketing of petroleum to consuming countries, which results in a decrease in transportation costs. For example, the average location of the Arabian Gulf between the East and the West enables it to supply the continent of Asia and southern and northern Europe with available quantities of energy.

-Arab oil is considered one of the finest types of oil in the world due to the low sulphur content compared to other types of oil. The huge quantities of Arab oil reserves, which amounted to 683.66 billion barrels during 2010, which represents 57% of global reserves.

-The major industrial countries depend on Arab oil as an important source of energy and as a raw material for the petrochemical industries [82, 79 p.].

If we assume that the major oil – producing countries in the Persian Gulf represent about 45% of the world 's proven oil reserves, and providing 20 – 25% of the current global oil demand reserves, but the most important obstacle faced by the energy cut production in order to raise oil prices globally and seek expansion the size of their market shares at the expense of price levels in general, especially since the Caspian Sea reserves represent a major challenge to the supremacy of the Arab Gulf, as a pivotal resource of energy to global markets. The rise in oil prices in the Gulf opens a new front for investment in other producing countries, but the important matter remains for the Caspian Sea, it is not only an issue of determining the price of oil, but another challenge related to the geographical area that is globally locked up, in addition to the complex economic, logistical and geopolitical obstacles that impede the transformation of this region into a major oil-producing region, and thus oil production in the Caspian Sea in this case It will not pose a major threat to oil exports to the Gulf countries in the first place [83, 76 p.].

Even if there is a decrease in oil prices in the world, the Gulf countries can benefit from their ability to adapt to market share and stimulate the use of additional quantities of oil and thus economic expansion that creates with it the creation of additional energy demand. The Arab Gulf exports amount to 19.1 million barrels per day for the year 2020 according to International Energy Agency, while the Caspian Sea exports by 2020 reached 3.6 million barrels per day, and thus there is a great paradox between the two sides, as for the North Sea exports, which in turn is one of the largest energy suppliers in the world as its exports reach for 2020 to 2.5 million barrels, on a parallel line to some extent with the Caspian Sea compared with the Arab Gulf states, it should be noted here that OPEC is seeking today to expand

outside the Gulf – wide Arab in marine areas like Nigeria, Algeria, Indonesia, and Venezuela greatly expanded production in western Africa and North America, while the decline in US oil production is compensated for by increases in production in Canada and Mexico [83, 78 p.]. At the same time, Caspian oil remains at the present time of particular importance if what is it about the foreign markets for the consumption of Caspian oil.

If we take into account the geographical proximity, transportation costs and the solution to the problems of establishing power transmission lines, then the western markets are located in the Mediterranean region and in western Europe, and therefore geographical proximity can play a role in reconsidering the transportation of Caspian oil, especially in European countries in the first place, as well. Another point is the attraction of the European investor to the quality of the Caspian Sea oil, especially that the oil extracted from Azerbaijan is light, free of sulphur and high quality, and this makes it of European polarization according to environmental standards, and therefore it is likely that the Caspian Sea will compete with OPEC, which is produced within the direction of east and south Asian countries such as China, for example, to pay attention to oil from the Caspian Sea, which is one of the largest consumers of oil in the world, but the question remains to what extent the Caspian Sea has succeeded in attracting foreign investments to exploit the enormous energy capabilities estimated at 15-31 billion barrels, it can be said in this regard that the first obstacle to the Caspian Sea is the occurrence of hydrocarbon resources in a remote area of the main energy-consuming regions in the world, which poses the high cost, a problem and a challenge at the same time, compared with the oil of the Gulf countries that are reliant. The low period, and as we have already mentioned that the Caspian Sea is surrounded by land and does not have sea outlets to global markets, which makes it difficult to transport oil in local ports to international destinations, and pipelines are expensive and transient to neighbouring countries, which creates the problem of sharing profits and creating conflict zones in the region [83, 80 p.].

Thus it can be said that the future of oil supplies and prices is the ongoing debate on energy security between the three big directions, the first trend which is represented by the “Limits to Growth School” [84, 58 p.] , which appeared in the seventies and which suggests that oil reserves in the world are limited by analogy to the need throughout the globe, and therefore they will dwindle sooner or later with the continuous increase of demand by the developed and growing worlds together. As for the supporters of the “Depletion School”, among them the two geologists Colin Campbell and Jean Lahri make an argument that the world is approaching or may have already reached the psychologically important midpoint on the basis of remaining reserves of about 900-1000 billion barrels of production. The result is distress and intense friction around prices while optimists speculate, for example, workers on the US Geological Survey say that this midpoint of depletion may still far from decades at worst. As for the International Energy Agency believes that the midpoint of depletion will be achieved between 2015 and 2030, as discoveries and the introduction of more efficient extraction from existing reserves will be the main factors leading to price moderation, and therefore it can be said that energy sources

are considered a scarce resource, for any point in the world in which there is an energy reserve that is not known internationally [84]. The amount to which the importance of Gulf, North African, and North Sea oil is given to the same extent that Caspian oil is concerned at the present time, as for the future of energy depends on the extent of the seriousness of the dialogue between producers and consumers, and the adoption of a negotiation mechanism instead of a mechanism of wars in order to drain energy.

As long as the countries that are located around the Caspian Sea are not in a strong economic position, large sums of money will need to be invested in order for these projects to be successful, and wells will need to be opened up to allow for foreign investment. The most important factor in the success of any project involving the Caspian Sea, particularly in terms of the cost of transportation, is that the project must have significant economic returns. Nevertheless, the legal impediment continues to be the most significant one in deciding the course that these projects will take [85].

When it comes to the global oil market, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) holds sway over both supply and price. It's better known by its abbreviation, OPEC. Some of the world's leading oil producers, known as "Members of OPEC," work together to adjust output in order to keep oil prices stable. As one of the world's most important oil and gas producing regions, the Caspian Sea region has a major impact on OPEC's operations.

The Caspian Sea is surrounded entirely by land. It is estimated that there are 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet of natural gas in the area surrounding the Caspian Sea. The area around the Caspian Sea is a significant oil producer. Many international oil companies have taken note of the region's oil reserves and are investing heavily in its exploration and production as a result.

Even though OPEC has a lot of sway over the Caspian Sea oil market, they don't have complete hegemony. Countries in the area range from OPEC members to non-OPEC countries. For instance, Azerbaijan has emerged as a major player in the international oil market despite the fact that it is not a member of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). Kazakhstan is a major oil producer in the region around the Caspian Sea, despite the fact that it is not a member of the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC).

The primary way in which OPEC exerts its influence on the oil market of the Caspian Sea is through its control of the prices of oil on the worldwide market. In general, higher oil prices result when members of OPEC reduce their output of oil, while lower oil prices are typically observed when OPEC members raise their output. These price shifts have the potential to have a major influence on the profits made by oil corporations operating in the region surrounding the Caspian Sea. For instance, as a result of the dramatic decline in the price of oil in 2014, many oil companies with operations in the region were obliged to reduce the amount of time and money spent on exploration and production [86, 56 p.].

The operations of OPEC have an effect on the oil market of the Caspian Sea in another way, and that is through its interaction with oil-producing countries that are not members of OPEC. Historically, OPEC has pursued the goal of maintaining its

dominating position in the global oil market by attempting to negotiate output cuts with nations that are not members of OPEC. Because non-OPEC countries in the region have sometimes been required to curtail production in order to comply with these agreements, there has been a considerable impact on the oil market surrounding the Caspian Sea as a result of these accords.

In spite of this, OPEC's influence on the oil market of the Caspian Sea has been dwindling during the past few years. One of the reasons for this is the growth of new oil-producing countries outside of OPEC, such as the United States, which has emerged as a significant oil producer in recent years. This is one of the reasons why the price of oil has increased. The increased production in the United States has had a considerable influence on the price of oil on a worldwide scale, which has in turn had an effect on the profitability of oil businesses that operate in the Caspian Sea region.

The development of new oil transportation infrastructure is one more factor that contributes to OPEC's diminishing power in the region surrounding the Caspian Sea. Access to the region surrounding the Caspian Sea has always been restricted, which has made transporting oil extracted from the area a formidable obstacle. The construction of new pipelines and rail infrastructure over the course of the past several years has, on the other hand, made it simpler for oil corporations to transfer oil from the region to markets around the world. This has resulted in a reduction in the region's dependence on OPEC for the provision of transportation infrastructure and has provided oil corporations with increased operational flexibility.

OPEC continues to be a significant player in the oil market of the Caspian Sea, despite the difficulties that have been presented. Because the organization is in a position to influence the overall price of oil on a worldwide scale, the decisions it makes have the potential to significantly affect the profitability of oil firms operating in the region. Additionally, because OPEC is able to negotiate production cuts with nations that are not members of OPEC, the organization can still exert some level of influence over production levels in the region [87, 56 p.].

The implications for OPEC of the discovery of oil deposits in the area around the Caspian Sea are significant. In order to maximise profits for its members, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) coordinates production and prices. Potentially changing the dynamics of the global oil market and OPEC's ability to maintain price stability is the introduction of new oil production areas, such as those in the Caspian Sea.

In recent years, the region surrounding the Caspian Sea has emerged as an important source of oil production [87, 58 p.]. Significant oil reserves may be found in the countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. These nations have made significant financial investments in the expansion of their oil production capacities, including the construction of pipelines and refineries to transport and process the crude oil. The development of these reserves has increased competition in the global oil market, which is particularly problematic for members of OPEC whose economies are highly reliant on oil exports to generate revenue.

Tensions have arisen between OPEC and the countries surrounding the Caspian Sea as a result of the growing significance of the Caspian Sea region in the

international oil market. OPEC has attempted to limit output in order to maintain high prices, but the countries surrounding the Caspian Sea have expanded production in order to strengthen their economies. Because of this, OPEC and the countries surrounding the Caspian Sea have found themselves at odds with output quotas and price methods.

The oil production in the Caspian Sea area has been affected by the global shift towards the use of renewable energy sources. There has been less demand for oil because countries have invested more in renewable energy sources like wind and solar power in recent years. This has led to a decrease in the price of oil and, consequently, a reduction in investment in oil infrastructure in the Caspian Sea region.

The region around the Caspian Sea continues to produce oil despite these challenges, and this oil is vital to the global economy. The oil reserves in the region are of great interest to countries that must import oil as a source of energy, and new technology is making it easier and cheaper to access these assets. The struggle between OPEC and the Caspian Sea countries is likely to continue as both sides seek to maximise profits from oil production [87, 56p.].

The ability of OPEC to maintain price control in the long run will continue to be impacted by the growth of oil reserves in the region surrounding the Caspian Sea. The ever-increasing competition in the global oil market, the transition toward renewable energy sources, and the geopolitical tensions between OPEC and non-OPEC oil-producing countries will all contribute to a dynamic in the oil market that is both complex and constantly changing.

Caspian Sea is a region of tremendous significance for the countries that are located in its immediate vicinity because of its geostrategic location and the geological structure of the Caspian Sea. Because of its location between Europe and Asia, the Caspian Sea has become an important hub for trade and transportation. In addition, the geological structure of the region has made it an important source of natural resources such as oil and gas.

The implications for OPEC of the discovery of oil deposits in the area around the Caspian Sea are significant. In order to maximise profits for its members, the Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) coordinates production and prices. It is possible that the dynamics of the global oil market, and OPEC's ability to maintain price stability, will change as a result of the introduction of new sources of oil production, such as those in the Caspian Sea.

2 The legal status of the Caspian Sea and Iran

2.1 Existing Legal Framework and its Activation after the Collapse of the Soviet Union

The next section will discuss the Caspian Sea's legal status and its implications for the states involved. Following the stages of this process, this section will discuss the negotiations between the countries with a stake in the Caspian Sea and shed light on the legal framework of the Caspian prior to the collapse and disintegration of the

Soviet Union. Until the issue of the sea's legal status was resolved, many energy experts believed that its oil riches could not be exploited to their full potential.

Prior to this point in time, the legal status of the Caspian Sea was established on the basis of two primary documents: the Treaty of 1921 between the Socialist Federal Republic of Russia and Iran, and the Trade and Navigation Treaty of 1940 between the Soviet Union and Iran. To begin, we'd like to emphasise that the issue of the Caspian Sea's legal status first surfaced at the start of 1992 [88, 18p.]. We'd like to bring this up right away because it's important.

To determine the legal status of the largest inland waters in the world and put an end to the ways to exploit the wealth in these waters, Iran and Russia, along with Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, met in Tehran in 1992 to develop a joint statement. In order to determine the legal status of the largest inland waters in the world and put an end to the ways to exploit the wealth in these waters, the meeting's participants decided to form a regional organisation for cooperation.

I will divide this section into three main categories: (1) the legal framework of the Caspian before and after the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union; (2) the negotiations between the five countries on this legal distribution of the Caspian Sea's wealth; and (3) the evolution of these countries' positions surrounding the legal status of the Caspian Sea.

The Caspian Sea, located in the heart of Asia, is a truly unique body of water. Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan form its five encompassing countries. The governments that sit on the Caspian Sea's shores have been debating the sea's legal status for centuries, with each country staking its own claim to the sea and a variety of competing interests. In this paper, we will examine the legal status of the Caspian Sea by discussing its background, different legal systems, and current problems.

The area surrounding the Caspian Sea has been inhabited by humans for thousands of years, as evidenced by ancient settlements and trade routes. Many different countries and empires have fought over the years to see who can rule the region around the Caspian Sea. Iran and Russia shared the Caspian Sea during the Soviet era, after that they had to share the basin with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Since then, the official classification of the Caspian Sea has been a matter of debate.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the newly independent states have been unable to settle their differences over the Caspian Sea's official status. A lack of clear legal frameworks and regulations led to frequent armed engagements over maritime boundaries, fishing rights, and resource extraction. The lack of well-defined laws and regulations was a major factor in fueling these disagreements. Nonetheless, the Caspian Sea's coastal republics have made significant progress in recent years towards establishing a legal framework for the sea.

A separate legal regime, neither a lake nor a sea, for the Caspian Sea was established in August 2018 when the five littoral governments signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. The sea has special legal status that sets it apart from other bodies of water like lakes and oceans. The Convention established

norms for extraction of resources and the delimitation of maritime boundaries in addition to navigation, fishing, and environmental protection.

According to the Convention, there are two distinct areas in the Caspian Sea: the territorial seas and the common water. The common water zone includes all of the waterbodies beyond the territorial waters, which extend outward from the coast for fifteen nautical miles. The ability to explore and exploit the resources in one's territorial waters is one of the unique privileges afforded to states with coastlines. The littoral states have equal rights and responsibilities to exploit resources and protect the environment in the common water zone.

Despite signing the Convention, the littoral governments of the Caspian Sea remain divided over the sea's legal status. One of the most challenging tasks is determining where the maritime boundaries are, especially between Azerbaijan and Iran and Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. These conflicts have persisted for decades and on occasion escalated into open warfare.

The environmental damage caused by Caspian Sea resource extraction is another problem the region must overcome. Pollution, oil spills, and the elimination of natural habitats have all had devastating effects on marine life, threatening the region's delicate ecosystem. To ensure the Caspian Sea and its resources are developed sustainably, the littoral governments of the sea must collaborate to establish clear norms and standards.

Because of the interplay of historical, political, and economic factors, the Caspian Sea's legal status is a moving target. The littoral states of the Caspian Sea have been experiencing a number of challenges, and the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea is a major step towards establishing a legal framework for the sea and resolving these issues. However, ongoing issues like the impact of resource exploitation on the environment and the delineation of maritime boundaries require ongoing collaboration and conversation to resolve. All of the littoral states need to show a commitment to cooperation, transparency, and environmental protection for the Caspian Sea to reach its full economic and stabilizing potential [88, 45 p.]

The strained relations between the Iranians and the Russian Empire, particularly after the violent confrontation that occurred between them outside of the Caucasus, were the impetus for the beginning of the process of constructing the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The disagreement between Britain and Russia over whether or not the land around the Caspian Sea should be divided along the same lines as the waters of the Caspian Sea served as a foundation or a launching pad from which to develop a legal framework for this body of water. The "Saint Petersburg" and "Rasht" agreements laid forth the framework for the legal status of the Caspian Sea before to the formation of the Soviet Union. This laid the groundwork for the existing legal position. This final agreement establishes Russia's rights and advantages over a portion of the territory along the Caspian Sea coast that were previously held by Iran but have now been transferred to Russia by the Iranians. It should be emphasized that the right to own warships was only granted to the Russian Empire. This document also establishes the new system of trade and navigation in the Caspian Sea as well as

the Kura and Aras rivers. And in contrast to the "Saint Petersburg" agreement, this deal has explained some of the rights of the Iranians, particularly with regard to navigation. As a result, Russia and other parties involved have simply granted the Iranians their portion of the rights in South Caucasus, which they had previously lost after approximately a century. This agreement put an end to the first war between the Russians and the Iranians, and depending on the fifth paragraph of the treaty text, it prevents the Iranians from owning a naval fleet in the Caspian Sea, but it has the right to retain the rights of navigation with commercial purposes freely. The "Treaty of Golestn" was the first agreement that accurately clarified the legal status of the Caspian Sea. It was concluded in 1813. For the first time, the Caspian defined a legal status or position in the form of a military agreement in favor of Russia [89]. Unlike the Iranians, this agreement granted the Russian Empire full rights to conduct or practice any activity in the region. In addition, the agreement granted the Russian Empire full rights to conduct or practice any action in the region.

As a result of the signing of the peace treaty in 1828 known as the "Treaty of Turkmenchay," the second war that took place between the Russians and the Iranians came to an end. This treaty replaced the one that had been signed earlier and was named after the location where it was ratified. According to the eighth paragraph of the agreement, Persian merchant ships have the same rights and privileges as all ships bearing any of the flags of the tsars of Russia, which reserves the right to own a naval fleet for the only purpose of conducting military operations. This provision does not apply to Russia's right to own a naval fleet for the purpose of conducting military operations. The "Treaty of Turkmenchay" established that the Aras River would serve as the border between Russia and Iran. During this particular time period, the first definitions of the Caspian Sea began to be produced or constructed from the perspective of international law. The renowned international law expert Friedrich Martens knew it as follows: the Caspian Sea is a body of water that lies between the Caspian and Black seas. "seas surrounded by lands belonging to the same state, which does not associate with any ocean, placed in a position contrary to fully of the open sea, it is a sailor closed under the authority of the state that is completely around it. In this perspective, the Caspian Sea is considered to be a subordinate of Russia, despite the fact that its waters are on the shore of both the Russian Empire and Iran [90, p.25] ...and up until the fall of the Soviet Union, the latter had embraced and been using this term.

Tsarist Russia did not take a firm position regarding its land and sea borders under the pretext that all land and sea borders are ambiguous, and therefore it wanted to acquire the sea [91, 48 p.]. This was despite the fact that numerous agreements had been signed, as well as the fact that extensive research and studies had been conducted on the nature of the legal status of the Caspian Sea.

The Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 brought about significant changes to the legal framework governing the Caspian Sea. On February 26th, 1921, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed between the Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic and Iran. This treaty nullified all previous agreements that were deemed to be in violation of international law. According to the terms of this treaty,

Russia is no longer entitled to any of the rights that it had previously asserted at the Persians' expense.

In the trade treaty and navigation that was held between Iran and the Soviet Union on March 2, 1940, it was announced that the Caspian Sea is joint ownership between the two parties. However, there is not in any paragraph or provision of this Treaty that refers to the proportions of this joint ownership or distribution between the parties. As a result of this, the Soviet Union considered the link between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan as a dividing line between the two countries [92, p.56].

It is crucial to highlight that none of the treaties or agreements signed between the two nations ever explicitly addressed the legal status or territorial delineation of the Caspian Sea, whether in a direct or indirect manner. Even though these agreements have been in place for several years, both parties have yet to arrive at a mutual understanding or establish a definitive legal framework governing the Caspian Sea.

According to Soviet legislation on state borders, enacted in 1982, the demarcation of national boundaries—except in cases where an existing agreement or international treaty dictates otherwise—was determined based on a longitudinal axis that connected the furthest border points of the Soviet Union and the perimeters of any given body of water, such as a lake or basin. This suggests that the Soviet Union regarded the Caspian Sea as a lake for demarcation purposes [93, 18 p.].

Nevertheless, none of these treaties accounted for the geopolitical transformations or ramifications that followed the dissolution of the Soviet Union. The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 drastically altered the governance of the Caspian Sea. Once under Soviet jurisdiction, the Caspian Sea now fell under the purview of five independent nations—Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan—each of which had to establish new legal arrangements to regulate its use and governance. The following sections examine the current legal framework that oversees the Caspian Sea and the complexities surrounding its implementation since the Soviet collapse.

A long-standing point of contention among the bordering nations has been whether the Caspian Sea should be legally classified as a sea or a lake. Historically, the Soviet Union treated the Caspian as a lake, which meant that neighboring states were not entitled to exclusive economic zones or continental shelves. However, following the Soviet Union's dissolution, the newly independent coastal states began asserting territorial claims, leading to increased tensions and disputes over resource distribution and maritime boundaries.

A significant milestone in the effort to establish a legal foundation for the Caspian Sea was the signing of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea in November 2003. As one of the first international agreements concerning the Caspian, this convention laid the

groundwork for regional cooperation in environmental preservation. It aimed to combat pollution, protect marine biodiversity, and promote sustainable development. Additionally, the agreement established a permanent Secretariat in Tehran, tasked with overseeing environmental initiatives across the region.

In 2007, the coastal nations signed the Declaration on the Basic Principles of the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. This document recognized the Caspian as a unique legal entity that did not fit neatly into the conventional categories of either a lake or a sea. The declaration provided a framework for future negotiations concerning its governance and delineated fundamental principles regarding its use and conservation. These principles emphasized respect for national sovereignty, territorial integrity, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the sustainable management of the Caspian's resources [76, 28 p.].

Despite these efforts, the activation and enforcement of the legal framework for the Caspian Sea have proven to be slow and arduous. One of the most persistent challenges has been the delineation of maritime boundaries among the coastal states, particularly in disputes involving Azerbaijan and Iran, as well as Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. These disagreements have hindered progress in achieving a comprehensive legal resolution for the region.

The collapse of the Soviet Union significantly disrupted the legal governance of the Caspian Sea. Before its dissolution, the Soviet Union maintained control over the entire sea, basing its regulations on Soviet-era legal doctrines. However, following the Soviet Union's fragmentation, the legal landscape became ambiguous, giving rise to territorial disputes among Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Iran [38, 78 p.].

Despite these difficulties, notable advancements have been made in recent years toward formulating a unified legal framework for the Caspian Sea. In 2003, the five littoral states endorsed the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, which established a cooperative mechanism for addressing environmental concerns. Furthermore, in 2018, these nations ratified the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, a landmark agreement that provided a structured legal framework and sought to resolve longstanding disputes over territorial rights and resource access [73, 18 p.].

The implementation of this legal framework has played a crucial role in fostering stability and cooperation in the Caspian region. By creating clear legal guidelines for the exploitation and management of resources, the framework has helped reduce tensions and improve diplomatic relations among the Caspian states. Additionally, it has facilitated collaborative efforts in environmental conservation and the enhancement of regional transportation infrastructure.

However, despite these promising developments, significant obstacles remain in fully realizing the potential of the established legal framework. Many of the provisions outlined in these agreements remain largely theoretical, as their practical enforcement is still untested. This could lead to continued disputes over resource allocation and maritime jurisdiction. Moreover, the effectiveness of the legal framework may be undermined by broader geopolitical tensions among the Caspian states, as well as global factors such as climate change and the transition to renewable energy sources.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 had a profound impact on the governance of the Caspian Sea. Under Soviet rule, the Caspian was managed as a single entity with strict environmental regulations. However, with the emergence of five independent states sharing its coastline, the sea's legal framework became increasingly complex, necessitating new agreements to address emerging challenges. While significant progress has been made in establishing a legal structure, the region continues to grapple with unresolved disputes and difficulties in implementing agreed-upon regulations.

Another initiative is the Caspian Sea Trust Fund, which was established in 2007. The trust fund aims to mobilize financial resources to support environmental conservation and sustainable development in the Caspian Sea region. The trust fund has provided financial support for a number of projects, including the development of sustainable tourism initiatives, the establishment of environmental monitoring systems, and the promotion of sustainable fishing practices.

Despite these initiatives, the effectiveness of the legal and institutional frameworks for environmental management and governance in the Caspian Sea remains limited. The lack of ratification of the Caspian Sea Convention by all the countries bordering the Caspian Sea limits its effectiveness in promoting a unified approach to environmental management and governance. The lack of resources and technical capacity of the countries bordering the sea also limits their ability to implement and enforce environmental regulations, monitor environmental impacts, and respond effectively to environmental emergencies.

To improve the effectiveness of the legal and institutional frameworks for environmental management and governance in the Caspian Sea, several steps can be taken. First, all the countries bordering the Caspian Sea should ratify the Caspian Sea Convention and implement its provisions. This will help promote a unified approach to environmental management and governance in the region. Second, the countries bordering the sea should invest in the development of technical capacity and resources to enable them to implement and enforce environmental regulations effectively, monitor environmental impacts, and respond to environmental emergencies. Third, greater collaboration and coordination among the countries bordering the Caspian Sea and the international community are needed to address the complex environmental challenges facing the region.

In conclusion, the problem of evaluating the Caspian Sea after the Soviet Union dissolution is complex and multi-faceted. The legal and institutional frameworks for environmental management and governance are complex, the countries bordering the sea have competing interests, and the region faces significant environmental challenges. Addressing these challenges will require a coordinated effort among the countries bordering the Caspian Sea, as well as the international community. The development of a unified approach to environmental management and governance, increased resources and technical capacity, and stronger enforcement of environmental regulations are all essential steps towards ensuring the long-term sustainability of the Caspian Sea. The initiatives undertaken by the countries bordering the sea and the international community are a step in the right direction, but much more needs to be done to ensure the protection of this unique and fragile ecosystem.

The situation changed radically after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and the geopolitical changes that took place in the region. The problem of the legal status of Caspian Sea appeared again in relation to neighbouring countries and even countries interested in investing in the region. The most important factors that led to the re-emergence of this problem can be summarized as follows:

- The dissolution of the Soviet Union resulted in the emergence of three countries aspiring to obtain a share of the Caspian Sea's wealth.
- The emergence of new studies confirming that the Caspian Sea is a major source of oil reserves in the region, amounting to four times more than what the Russians have declared.
- Calling upon new countries for cooperation directed at foreign investors.
- The national awakening of the ruling elites in the three new states [52, 48 p.].

These factors were accompanied by the emergence of a group of questions that imposed themselves on the international arena regarding this problem, the most important of which we refer to that question that raised the possibility of cancelling all agreements and treaties that were previously concluded between the Soviet Union and other countries after its collapse and disintegration, and in the manner of geopolitical transformations in the region. The agreements relating to the Caspian Sea can be considered not valid, and from it is necessary to talk about a new situation, and whether the Caspian is a closed sea or a lake with borders.

Before 1991, everything was clear, as the situation was in the hands of two actors, but now agreement and negotiations must take place between five actors who complicate the situation, in addition to the absence of any legal culture for the new countries and the absence of any practice at the level of international relations, and this is a result of their affiliation to the Soviet Union, as the three countries always used the center to consult it before taking any decision, especially with regard to concluding and contract agreements and treaties. Therefore, these modern countries have shown caution in dealing with issues of an international dimension, and "have pursued peaceful methods to address the problem" [94].

In this regard, it is possible to point out a set of legal loopholes that characterized previous treaties, the most important of which are:

- Previous treaties ignored the participation and opinion of the former states of the Soviet Union.
- Previous treaties do not represent any reference to the borders of all states. (administrative boundaries)
- Previous treaties did not accept in any way any possibility for the number of Caspian riparian states to rise from two to five.
- Previous treaties have not ended the problematic exploitation of the sea floor and its waters [94].

Within the realm of international law, resolving the legal status of the Caspian Sea has remained an elusive goal due to its ambiguous classification. Historically, negotiations with the Soviet Union revolved around two primary perspectives—whether the Caspian should be regarded as a closed sea or a confined lake. The core dilemma was not merely a matter of defining its legal status but also how its vast natural resources should be equitably divided and exploited. This challenge was not confined to the five littoral states alone—Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan—but also extended to global investors and energy corporations eager to tap into the region’s abundant reserves. Amidst these broader concerns, the issue of maritime navigation, though legally significant, was largely overshadowed by the more pressing disputes over resource control and jurisdiction.

The Lasting Impact of the Soviet Collapse

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 fundamentally reshaped the geopolitical landscape of the Caspian Sea region. With the emergence of independent states such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, unresolved questions concerning sovereignty and resource ownership became more pronounced. The absence of a unified legal framework has made the fair and sustainable utilization of the Caspian's vast reserves—oil, gas, and fisheries—an ongoing challenge. This legal uncertainty has fueled regional tensions, as each country seeks to assert its rights over lucrative offshore fields and strategic maritime zones.

Beyond the immediate regional disputes, the Caspian Sea's role in global energy markets has added another layer of complexity. With its vast hydrocarbon deposits, the region has become a focal point for international energy policies, pipeline negotiations, and geopolitical maneuvering. The lack of a definitive legal structure has made foreign investment in the Caspian a legally and politically sensitive endeavor, further complicating efforts to establish long-term cooperation among the littoral states.

Progress and Remaining Challenges

Despite decades of negotiations, a fully binding resolution on the Caspian Sea’s legal status has yet to be achieved. Multiple bilateral and multilateral agreements have been signed over the years, but many critical issues remain

unresolved. However, one of the most significant milestones in recent history was the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018. This agreement marked a major step toward establishing a structured legal foundation for governing the sea and its resources. While the convention provided a clearer framework for cooperation, many aspects—particularly concerning the precise division of territorial waters and resource-rich seabed zones—are still subject to ongoing negotiations.

In conclusion, the Caspian Sea remains a region of both opportunity and contention. While efforts have been made to clarify its legal status, challenges persist, shaped by historical legacies, economic interests, and geopolitical dynamics. The evolving energy landscape and increasing global demand for resources will likely continue to shape the future of the Caspian, making it a focal point of legal, political, and economic negotiations for years to come [52, 32 p.]. This agreement seeks to encourage cooperation and stability in the region, and it does so by laying the groundwork for a legal framework that will govern the extraction of the sea's resources.

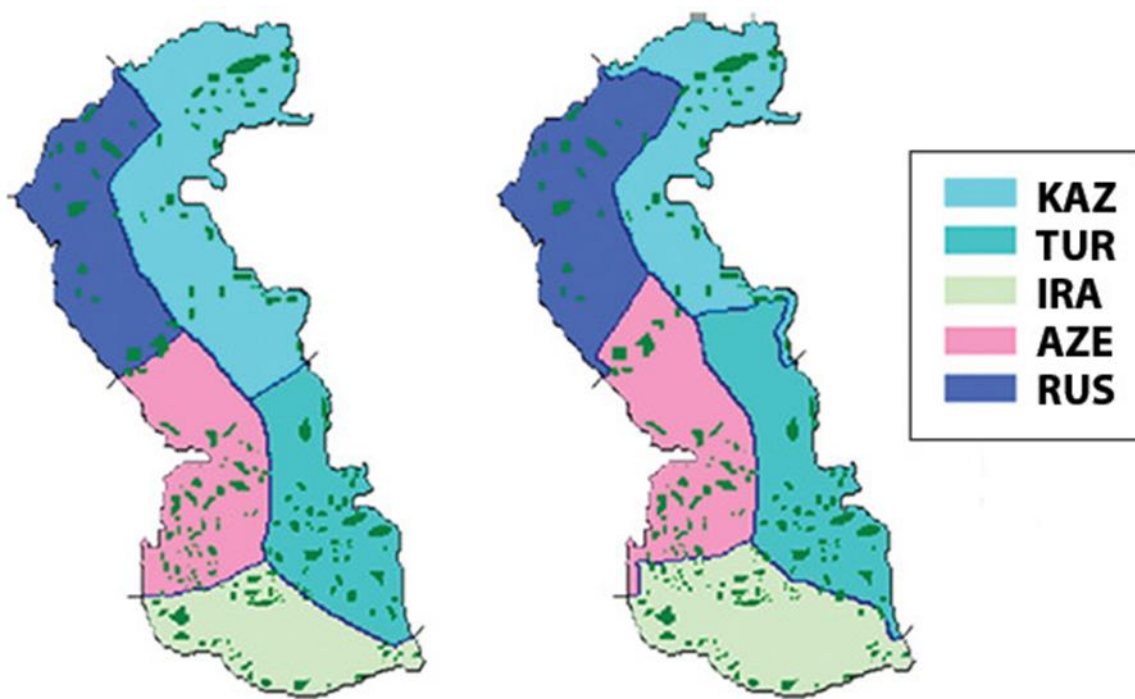


Figure – 4 Caspian Sea division (<https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/caspian-sea-negotiation-support-system/>)

After the fall of the Soviet Union, one of the most complicated and difficult problems that has arisen is determining the legal status of the Caspian Sea and its resources. There has been some progress made in a positive direction, but there is still a lot of work to be done to ensure the sustainable and equitable management of the sea's resources and to promote peace and security in the region.

2.2 Legal Status of Caspian Sea in International Law

The Caspian Sea, often referred to as the Sea of Treasuries, stands as the largest enclosed body of water globally. Situated in Central Asia, it is surrounded by five nations: Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. Its abundant natural resources and strategic position have made it a focal point of legal disputes over the years. To comprehend its legal standing under international law, it is essential to examine the various agreements and treaties aimed at resolving these conflicts.

Historically, there has been debate over whether the Caspian Sea should be classified as a lake or a sea. This classification has significant implications for how its resources and waters are divided among the neighboring states. Some nations advocate for its recognition as a sea, which would alter the distribution of sovereignty and resource control.

A key issue influencing the Caspian Sea's legal status is the ownership of its oil and gas reserves. These resources are crucial to the economies of the surrounding countries, making their legal status a significant economic and geographical challenge.

Over the years, numerous treaties and agreements have been signed to address disputes and define the sea's legal status. The absence of a comprehensive international agreement has perpetuated these issues. The roots of the controversy trace back to the Soviet era, with treaties signed between Iran and the Soviet Union in 1921 and 1940, which divided the sea into two parts and allocated equal resource shares to each country. The dissolution of the Soviet Union introduced new complexities, as new governments emerged and previous treaties became obsolete.

In 1991, the Caspian Sea Working Group was formed to tackle the sea's legal status issues, leading to the Tehran Convention in 2002. This convention provided a framework for managing and conserving the sea's resources but did not resolve the fundamental legal status question.

A significant development occurred in 2018 when the five bordering nations signed the Agreement on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. This agreement established a framework for the sea's legal status, including water division and common area delineation. Importantly, it recognized the Caspian Sea as a unique body of water, reflecting its geographical and political intricacies.

The treaty introduced a "special legal regime" for the Caspian Sea, setting it apart from other bodies of water. For example, it allows bordering countries to restrict the passage of foreign ships, a provision not typically permitted under international law. The treaty also includes mechanisms for negotiating and mediating disputes

among the bordering nations, with the option of referring unresolved issues to an ad hoc arbitration panel for a legally binding resolution.

Despite these advancements, certain challenges remain. One concern is the military presence in the Caspian Sea. While the convention permits bordering countries to maintain military forces in their territorial waters, it prohibits foreign military presence. However, the implementation and enforcement of this provision remain unclear.

Environmental protection is another pressing issue. The Caspian Sea's ecosystem is rich in biodiversity, and the extraction of natural resources like oil and gas poses a threat to its environment. Although the convention includes provisions for resource conservation and management, their effectiveness in practice is yet to be seen.

Additionally, the role of external actors in the Caspian Sea region is a concern. The sea's strategic location between Europe and Asia attracts the attention of major powers such as the United States, China, and the European Union. While these countries do not border the sea and have no direct stake in its legal status, their involvement can influence the region and its resources.

In summary, the legal status of the Caspian Sea has been a contentious issue for decades, with each bordering nation having its own claims and interests. Various treaties and declarations have addressed the matter over the years, culminating in the 2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. While this agreement has resolved many lingering questions, challenges and concerns persist. Continued collaboration among the bordering nations is crucial for the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea's resources, as well as for addressing the interests of external actors and the broader international community.

The earliest agreements on the Caspian Sea's legal status date back to the 18th century, with 19th-century conflicts between Iran and Russia further clarifying aspects of the Caspian Sea system. Located in northern Iran and southeastern Russia, the sea's legal framework initially favored the Russian Empire and later the Soviet Union. These early treaties, primarily bilateral between Russia (and later the Soviet Union) and Iran, established navigation and fishing rights but failed to address seabed delineation, leaving a significant gap in the legal framework.

The issue of the legal status of the Caspian Sea was thrust into the center of political life in the region during the tenth and eleventh years of the twenty-first century as a result of geopolitical shifts and transformations that occurred in the region. The collapse of the Soviet Union brought an end to the authority and control of the Communist doctrine on the issue of the Caspian Sea, and as a result, it compelled the search for a new legal framework itself, since all questions and ideas circled around one question: Is the Caspian a closed sea or a limited lake? It was not

possible to apply international water law to the Caspian Sea, which complicated the process of defining the legal framework for the Caspian Sea. The problem that complicated this process was represented in the absence of similar cases that can be measured, and the solution here appears to be an agreement between the parties involved. In the context of the attempts to answer this question, a group of factors emerged that also tried to push for the progress of the process of setting major milestones to define the legal framework for the Caspian Sea. Please submit your application exclusively in this specific location and circumstance" [96, 14p.].

In conclusion, the legal status of the Caspian Sea in international law has been a subject of great controversy and discussion over the course of recent history. Disputes between the littoral governments have arisen as a result of the absence of a well-defined and universally accepted legal framework for the sea. These disagreements have centered on topics such as maritime boundaries, fishing rights, and the exploitation of natural resources.

In spite of the difficulty of the matter, there have been some encouraging changes in the situation over the course of the past few years. The five littoral governments took a big step toward resolving some of the unresolved concerns in 2018 when they signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. This convention was a milestone toward settling some of the lingering difficulties. The Convention defines the Caspian Sea as a special legal regime, outlining the rights and obligations of the littoral states and establishing a framework for cooperation in the fields of maritime transportation, fisheries, and the exploitation of natural resources. Additionally, the Convention establishes the Caspian Sea as a UNESCO World Heritage Site [97, 16p.].

Despite this, the Caspian Sea's legal status is still a work in progress, as there are a great deal of issues that have yet to be resolved. These include problems with the demarcation of maritime boundaries, the administration of fisheries, and the safeguarding of the marine environment. The growing significance of the Caspian Sea in international energy markets is another factor that contributes to the issue's already complex nature.

There has been some progress made in the establishment of a legal framework for the Caspian Sea; however, there is still a great deal of work to be done in order to guarantee its continued sustainable management and peaceful development. In order to address unresolved concerns and to further the region's long-term peace and prosperity, the littoral governments must continue to participate in conversation and collaboration.

2.3 Economic and political interests of the five states in the Caspian Sea

The five nations surrounding the Caspian Sea—Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan—have been exchanging perspectives on this massive body of water for quite some time. Since the early 2000s, ongoing negotiations about the Caspian Sea's legal status have led to several agreements and declarations. This

section will dive into the discussions among these five countries, highlighting the key issues debated, the agreements reached, and the challenges that remain unresolved.

The Caspian Sea, nestled between Europe and Asia, is the world's largest enclosed body of water. It's home to over 200 million people across its bordering nations and is rich in natural resources like oil and gas. However, since the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, the Caspian Sea's status has been a hot topic of debate. Before the USSR fell, the Caspian was seen as a strategic asset for the Soviets, with its waters split between Iran and the Soviet Union. But after the Soviet breakup, the five newly independent countries began asserting their sovereignty over their respective parts of the sea, sparking disputes over its status and resources.

The negotiations have revolved around a few major issues: the Caspian Sea's legal status, how to divide its waters into national zones, and how to manage its resources. One of the biggest questions is whether the Caspian is a lake or a sea. If it's classified as a lake, international law would require the five countries to split it equally. But if it's considered a sea, each nation would get a 12-mile territorial zone and a 200-mile exclusive economic zone.

Another sticking point is how to divide the Caspian Sea among the five nations. Each country wants the largest possible share, but this is complicated by the fact that the Caspian is landlocked, and there's no clear legal framework for dividing such a body of water. Resource extraction has also been a major focus of the talks. The Caspian Sea is believed to hold vast oil and gas reserves, but some of these are in disputed areas, making it hard to agree on how to share them. Despite these challenges, the five countries have made some progress. In 2003, they signed the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, aiming to protect the sea's ecosystem. Then, in 2018, they reached a landmark agreement with the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which set up a unique legal framework for its use and management [97, 15p.].

One of the key outcomes of the 2018 convention was the division of the Caspian Sea into national sectors. Each country got a share based on the length of its coastline: Iran received 13%, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan each got 19%, Azerbaijan secured 18%, and Russia claimed 21%. The remaining 10% was designated as a shared zone, where all five countries agreed to cooperate on development and resource management [96, 45p.].

The convention also laid out rules for extracting the sea's resources. The countries agreed to work together on oil and gas exploration, with each nation having exclusive rights to resources in its own sector. However, if resources are found in disputed areas, the countries must resolve the issue under international law. Despite these agreements, several challenges remain. One of the biggest is unresolved disputes over resource ownership. For example, Azerbaijan and Iran are still at odds

over the Araz-Alov-Sharg oil fields, while Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan continue to clash over the Kapaz and Serdar fields.

Another issue is the lack of infrastructure in the Caspian Sea region. While there's been significant investment in oil and gas exploration, the lack of transport infrastructure to get these resources to market has driven up costs and limited the economic benefits. Environmental degradation is also a growing concern. The Caspian Sea is heavily polluted due to overfishing, habitat destruction, and other factors, leading to a decline in biodiversity and threatening the livelihoods of local communities.

In short, negotiations over the Caspian Sea have been ongoing for over two decades, resulting in several agreements. But significant challenges remain, including unresolved resource disputes, infrastructure gaps, and environmental damage. To address these issues and ensure sustainable and fair use of the Caspian Sea, the five nations must continue working together. As mentioned earlier, the treaties between the Soviets and Iran didn't account for the new geopolitical realities after the USSR's collapse. With the number of stakeholders jumping from two to five, three of which hadn't signed or ratified the existing agreements, interpretations of the treaties became muddled. Each country began viewing the Caspian Sea issue through its own lens, with some feeling the old treaties no longer applied.

Both Iran and Russia had already identified key resource-rich areas and sought to exploit the situation to their advantage. Initially, Russia and Iran pushed for a system where the seabed would be divided among the five countries without changing its legal status. They proposed a "joint mandate" system, where they would share sovereignty and jointly control resource exploitation. However, this idea didn't gain much traction, as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan made it clear they opposed the current legal status. These three nations called for the repeal of the old treaties and argued for applying United Nations rules, given the new geopolitical landscape [95, 12p.]. After the international community recognized Russia as the successor to the Soviet Union, the Caspian issue returned to the regional stage. The question of Russia's "legacy" as the Soviet successor became a point of contention. The Alma Ata Declaration highlighted this, with member states agreeing to uphold the Soviet Union's international obligations. However, some documents suggested Russia was a "complementary state" to the USSR, especially since it took the USSR's seat in the UN Security Council.[98]

Amid these competing views, the first attempt at unity came in 1993, when the leaders of Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan met in Almaty. Iran was notably absent. They agreed to resolve all Caspian Sea-related issues and formed the Economic Cooperation Council to oversee economic activities, particularly oil exploitation. This move came as multinational corporations began showing interest in the region, culminating in Azerbaijan's "Contract of the Century" with an

international oil company in 1994. This deal angered both Moscow and Tehran, who feared foreign companies would exploit the Caspian's resources [99, 45p.].

In summary, the Caspian Sea remains a complex and contested region, with ongoing negotiations and unresolved challenges. The five bordering nations must continue collaborating to address these issues and ensure the sustainable and equitable use of this vital resource.

In this regard, the efforts of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have been geared toward involving the West, particularly the United States of America, in the problem due to the imbalance of power in favor of Moscow and Tehran. In particular, the United States of America has been a target of these efforts. In point of fact, the United States of America and Britain collaborated on a plan that was codenamed "the Caspian Storm." Which recommends a multinational monitoring of the Caspian Sea's fate in the event that the situation deteriorates further or if negotiations between Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and other nations reach a dead end [99, p.12]. After Russia changed its position regarding the legal status of the Caspian Sea on November 12, 1996, all discomfort and distress regarding the problem went away. This allowed Russia to even evade or avoid losing control of the situation, as it was approved by the Kremlin to have each country have its own exclusive economic zone, as well as sovereignty over natural resources outside of this region, but with reservations. This agreement was known as the "Ashgabat" agreement.

A working group consisting of the deputy heads of foreign affairs for each of the five countries was established in order to determine the future legal status of the Caspian Sea. Subsequently, a memorandum was signed regarding this matter, stipulating the countries' desire to cooperate in order to exploit the marine resources of the Caspian Sea. The marine area was determined to be 45 nautical miles in which the sea floor is exploited, while the rest of the space is used collectively [98].

1998 was the year that Russia's policy toward the Caspian Basin underwent a significant shift, and it was a pivotal year for the country. In the first few months of this year, Moscow made an official announcement that its positions were close to the positions of the countries that were subordinate to it in regards to the division of the wealth of the bottom and the preservation of joint exploitation of the water surface, and "this first appeared with Kazakhstan when The two presidents signed on October 9, 2000 in Astana, which confirmed the convergence of views between the two countries on the Caspian Sea [99, p.45].

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, it became essential for the five countries bordering the Caspian Sea to reevaluate the legal status of the body of water. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have all pinned their hopes on the development of the oil sector with the assistance of foreign aid; however, the existing legal framework excludes both the existence of these countries as well as their exploitation of the wealth that exists on its water level without permission or a license from Moscow or Tehran. The geopolitical weight of these three countries increased, as did the pressure on Tehran and Moscow to rethink the legal framework for the Caspian Sea in light of the growing significance of oil and particularly investment in

this sector. As a matter of principle, Russia and Iran opposed the division of closed waters and proposed the principle of joint sovereignty as a means by which they could monitor all projects related to the exploitation of oil in this sea. However, this position does not serve the interests of the three nations that have been exerting pressure on Russia to change its strategy with the assistance of Western nations and international oil companies[100, 45 p.].

Russia has adopted a pragmatic policy that has been expressed in rapprochement with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in order to find fresh solutions to this problem [101].

The goal of this policy is to avoid giving the impression that Russia is being ostracized and disregarded. As a consequence of this, the five countries started to gradually accept the division of the sea depths into national sectors according to the middle line, which ultimately became the basis for the determination. The marine boundaries between countries that have land borders that are either continuous or opposed to one another are determined by the center line. It is a line in which every point is the same distance from points positioned on the opposite borders of the body of water. Kazakhstan, for its part, has formed a set of comparable agreements with Turkmenistan that focus on exploitation sites. These agreements were concluded between the two countries.

Within the framework of the Russian-Iranian negotiations in Tehran in 2000, the representative of Russia proposed ending all disputes related to the oil fields by implementing the 50:50 principle [102, 15 p.].

After the Russian-Azerbaijani meeting, talks began about a new principle, which is “shared waters and divided bottom”, and that was in January 2001, and the Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan agreement in November of the same year revolved around the same idea.

In general, the positions of Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan witnessed remarkable convergence. Turkmenistan opposes monitoring the three oil sites located in the Azerbaijan sector, but in principle it approaches the position of the previous three countries[101].

In the south, Tehran demanded the oil fields of Azerbaijan, which approached its position with “Turkmenistan”, as Tehran insisted on the need to divide the waters, and on the contrary, the five agreed on the number of flags under which navigation in the Caspian Sea.

A summit meeting of the five countries to examine the legal status of the Caspian Sea was convened from April 24-23, 2002 in an effort to come to an agreement on the matter, but the meeting was unsuccessful. A bilateral agreement was made between Russia and Azerbaijan in September 2002 on the definition of the exploitable sea floor, and finally, an agreement was inked in May 2003. The three countries of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan worked together to determine where the boundaries of their respective nations' sovereign territories over the Caspian Sea meet [103].

The incomplete legal framework of the Caspian Sea, which was neglected and not implemented, brought Moscow to an unexpected end, and as a result of errors and

miscalculations that led it to lose the rule over the Caspian Sea, which it inherited from the Soviet Union, but it has always tried to maintain its monopoly with Iran over legal issues related to the Caspian Sea influenced by its ancient ideas [100, 48 p.] and associated with the Soviet-Iranian treaties, On the other hand, the three independent nations who fought against this concept [101] did not find this viewpoint to be of any importance, and they implemented other policies.

The Caspian Sea is a body of water that is located between Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, It is an extremely important body of water from a strategic point of view, The Caspian Sea, which is located in Asia and is one of the largest inland oceans in the world, is home to a plethora of natural resources, including oil and gas reserves, Since the fall of the Soviet Union, the five nations that border the Caspian Sea have been in negotiations about its legal status, including the ownership of the sea's resources. These negotiations began shortly after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. In this chapter, we will be concentrating on the perspective that Russia takes with regard to the Caspian Sea.

Throughout the course of history, Russia has maintained a sizable influence in the area surrounding the Caspian Sea, During the time that the Soviet Union was in power, the majority of the Caspian Sea was under its control. The Soviet Union made strategic use of the Caspian Sea in order to advance its economic and military goals. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has maintained to keep a robust presence in the area, notably with regard to its energy interests [103].

Regarding the question of the Caspian Sea's official classification, Russia has adopted a nuanced stance. On the one hand, Russia has been a staunch supporter of the idea that the Caspian Sea should be managed as a shared body of water, with all five countries sharing equal rights and responsibilities for the region. This is represented in the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which was signed by the five countries in August of 2018. There are five countries involved in this convention. Nevertheless, Russia has not yet shown a complete willingness to adhere to the convention's terms. In spite of the fact that it has signed the convention, Russia has not yet ratified it, citing the requirement for additional legal examination. Speculation has arisen as a result of this as to whether or not Russia is attempting to maintain some degree of flexibility in its strategy regarding the Caspian Sea.

In addition, Russia has taken a resolute stance on the contentious topic of the presence of armed forces in the Caspian Sea. It is Russia's position that the Caspian Sea should be demilitarized, with the exception of restricted coast guard patrols in some areas of the sea. This attitude reflects Russia's anxiety about the possibility that the Caspian Sea would become a site of conflict or military competition in the future[104, 50p.].

There is a strong connection between Russia's oil interests in the Caspian region and its stance on the legal status of the Caspian Sea. It is believed that the Caspian Sea contains considerable oil and gas reserves, and Russia is one of the leading producers and exporters of oil and gas in the world. The Caspian Sea is located in Russia. As a consequence of this, Russia has a significant interest in

making certain that it is able to access and harness the energy resources that are located in the Caspian Sea.

At the same time, Russia has not been oblivious to the possibility that a dispute may arise over the riches that are located in the Caspian Sea. In particular, Russia has expressed concern on the possibility of competition with Iran over the ownership of the resources that are found in the Caspian Sea. Iran and Russia have a long history of working together, but relations between the two countries have become strained in recent years due to disagreements over Syria and the nuclear accord.

Russia's efforts in the Caspian Sea have been focused on striking a balance between its oil interests in the region and its desire to preserve stability and cooperation in the area. For instance, Russia has been a staunch supporter of the notion of joint development of the resources surrounding the Caspian Sea. This would include all five countries in the region sharing in the benefits of the region's abundant supply of energy. This way of thinking is mirrored in the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which places an emphasis on the significance of cooperative endeavors and shared economic growth[103].

In conclusion, Russia's position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, reflects a complicated mix of the country's interests as well as its worries. In spite of the fact that Russia has long been a staunch supporter of the idea that the Caspian Sea ought to be regarded as a shared body of water, the country has been rather reticent about committing to the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in its entirety. Russia's energy interests in the region are intimately related to its fears about the possibility for conflict over the Caspian Sea's resources. However, Russia has also worked to balance these interests with its desire to maintain stability and cooperation in the region. In the region surrounding the Caspian Sea, Russia places a strong focus on the principle of joint development, which demonstrates its acknowledgment of the significance of collaboration and shared advantages. This strategy has the potential to serve as a foundation for future cooperation among the five countries; however, it will call for ongoing participation and conversation.

When looking into the future, it is difficult to predict how the issue of the Caspian Sea's legal status will ultimately be settled. The Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea establishes a framework for collaboration and cooperative development, but in order for it to be put into effect, all five countries will need to ratify it. In the meanwhile, it will be necessary for the five countries to continue cooperating with one another to manage the resources of the Caspian Sea and to keep the peace in the surrounding area.

In general, Russia's perspective on the Caspian Sea shows a combination of pragmatic and strategic goals, as well as an acknowledgment of the significance of collaboration and shared advantages. While there are issues that need to be resolved, there are also opportunities for the five countries to collaborate in order to make sure that the region surrounding the Caspian Sea continues to be one that is secure and successful for everyone.

In the early years of the twenty-first century, Russian President Vladimir Putin stated that "it is a mistake to divide the Caspian Sea into five countries." [105] This

was due to the fact that an increase in the number of riparian states does not automatically result in a change in the legal status of the water body. On October 5, 1994, following the signing of the century agreement, Russia expressed its formal position publicly on the United Nations in light of the growing significance and gravity of this issue on the international scene [106]. Iran, in addition to Russia, was able to benefit from this agreement by obtaining "assurances of the correctness of its position by experts in international water law affiliated with the United Nations." On the other hand, Russia and Azerbaijan signed a cooperation agreement in the field of oil field exploration and exploitation on November 20, 1993. This agreement referred to the phrase "Azerbaijan Sector." [107, 44 p.].

This example demonstrates the extent to which Russia's policy in the Caspian Sea has become muddled. This policy was characterized by two dimensions: one dimension related to the (official) foreign minister, and another dimension related to the position of oil companies supported by figures in the government. Russia was aiming, through duplication, to deal with this problem in the event that it lost in the dimension related to the foreign minister. In the first place, it will emerge victorious thanks to the second dimension.

In September 2001, Putin visited Azerbaijan that ended with the joint declaration: "Shared waters, a divided bottom," which constituted a settlement decision for both parties. In short, it can be said that Russia's position is based on the following points:

- The establishment of an agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea among the five countries on the basis of consensus.
- Segmentation principle: common water, common bottom
- Supporting a division based on the principle of the middle line – the rate - that does not coincide with the borders of the countries
- It supports the sovereign rights over the oil fields on the basis of the agreement
- Joint exploitation of biological resources.
- Freedom of navigation for ships of the five countries provided that the country's flag is hoisted[107].

Kazakhstan is a country with a vast territory in Central Asia, and it is one of the five littoral states of the Caspian Sea, which is the world's largest inland body of water. The Caspian Sea is a unique water body that has been the subject of complex legal and political discussions for years. Kazakhstan's position regarding the Caspian Sea is shaped by its geopolitical interests, historical background, and economic priorities. In this chapter, I will discuss Kazakhstan's position regarding the Caspian Sea in detail.

Kazakhstan is a landlocked country, and the Caspian Sea is its only access to the outside world via the Volga-Don canal. As such, the Caspian Sea plays a crucial role in Kazakhstan's foreign policy and national security. Kazakhstan's primary geopolitical interest in the Caspian Sea is to ensure that it remains a stable and peaceful region, free from external interference. The country also aims to enhance its

regional influence by playing a more active role in the Caspian region's economic and political affairs.

Kazakhstan has a long history of nomadic and settled life, and the Caspian Sea has been a part of its history for centuries. The sea has been used for fishing, transportation, and commerce by Kazakh nomads, as well as by the Kazakh Khanate, which was a powerful state that existed in the region in the 15th to 19th centuries. After the Soviet Union's collapse, the five Caspian littoral states, including Kazakhstan, inherited the Caspian Sea's legal status, which was undefined at the time. This situation has led to numerous disputes and disagreements between the littoral states regarding the sea's ownership, sovereignty, and exploitation[108].

One of the main issues that Kazakhstan and other Caspian littoral states have been grappling with for years is the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The Caspian Sea's legal status is important because it determines the ownership and exploitation rights of the littoral states over the sea's resources, including oil, gas, and fisheries. In 1991, after the Soviet Union's collapse, the Caspian littoral states agreed to divide the Caspian Sea into five equal sectors. However, this agreement did not resolve the legal status issue because the Caspian Sea's status as a sea or lake was still unclear[108].

In 2002, the five littoral states signed the Tehran Convention, which recognized the Caspian Sea as a lake, thereby giving each littoral state a 20% share of the sea's resources. However, this agreement did not resolve the issue of the Caspian Sea's legal status because Iran did not ratify the convention. In 2018, after years of negotiations, the littoral states signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which defines the sea as neither a lake nor a sea but as a "special body of water." This agreement has resolved the legal status issue to a large extent, paving the way for the littoral states to exploit the Caspian Sea's resources jointly[109, 19p.].

The Caspian Sea is a rich source of natural resources, including oil, gas, and fish. Kazakhstan is one of the largest oil-producing countries in the Caspian region, and it has been exploiting the sea's oil resources since the 1990s. Kazakhstan's oil production has been crucial for the country's economic growth, and it has also made it a significant player in the global oil market. However, the exploitation of the Caspian Sea's resources has also caused environmental concerns, including pollution and the depletion of fish stocks.

Kazakhstan has taken measures to address these environmental concerns, such as introducing stricter regulations for oil and gas companies operating in the Caspian Sea and implementing sustainable fishing practices. Kazakhstan has also been investing in renewable energy sources, such as wind and solar, to reduce its reliance on fossil fuels.

In addition to oil, gas, and fish, the Caspian Sea also has significant mineral resources, including sulphur, salt, and magnesium. Kazakhstan has been exploring these mineral resources, and it has established joint ventures with other Caspian littoral states to exploit them. The exploitation of these mineral resources has the potential to provide significant economic benefits to Kazakhstan and the other Caspian littoral states.

The Caspian Sea is an important transportation route that connects the Caspian region to other regions, including Europe and Asia. Kazakhstan, as a landlocked country, relies heavily on the Caspian Sea for transportation. The country has been investing in the development of its Caspian Sea ports, such as Aktau and Kuryk, to improve its connectivity to other regions. Kazakhstan has also been cooperating with other Caspian littoral states to develop a trans-Caspian transport corridor, which would connect the Caspian Sea to the Black Sea and Europe via Azerbaijan and Georgia. The development of this corridor would provide Kazakhstan with a more efficient transportation route to Europe and other markets [109, 19p.].

In conclusion, Kazakhstan's position regarding the Caspian Sea is shaped by its geopolitical interests, historical background, and economic priorities. The country's primary geopolitical interest in the Caspian Sea is to ensure that it remains a stable and peaceful region, free from external interference. Kazakhstan also aims to enhance its regional influence by playing a more active role in the Caspian region's economic and political affairs. The legal status of the Caspian Sea has been a significant issue for Kazakhstan and other Caspian littoral states, but the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018 has resolved this issue to a large extent. The exploitation of the Caspian Sea's resources, including oil, gas, and minerals, has provided significant economic benefits to Kazakhstan, but it has also caused environmental concerns [110]. Kazakhstan has taken measures to address these concerns and to promote sustainable exploitation of the Caspian Sea's resources. The Caspian Sea is also an important transportation route that connects Kazakhstan to other regions, and the country has been investing in the development of its Caspian Sea ports and the trans-Caspian transport corridor to improve its connectivity to other markets.

On June 19, 1994, the Kazakh capital attended a draft agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea "based on a set of standards derived from the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea"[111].

For Kazakhstan, from the start, the Caspian was closed inland water. However, there is no legal classification regarding this situation in international law, in another way, and according to the Kazakh vision, the Caspian Basin was not a sea and it was not a lake, and therefore it demanded the establishment of a special agreement, based on the history and practice of international, Kazakhstan suggested to division of the Caspian to the territorial waters up to 12 nautical miles (sea), and economic zones exclusively by the principle of the line center (Lake), which is seems clear the discrepancy and conflicting positions of Kazakhstan, it is once you look at the Caspian is a sea and denies the characteristic of the lake from it, and sometimes you talk about the situation as the Caspian is a lake [112]

Finally, Kazakhstan's position regarding the legal status of the Caspian Sea can be explained by the following points:

- Considering the Caspian Basin as water that has neither sea nor lake characteristic.
- Application of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, with some reservations.

- Define a territorial area of 12 nautical miles.
- Apply the principle of the middle line to define EEZs
- Exercising all sovereign rights over the territorial waters, including the seabed.

Azerbaijan's position was defined by its history, especially after the sudden rise in oil prices at the end of the nineteenth century. Economic reforms are also directly related to the development of the petroleum sector and the exploration and exploitation of oil fields. With the encouragement of international oil companies, Azerbaijan is the first country to oppose the status quo of the Caspian Sea, and since its independence, "it took the position of the right holder to define its rights in what it called its maritime ownership" [78].

On this basis, the status of a "lake" allows for the division of the Caspian into regions, unlike the status of the "sea", which gives only 12 nautical miles as territorial waters, and as is known, most of the oil fields were located in regions belonging to Azerbaijan, and this is what made it support the idea of a "lake", As the other areas were not studied and did not show any mineral resources.

In short, the intentions of Azerbaijan can be summed up in the following points:

- Caspian Lake is Limited
- The division of Caspian into national regions, according to international laws and practice
- Determining the lake bed and marine area according to the principle of "equal dimension"
- Application of the principle of division around administrative regions, which was approved by the Soviet Ministry of Petroleum Industry in 1970. [79].

Turkmenistan's policy on the Caspian Sea has been characterized by contradictions since it arose and began to talk about this problem. In the beginning, it looked at the problem from the angle of establishing a legal status on the basis of Russian treaties /Soviet-Iranian years 1921 and 1940 and objected to every division of national regions. Always, according to Turkmenistan's point of view, the Caspian was an inland watery ocean (lake) to which the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea does not apply. It also suggested limiting water to three areas:

- Coastal areas up to 15 nautical miles in length. Common areas in the central area at sea.
- National Economic Zones up to 15 nautical miles in length.

Russia has shown its willingness to accept and support Turkmenistan's proposal regarding expanding coastal areas from 10 to 15 nautical miles and this in fact means defining the maritime boundaries.

However, in subsequent years, this attitude will often change. In short, Turkmenistan tried to adhere to the following points:

- Defining the following areas: the regional from 12 to 15 nautical miles, the economic zone of 35 nautical miles, and the rest are shared waters
- Zoning 20 % for each area
- Dividing the sea floor according to the median line principle. Iran Position:

Initially, Tehran proposed the establishment of a specific oil company that includes the five countries that would work to preserve their interests. Iran's goal in establishing a "joint sovereignty" status over the Caspian Sea was to avoid a loss, as dividing the regions would only return 8.13% of the water. In 2002, the four countries had an intention to present a proposal to Tehran represented by the "principle of dividing natural resources" without changing the boundaries of regions, which would raise Iran's share from 8.13% to 16% of its water [113].

In short, Iran's position can be summarized as follows:

-Caspian is a closed sea

-Exercising the sovereign rights of each state in coastal areas of up to 20 nautical miles.

-Absolute sovereignty over the waters, the bottom and the atmosphere in this area of the adjacent territorial sea, or the five riparian countries to have the same rights to practice exploration and protection of the ocean.

-Joint management in the middle or heart of the Caspian Sea, that is, from 40 nautical miles from the shores of the riparian states [114, 10p.].

In the end, it can be considered that the first perceived successes in developing the process of preparing or establishing a legal status for the Caspian Sea were represented in the development of the policies of the five countries that ended with the acceptance that the Caspian is not a sea and at the same time not a lake. With the passage of time, these countries abandoned the idea of applying the international law of the seas to the Caspian because the law does not coincide with the status of the Caspian, and in parallel with that, they began to accept the idea of developing a special law or a joint agreement between the five countries on the legal status of the Caspian waters. In principle, Russia's policy with regard to the Caspian Sea seemed to be contradictory, exemplified by the dual positions between the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the business world represented by the major Russian petroleum companies. At the end of the nineties, a rapprochement between Russia and Kazakhstan was noticed over the problem, which led to a tripartite rapprochement between Russia, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Here we point out that the bilateral agreements that Russia was undertaking and its unclear policy were the ones that stirred at all the time the legal problem of Caspian. At the present time, the sea is divided into five regions, but its legal status is still unclear, which prompted the five countries to go to agreement on the legal status, which constituted an obstacle to foreign investment. In the end, the final decision regarding this problem, which may lead to agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, will inevitably, is the convergence of states' policies and their tendency to develop a special law on Caspian waters [115].

In the third section, we will explain the agreement that has been signed from the five countries in 2018, which ended part of the differences between the participating countries on the Caspian Sea.

In conclusion, the negotiations between the five countries regarding the Caspian Sea have been complex and challenging, but there have been some positive developments in recent years. The lack of a clear legal framework for the Caspian

Sea has led to disputes over issues such as maritime boundaries, fishing rights, and the exploitation of natural resources.

Despite these challenges, the five countries have engaged in bilateral and multilateral negotiations to address these issues. The signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018 is a significant achievement that establishes a legal framework for the management of the sea's resources and promotes cooperation between the littoral states.

However, there are still some outstanding issues that need to be resolved, such as the delimitation of maritime boundaries and the management of fisheries. Furthermore, the growing importance of the Caspian Sea in global energy markets adds further complexity to the negotiations.

In conclusion, the collapse of the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the legal framework governing the Caspian Sea region. Prior to the collapse, the Soviet Union had claimed control over the entire Caspian Sea, and the legal framework governing the region was largely based on Soviet-era laws and regulations. However, with the collapse of the Soviet Union, the legal framework governing the Caspian Sea became unclear, leading to disputes and disagreements between the newly independent countries of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Iran.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union had a significant impact on the evaluation of the Caspian Sea's legal status and resources. The emergence of new states, namely Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, led to disputes over the ownership of the sea and its resources. The lack of an agreed legal framework for the Caspian Sea has made it difficult to exploit its resources, leading to conflicts and tensions between the littoral states. Furthermore, the growing importance of the Caspian Sea in global energy markets has added to the complexity of the issue.

The legal status of the Caspian Sea has been a topic of debate for decades, with each of the five bordering countries having their own claims and interests. The issue has been addressed in a number of agreements and declarations over the years, culminating in the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018. While this convention has resolved many of the outstanding issues surrounding the legal status of the sea, there are still challenges and concerns that remain. It is important for the bordering countries to continue to work together to ensure the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea's resources, while also addressing the concerns of external actors and the wider international community [114].

In conclusion, Russia's position on the legal status of the Caspian Sea reflects a complex mix of interests and concerns. While Russia has been a strong advocate for the principle of the Caspian Sea being treated as a common body of water, it has also been cautious about fully embracing the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. Russia's concerns about the potential for conflict over the Caspian Sea's resources are closely tied to its energy interests in the region, but Russia has also sought to balance these interests with its desire to maintain stability and cooperation in the region.

3 Geopolitical balance of Power in the Region and Iran

3.1 Caspian Sea Agreement and Iran's Exit from the US Sanctions Crisis

In the Caspian Sea context, the longstanding notion that greater economic development automatically curtails military friction does not necessarily apply. In fact, economic growth here can sometimes intensify conflict. Every state bordering the Caspian stands to gain or lose a great deal in both economic and political terms, and the region's security framework is notably intricate. It is striking that the number of Azerbaijanis in Iran exceeds the population of Azerbaijan itself. At present, Azerbaijan is a pivotal U.S. ally in the area. Meanwhile, Iran, despite religious differences, maintains close relations with both Russia and Armenia. The Armenian diaspora also exerts strong political clout in the United States on issues concerning this region. As a result, conventional alliances are less straightforward in the Caspian. Russia, holding substantial and varied interests here, wields dominant influence and aims to avert regional instability.

Moscow's shifting views on the legal status of the Caspian stem from overlapping political and economic considerations. The complexity of the region arises from abundant resources, commerce and transit routes, environmental conditions, and military dominance questions still unresolved. Russia's military foothold around the Caspian is tied to its broader strategy in the Caucasus, a place where Russian forces have been involved in suppressing uprisings for roughly two decades. Even though some republics in the North Caucasus do not directly border the Caspian, the proximity of Dagestan—which does border the sea—offers separatist fighters a key base of operations.

The United States places considerable emphasis on Azerbaijan, given its strategic role in facilitating the exit of American forces from Central Asia after the Soviet period. Sandwiched between Iran and Russia, Azerbaijan is vital for managing movements of terrorist elements in and out of the North Caucasus. The U.S.–Azerbaijani partnership thus concentrates on promoting regional stability and countering terrorism, with the United States helping to train Azerbaijani forces. This training focuses on specialized tactics for safeguarding offshore oil platforms in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea [116].

Azerbaijan supports demilitarizing the Caspian Sea, urging that it be reserved solely for peaceful use, or at least governed by rules restricting military presence. However, other littoral countries show minimal enthusiasm for such proposals. A perception exists that Washington's policies toward Azerbaijan are intended to weaken Moscow's sway in a country of deep importance to the Kremlin—an impression supported by certain American officials.

Following the breakup of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan inherited Central Asia's largest aviation fleet. Reports suggest Turkmen military helicopters might conduct patrols in disputed waters, though it remains uncertain whether this capability is sufficient to secure Turkmenistan's maritime claims by force, particularly given the ongoing stalemate between Iran and Azerbaijan over territorial

rights. Although Turkmenistan has had disagreements with Azerbaijan in the past, a resort to military means appears improbable.

Kazakhstan, ninth globally in area with a relatively small population, benefits from borders with Russia and China that allow for oil and gas pipelines. Yet this pipeline infrastructure creates vulnerabilities to external pressure. With resources like the Tengiz gas field and Kashagan oil field, Kazakhstan is a major global energy player, affecting both regional energy stability and neighboring areas [112].

Defense expenditures in the Caspian region are climbing due to conflicts in Afghanistan, unrest in Russia's North Caucasus, and the unresolved Armenia–Azerbaijan dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. Additionally, territorial disagreements in the Caspian Sea basin have led to modest increases in arms acquisitions. In the late 1990s, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan quarreled over oil fields, among them the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli field, which resulted in friction and military maneuvers.

Outside states have lent assistance in building up the militaries of the Caspian littoral nations. The United States has supported Azerbaijan, while Ukraine has aided Turkmenistan. Participation in broader security agreements further boosts these countries' military capacities but raises tensions in the region. Russia regards any expanded U.S. influence in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan as a threat to its interests, fearing encirclement from west and south and a diminution of its hold on key energy export routes. A more prominent U.S. role could enable an American corridor stretching from Turkey and the Black Sea to the Caspian [117, 8p.].

Although U.S. and NATO assistance, including arms supplies to this distant region, has remained modest relative to Russia's large contributions, Western support nonetheless strengthens the military competencies of regional states. The growing presence of such external actors cannot be overlooked, as it could fuel either cooperation or confrontation, particularly among Russia and Western powers. Meanwhile, new dangers to stability and security keep emerging, and it is unclear when or whether this trend will ease.

Ongoing patterns suggest that domestic and international entities will gradually expand their military roles in the region. Moreover, the continued ambiguity about maritime borders and the absence of consensus on energy resources may sporadically ignite hostilities among coastal states, likely in the form of contained flare-ups rather than large-scale conflicts. Vague boundary lines also hamper development of offshore energy projects.

With 500- to 1,000-ton vessels suited to deep-water missions, the Caspian region has the manufacturing capacity to sustain such fleets. Russia and Iran both possess this capability, and Azerbaijan has acquired it within the past five years. This means Russia could either accelerate or restrict broader militarization in the Caspian [118]. Conversely, because of the Caspian's limited expanse, naval aviation with anti-ship missile capabilities could be quite relevant. The smaller scale of Caspian vessels typically limits robust air defenses, so proficient aircrews trained for anti-ship missions could have a considerable impact. While a few patrol boats may be sufficient for coastal defense and oil platform protection, how each state develops its

navy and aviation forces will significantly influence the Caspian's future military balance [118].

As previously mentioned, the Caspian plays a strategic role as an area of interest for Russia and Iran while drawing the attention of four major external actors—the United States, the European Union, China, and Turkey—each seeking to expand political leverage or guarantee access to energy resources. Extraction, export, and security considerations all remain vulnerable to interference by these states. From Russia's perspective, in particular, blocking energy projects that bypass its territory is crucial, as detailed below.

The Caspian region poses a challenge to Russia in preserving its status as the principal oil supplier to the European Union, and by extension, its political weight across Europe. If European nations successfully circumvent Russian influence, they may do so by actively engaging the Caspian states. Alongside this, Azerbaijan and the western Central Asian republics—Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan—also compose part of Russia's buffer zone, separating it from prominent southern and eastern neighbors. Because many of these states are looking to reduce Russian influence and gain independent political and economic space—or to build alliances with alternative major powers—Russia's position grows increasingly precarious [119].

Consequently, from Moscow's vantage point, thwarting energy routes that circumvent Russia helps maintain leverage over Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, thereby shielding them from foreign players' agendas. Azerbaijan, for its part, uses the Caspian to expand its oil and gas production and transit capacities, affirming itself as both an energy source and a corridor. Yet as Baku's stature in energy markets grows, it risks conflicting with Moscow's interests. Given Russia's local military dominance and its alliance with Armenia, Azerbaijan is cautious in navigating its ties with the Kremlin.

Over the next decade, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, in addition to Uzbekistan, might use the Caspian to reach not only European markets but also rapidly growing demand centers in China. However, their challenges in diversifying exports resemble those of Azerbaijan, if not more so, and their political, economic, and security structures are deeply intertwined with Russia's. These states often maintain a stronger resistance to Western influence, acting more carefully than Azerbaijan [118].

Iran's geopolitical influence has risen recently, a pattern likely to gain momentum if the United States completes its planned drawdown in Iraq. Ongoing turmoil in the Middle East, notably in the Gulf, further bolsters Iran's position. Nonetheless, Tehran typically seeks to avoid conflicts with Caspian neighbors, particularly Russia, despite its notable military strength in the region.

That said, the Caspian ranks lower on Iran's agenda than the Persian Gulf, and Tehran's immediate participation in Western-based energy initiatives remains unlikely. However, given Iran's growing assertiveness in the Middle East and the Gulf, a parallel situation could unfold in the Caspian, especially with respect to complicated relations between Iran and Azerbaijan. While Iran may not assume a leading role in the Caspian, Russia and Turkey can both act as checks against Tehran's regional ambitions [85].

For the United States, seeking additional energy sources in the Caspian region is not the principal aim. Washington is more concerned with geopolitical dynamics relative to Moscow, so it channels resources toward regional initiatives that expand energy diversity away from Russia.

For the European Union, securing energy remains the primary driver, though a geopolitical dimension is also present. Europe faces complications with Russian energy, viewed as fueling Moscow's resurgence, and relies on resources from North Africa, which come with political and security risks. This makes the Caspian an appealing option to solidify Europe's energy needs independent of Russia.

Turkey's objectives in the Caspian largely converge with Europe's: both want alternative energy paths bypassing Russia. Yet Turkey also strives to be central to any resulting infrastructure, ensuring it becomes a critical transit route.

China's interests, by contrast, diverge somewhat from Europe's. Beijing would prefer shipping Caspian energy eastward, whereas the European Union and Turkey want to direct those flows west.

Another factor is the United States' pivot back to the Middle East, giving Russia greater freedom to reinforce its position across post-Soviet territory. If, however, American forces withdraw fully from Iraq and Afghanistan, Washington might reassert itself more robustly around the Caspian, heightening competition with Moscow.

Additionally, China may become a far more significant regional player by gradually deepening its foothold in Central Asia to secure energy resources for its expanding economy. Meanwhile, Europe might address internal inconsistencies among different Caspian pipeline proposals to choose one or two projects capable of diminishing reliance on Russia.

Russia will undoubtedly weigh these possibilities when charting its strategy. By 2020 and beyond, more domestic and external actors will be involved in Caspian affairs than they were in 2011. Which energy ventures receive the green light, which pipelines end up being built, and how the Caspian's ambiguous legal status is resolved all remain unclear. Accordingly, many different developmental pathways could materialize in the coming ten years [120].

One scenario envisions Russia preserving or strengthening its leading position in the region, using disputes within Europe to obstruct major energy projects aimed at diversifying EU imports. Although Russia may not be able to stop every proposal, it could remain the dominant force in both energy and regional politics, thereby limiting the sway of nations like the United States, the EU, and China. Essentially, this scenario maintains the status quo.

A second possibility sees Russia losing ground significantly—perhaps due to security or political setbacks, or because of domestic economic strains. The geopolitical environment in the Middle East might simultaneously shift, and the United States, freed from military commitments in Iraq and Afghanistan, could adopt a more assertive line. In this context, Washington could deliver enhanced financial and political support to Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, enabling more effective energy diversification. While this would empower lesser states, it would

also raise the risk of inter-state confrontations by constraining the roles of Russia and Iran.

A third scenario envisions a major political or regime transformation in Iran, leading Tehran to abandon hostility in favor of collaboration with the West. Should that occur, projects such as the Nabucco pipeline would appear more feasible, and Iran might work openly or discreetly with the United States to loosen Russia's grip [121].

A fourth option is a severe economic downturn in China, shrinking Beijing's influence in Central Asia and forcing it to address internal issues at home. Such developments might reaffirm Russia's dominance over energy routes and imports, or inspire the U.S. and Europe to expedite their own diversification initiatives in Central Asia.

Given the sheer number of influential players, the Caspian's political, energy, and military landscape can shift abruptly, making it nearly impossible to predict its exact state in a year, let alone a decade. Since the emergence of three more Caspian states two decades ago, the area has undergone a dramatic transformation. Adding Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan has turned the Caspian into one of the world's most pivotal regions, offering ample resources and strategic positions.

Because of these factors, the next ten years—and even the longer term—will see heightened competition in the Caspian among major geopolitical powers. In 2018, the heads of Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. While the five nations made it clear they would not allow any foreign bases to be established there, asserting that only the littoral states should determine the Caspian's destiny, they also formalized a framework governing shared usage of the waters.

The importance of the agreement does not lie in any immediate economic outcomes—currently negligible—but rather in formalizing an already existing reality. Recent settlements have transformed the Caspian Sea from a contentious point into an arena of collective dialogue for the five bordering nations. Over the past four years, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have undertaken limited joint efforts to harness the sea's resources through interdepartmental accords. However, what stands out is the agreement's role in providing formal recognition of this arrangement.

On the day the accord was signed, the presidents of Russia and Kazakhstan remarked that this step could foster further economic and military cooperation. In their view, the agreement effectively establishes a foundational framework (“a constitution for the Caspian Sea”) that addresses the rights and obligations of littoral states and serves as a guarantor of security, stability, and development in the region [110].

Ever since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea has been at the heart of a dispute involving Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. For 27 years, the sea's legal definition—whether it is a sea or a lake—remained unclear. This classification has significant implications for the way ownership of the Caspian's gas reserves is divided among the five states.

From the beginning of the Aktau conference, the question arose whether to define the Caspian as a lake or as a sea, given that international maritime regulations differ based on this designation. Defining it as a lake would imply shared distribution of resources among all coastal nations. Labeling it as a sea, by contrast, would limit each country to specific portions of these resources.

Subsequently, negotiators turned to essential matters, including utilization of the sea's assets; the rights of each party in navigation and fishing; demarcating the seabed; and security concerns, such as preventing states with no Caspian coastline from deploying military forces in this body of water.

In the end, those gathered reached an accord that encompassed several core points. These included prohibiting any Caspian nation from permitting its territory to be used to compromise the security of others; making joint use of the surface waters; allocating the seabed and sub-seabed in compliance with international law; and undertaking fishing and maritime activities accordingly. They also stipulated that major maritime initiatives must take environmental protection into account, and that endeavors like scientific research or pipeline construction should adhere to agreed principles.

Despite these initial and meaningful understandings, doubts persisted concerning how effectively the provisions would be enacted and whether the stakeholders could move past longstanding disputes—particularly among Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, all situated along the southern Caspian, with overlapping claims to certain oil fields. Meanwhile, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Kazakhstan have already agreed on how to split the northern part of the Caspian. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani offered perhaps the most revealing commentary by indicating that after more than two decades of negotiations, only around 30 percent of the outstanding issues had been resolved, leaving multiple unresolved topics to be managed through further talks [122,139 p.].

Iran had previously taken a hardline approach to the Caspian question, at one stage insisting on dividing the body of water equally with the other littoral states; later, it demanded one-fifth. Current proposals place its share nearer to 13 percent, which may heighten competition with other nations regarding undersea oil and gas pipelines. In Aktau, Tehran relinquished its earlier insistence on “historical rights” over the sea and abandoned its longstanding argument that it should be considered a lake rather than a sea—thus marking a notable shift from previous positions.

All of these things are being done in order to avoid stymieing the strategies and agendas of its Russian partner, which placed a large bet on the outcome of the Aktau summit and its demise as a major force, with the ultimate goal of expanding Vladimir Putin's sphere of influence both domestically and internationally. Hassan Rouhani went out into the Iranian media to focus on one thing, which is the success in transforming the Caspian Sea Basin into a safe zone free of any foreign military presence, or as he literally said: "The signature the legal status of the Caspian Sea agreement foiled the United States and NATO plans to send military forces to the region." This was an attempt by the ruling class in Tehran to come out in front of its people with the appearance of a victor. However, Iranians who are aware of the

flailing of their worn-out jurisprudential system interpreted Rouhani's statements as a type of deceit and expressed their fury at the accord. This wrath was directed towards the fact that the agreement was reached. Instead, they compared it to the "unjust" deal that Iran and Tsarist Russia made in 1828 about the sea itself. They said the pact concerned the sea [31].

Iran is a major player in this region, and its importance may increase in the future as a result of its qualitative advantages. The most important of these advantages are Iran's enormous wealth and its geographical location, which makes it the best and least expensive passage for Caspian oil and gas to the rest of the world. This is especially true given that Iran has equipped itself well with facilities for the oil industry on the south coast of the sea, that it has the largest pipeline network.

However, these numerous chances are met with more limitations by Iran, which the United States is seeking to isolate politically, economically, and even militarily by employing soft power not just in the Middle East, but also in Central Asia. This is the case despite the fact that Iran presents many opportunities. There are international and regional equations working in favor of isolating or at least limiting Iran's role in the Caspian Sea region, and there is no doubt that the current sanctions help that. In return, there is an Iranian-Russian-Chinese awareness of the importance of joint cooperation to prevent America from dominating this region; this could secure for Iran in the coming years an alternative regional and international environment, to compensate it for some of the negative effects of the sanctions. In addition, there is an awareness of the importance [123, 150 p.].

The circumstances of a group of nations that are located along the coast of the Caspian Sea are believed to be complicated by two different kinds of elements. The first kind of problem is the requirement for these countries to sell their oil to the international market via economic means. While the second kind has to do with the legal standing of each of these countries by itself. Although Iran has a significant geographical and political position as one of the nations in this region, the other countries that border the Caspian Sea also have a significant relative degree, and Iran has a significant amount of oil and gas deposits that may be utilised and exploited, thus its importance is comparable to that of the other countries in the region. In addition, these nations are virtually on par with one another in terms of the importance they have in regards to the means of maritime transportation and the capability to use the marine environment along the Caspian Sea beaches for fishing as well as agricultural exploitation.

Whether on the scale of OPEC or globally, Iran is a significant player in the oil and gas industry as one of the leading producers in both categories. In 2019, Iran has proven oil reserves of more than 155.6 billion barrels, which places them in fourth position behind Venezuela, Saudi Arabia, and Canada. Canada has the most oil reserves in the world[123, 151 p.].

Despite the economic restrictions that are now in place, Iran is certain that its current position as a significant actor in the Caspian Sea area will only grow in importance over the next few decades. The following is a summary of the causes, according to the opinions of various Iranian analysts:

1) In all likelihood, events will unfold in a manner that will lead to an alliance in the region between Russia and Iran. This alliance will be predicated on the enhancement of mutual benefits, as well as the confrontation of foreign intervention that targets both sides economically, politically, and militarily. The goal of this alliance will be to prevent the United States and Europe from controlling the region militarily and dominating its oil wealth and export lines [124, 3 p.]. According to this opinion, both Tehran and Moscow can be the most important part in the region. If they can come to an agreement, this will make it simpler and faster to resolve any problems that may arise in the future over the distribution of the sea and the riches it contains among the five nations [125, 60 p.].

2) In addition to the aforementioned, Iran anticipates that the doubling of demand for oil and energy sources over the next 30 years will increase the importance of its role in the Caspian Sea region, which will secure many energy sources in the future [125, 61p.]. While it is true that there is agreement among observers that the Caspian region will not be a major competitor to the Gulf region, it will certainly be able to play a major role in diversifying sources of production, which is encouraging. Iran also anticipates that the doubling.

3) In the next few years, both Iranian and American assessments suggest that China will emerge as the primary player in the Caspian Sea region. As indicated by recent events, China has ambitions to secure its oil and gas supplies from this area for the long term. China's objectives are long-term. China has, over the course of the past several years, significantly increased the length of a gas pipeline that originates from the Saman-Dan gas field in Turkmenistan and travels via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Additionally, in 2009, construction was finished on a pipeline that would deliver oil from Kazakhstan to Alashankou in the Chinese province of Xinjiang. Additionally, China is working hard to secure long-term deals with the nations in the region. One such arrangement is a treaty that will last for thirty years and requires Turkmenistan to ship thirty billion cubic metres of gas to China between the years 2009 and 2039. Iran believes that an expansion in China's influence in the region surrounding the Caspian Sea will be beneficial to the nation's interests. The trajectory of Iran's ties with China is heading in a favourable direction, and Tehran, Moscow, and Beijing are in agreement over how to counteract attempts by the United States to establish control over Central Asia. On the other hand, it is expected that the United States would step up its attempts to thwart Chinese growth in the area. It's possible that the current American policy in the Caspian Sea region is already aimed towards stopping China from capitalising on a crucial source of oil and gas in the region's future and slowing the expansion of Chinese influence in the area [126, 18p.].

4) The Iranians are placing their bets on the role that the common economic benefits of the major countries may play in preventing any military attack on them, and the Iranians believe that the most important goals of the main players in this region (Russia, the United States of America, the countries of the European Union, and China) is to control the routes and pipelines of oil and gas export, and so in spite of the disagreement between Tehran, the West, and even Saudi Arabia over the Iranian nuc. [126, 19p.].

But there are also two major players in the Caspian Sea equation, namely the United States of America and China, in addition to the existence of the Russian actor who overlooks the Caspian Sea [127, 45p.].

Caspian Sea Basin has been associated with Washington's energy security on the one hand, and the penetration of a region that includes Russia and Iran, which overlook the Caspian Sea, and are seen as regional competitors for American projects there through its alliance and cooperation with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to benefit from a share of it, and to gain the right to establish an infrastructure to transport the reclaimed water. In the thinking of the American strategist, the Caspian Sea Basin region has been associated with Washington's energy.

3.2 The Caspian Basin: Geopolitics and the Future Balance of Power

Owing to its unique geological features, the Caspian Sea has long stood at the heart of political and economic deliberations. Its prime geographic position and abundant natural resources make it a vital source of energy and economic growth for countries in the surrounding region. Among the five littoral states, Iran holds a major stake in the sea's political and economic dynamics. This significance is further magnified by the detrimental impact of U.S. sanctions on Iran's economy, prompting Tehran to seek strategies for overcoming its current constraints. In this context, the present literature review examines how the Caspian Sea might assist Iran in easing the crisis brought about by American sanctions, offering an overview of key research on the subject.

Spanning the geographical juncture of Europe and Asia, the Caspian Sea is recognized as the world's largest enclosed body of water. Its coastline is shared by Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. Thanks to vast oil and gas reserves, this region serves as a critical energy source for nearby nations. Additionally, the sea's location makes it an essential corridor for shipping oil and gas to European and Asian markets. Nevertheless, the Caspian Sea's legal status has proved challenging to resolve. For more than two decades, the five bordering countries have worked to establish an acceptable legal framework governing resource use and management within this pivotal area [128].

The economic situation in Iran has been further complicated by the sanctions imposed by the United States of America. The sanctions have had a severe impact on Iran's oil exports, which are responsible for a significant share of the country's gross domestic product (GDP). Iran has been looking at a variety of options in order to find a way out of the dilemma caused by the sanctions, including entering into negotiations with the United States and its European allies.

Iran's efforts to escape the crisis brought on by the sanctions have made significant use of the Caspian Sea. To lessen its reliance on revenue from oil sales, Iran has been making efforts to develop the resources found in the Caspian Sea. Iran's energy exports to Europe, in particular, stand to benefit significantly from the Caspian Sea's huge potential. Iran has been in negotiations with its Caspian Sea neighbours to develop the region's energy resources and build a legal framework for

the exploitation of the Caspian Sea's resources. These negotiations have been going on for quite some time.

The current body of research on the topic of the Caspian Sea and Iran's departure from the crisis brought on by the United States' sanctions offers a complete assessment of the political and economic dynamics of the region.

Recent research stresses both the strategic importance of the Caspian Sea to the region's broader energy security and the challenges faced by littoral states in managing its resources.

A 2021 study by Mohseni and Haji Ali Akbari examines how the Caspian Sea influences Iran's energy security and economic trajectory. Their findings highlight the sea's potential to bolster Iran's energy exports, noting the importance of diversifying regional resources to diminish Tehran's reliance on oil [129, 12p.]. By exploring Caspian energy opportunities, the authors argue, Iran may lessen its vulnerability to external pressures while improving overall economic stability.

In a related analysis, Zarifi and Mohammadi delve into the Caspian Sea's legal status and how it impacts Iran's economic progress. They underscore the necessity of a comprehensive legal framework to govern resource development and note the complications that littoral governments encounter in reaching such an agreement. The study concludes that establishing a well-defined legal structure is critical for tapping into the Caspian's abundant resources, as it would enable more effective cooperation among the bordering nations and facilitate Iran's economic advancement.

[130].

Iran's efforts to enhance its Caspian Sea resources and reduce its reliance on oil exports are investigated in a study that was conducted by Foroozan and Mahmoudi (2021). The research underscores the difficulties that Iran would face in developing the region's resources, including both political and economic difficulties [131].

Iran's tactics to overcome the hurdles created by US sanctions have made extensive use of the Caspian Sea, which has played an essential part in these strategies. Iran's goals of decreasing its reliance on oil and increasing the amount of energy it sells to Europe are in line with its primary focus on exploiting the resources of the Caspian Sea. Significant barriers to development have been erected as a result of the complex legal position of the Caspian Sea, which has forced the littoral states to negotiate a unified framework for the utilisation of the sea's resources. Scholarly publications highlight the significance of the Caspian Sea for regional energy security, economic growth, and the difficulties encountered by the littoral governments in forming a legal accord. The Caspian Sea is located in Eurasia .

In addition to the legal challenges that are associated with the Caspian Sea, Iran has faced both political and economic challenges in the process of resource development. The sanctions imposed by the United States have had a profoundly negative effect on Iran's economy, which has prompted the country to look for potential solutions. An additional source of income might be created by capitalising on the resources of the Caspian Sea and increasing exports of energy to Europe. This would reduce the region's reliance on money from oil sales. The existing body of

research highlights the vital connection between the Caspian Sea and Iran's efforts to circumvent US sanctions, highlighting the sea's central role in the dynamics of the area as a whole.

The pursuit of resource development and the building of a comprehensive exploitation framework might offer large benefits to the littoral governments, fostering both stability and wealth in the process. However, in order to realise these goals, it will be necessary to engage in collaborative diplomacy and negotiation, as well as to address political and economic difficulties in an appropriate manner, as the academic debate has emphasised again and again [132, 65 p.]

The Caspian Sea agreement profoundly reshaped Iran–Russia relations in political, military, and economic dimensions, while also curtailing the role of landlocked nations around the sea. Although Iran had historically asserted a 20% claim to Caspian waters since the Soviet Union's collapse, its sudden decision to sign the Convention created a major crisis within the Iranian government. The secrecy around the agreement's details and the lack of a parliamentary vote prompted suspicions that it undermined Iran's interests, leading officials to adopt a quiet approach to avoid public backlash. Furthermore, critics charged that bypassing parliamentary approval violated Iran's Constitution, as no information about the accord's provisions was released.

Although President Rouhani underscored supposed security benefits—such as blocking alleged U.S. ambitions to station troops or set up bases on the Caspian—the Iranian public remained unconvinced. They noted that the United States had never declared intentions to establish bases in one of the Caspian states, and that, given the sea's enclosed nature, U.S. naval forces would have no direct access. As a result, many believed Tehran had conceded part of its share to Russia. This impression deepened because Iran signed the agreement without resolving its boundary disputes with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, whereas Russia managed to claim approximately 17% of the Caspian. Protesters gathered outside Iran's parliament, angered that previous demands for 20% of the sea and its resources had apparently dwindled to an estimated 11%. While Russia can now proceed with Caspian investments, Iran must first resolve its disagreements with the southern littoral states before undertaking any significant ventures [132, 65 p.]

This suggests that the efforts taken by the United States in 2018 against Iran's destabilising acts in the area played a significant role in causing Iran to forsake historical demands that it regarded to be an integral part of Iranian identity in exchange for a Russian position that supported it in the face of the actions taken by the United States. And to withdraw from the regional countries, particularly Syria, and to suspend its missile programme, both of which caused Tehran to feel the danger and the capacity of the United States to influence Moscow's posture towards Tehran. As a result, the Iranian government has shown a tendency to offer concessions to Russia in exchange for non-compliance with the demands made by the Americans. This is done in order for the Iranian government to appear before the people in the position of a powerful government that refuses to accept to yield. However, it seemed as though the Iranian people were aware of his government's policy, and many of

them expressed their extreme ire at the Convention, which did not declare all of its provisions and the significance of the Convention. The Russian side of what will earn economic returns in the future will not mind that Russia signed a security agreement with Tehran to ensure the continued presence of its troops in Syrian territory and the participation of Iran in the political solution to the conflict in Syria [133].

Cooperation will continue in a number of files in Syria or in the East and Central Asia region, and this reinforces a number of indicators, the most important of which are: there is a balance in the two parties' need for one another, for there is a unified need for a multi-polar international system, and there is a common policy regarding the situation in Syria. However, the sanctions that the United States has imposed on Iran continue to be a constraint on the development of Russian economic relations with Iran. The Iranian regime has adopted a strategy that relies on confrontation and manoeuvring in order to limit the impact of the US strategy on it. In this context, it can be indicated that there are direct and indirect elements to confront the US sanctions based on a number of indicators that support this hypothesis. The Iranian regime has adopted a strategy that relies on confrontation and manoeuvring in order to limit the impact of the US strategy on it. Iran bet that the nuclear agreement would be maintained according to the 4+1 formula, that is, without the United States, as one of the alternatives, based on international positions opposing Trump's decisions, and to the position of the United Nations and its Secretary-General, particularly due to the fact that the International Atomic Energy Agency announced in 13 official reports from the date of the signing of the agreement until November 2018 that Iran's nuclear activities were in compliance with the terms of the agreement. However, Trump's decision to withdraw the United States [133,55 p.].

China and Russia, followed by the European Union, are of primary interest to the Iranian government since they have publicly stated their opposition to the American sanctions that have been imposed on Iran [134, 39 p.] The Iranian regime is in favour of cooperating with countries who have demonstrated their rejection of these penalties. Non-European countries will join these mechanisms in the second stage. Some countries that import Iranian oil have stated that they are waiting to use this system to pay off Iranian oil payments; however, this mechanism was not launched until the end of 2020, and no countries have participated in it as of yet. The Europeans acknowledged their decision to remain in the nuclear agreement, and they announced the creation of special financial mechanisms to allow Europe and Iran to pay and repay without resorting to the dollar. The Europeans also announced the creation of special financial mechanisms to allow Europe.

China and Russia, on the other hand, managed to keep their relations with Iran amicable throughout the previous round of sanctions, which took place prior to the nuclear accord. After the Chinese, in particular, opened the private bank road in front of Iran during the previous sanctions, and they promise to do so during this stage, and Iran launched private bilateral financial mechanisms with China, Russia, and India, in order to overcome the financial sanctions imposed on it by the United States, a lot of aid was provided to Iran, and economic cooperation between the two countries and Iran increased [135, 12p.] This occurred after Iran launched the private bilateral

financial mechanisms with China, Russia, and India, in order to overcome the financial sanctions imposed.

Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif threatened on September 13, 2018, "a possible increase in Iran's uranium enrichment if Europe backs down negatively after the American withdrawal from the nuclear agreement" [133, 46p.]. This comes after Iran hinted at the possibility of its return to uranium enrichment in the event that the agreement failed. Rouhani hinted at the possibility of Iran returning to uranium enrichment.

Iran is betting on thwarting the American endeavour to reduce oil exports, to affect the interior of the gateway to the economy, by intensifying cooperation with neighbouring countries. As Iran moves on several regional axes to confront sanctions, particularly with the countries of Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, and countries of the Caspian Sea basin, as well as some countries of the Arab Gulf [136], Iran is betting that it will be successful in thwarting the American endeavour.

Iran plays the paper of stability in the area and the impact on the global oil market, and thus the threat of stopping oil exports from the region if Iran is not able to sell its oil as a result of sanctions that the United States will put on Iran as a result of its nuclear programme.

Internally betting on Iran's internal cohesion in the face of pressure from the United States, as well as betting on some economic measures in order to avoid the reflection of the sanctions on the economy, and these actions: attempting to address the decline in the exchange rate, and attempting to reach cooperative formulas with the outside world without relying on the US dollar, as well as for Some agreements related to the possibility of exporting petroleum independently of banking sanctions, in a so-called "so-called" "side deal. "

The Iranian government's goal of amassing as much wealth as possible, on the other hand, makes it impossible to ignore the possibility of transferring energy via pipelines. When it comes to energy security, entry to production areas is not the only way to achieve this, but it is also linked to ways and means of transporting energy supplies safely, reliably and at reasonable cost for consumption markets, and for countries with a closed geography in general, such as the Caspian Basin, the issue of transferring energy resources becomes a real preoccupation and a strategic challenge on which their economy and national security depend, and in light of the dichotomy of the depths of the territories of the countries of the region with resources on the one hand, and their geographical nature that hinders their transfer on the other, external forces find an opportunity to penetrate the region and achieving the largest possible gains in light of intense competition for the conflicting interests of each of those forces, which is what creates a situation strategically disturbed there, play in which both Russia and the USA, Iran and China, decisive and influential role, and entered those the powers in what was known as a pipeline war, in reference to the various projects adopted by each country to transfer the region's energy wealth to serve its interests and orientations.

In an era in which energy is the backbone of the economy and strategy, and the United States of America, Russia, Iran, and China are the most present actors at the

heart of this intertwining geostrategic equation, each has its own interests in the region, which often conflict with the interests of other actors. The presence of a region with these reserves and production capabilities naturally makes it a magnet, and turns it into an arena for geopolitical and geoeconomic competition .

This may be proven in a concrete way by looking at a map of the numerous pipelines and projects that are spread out across the region. Each of these reflects different interests and trends, and it is feasible to demonstrate this by: stopping at one of the five main roadways that oil and gas pipelines take

Northern Roads: they are favoured for Russia, and through which Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan can link to the already existing pipelines by undertaking extension or building new pipelines, carrying their oil to Novorossiysk on the Black Sea. These pipelines carry their oil to Novorossiysk from Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan [137, p.93].

The Western Roads are favoured by the United States of America, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. These roads are distinguished in that they do not cross any territory that is owned by Russia or Iran. The least expensive project that is being proposed here is the construction of a pipeline from the production areas towards the Georgian port of "Supsa" on the Black Sea. From there, oil tankers deliver the product to Europe via the Bosphorus strait. In addition to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, which Israel and the United States hope to use to extend a pipeline to Tel Aviv across the Mediterranean, there is also a pipeline that crosses the Caspian Sea that pumps oil from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan into the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Israel and the United States hope to expand the pipeline to Tel Aviv [138, p.93].

Southern Roads: Iran tends to favor these southern routes, as they offer greater cost-efficiency, generally traverse secure areas, and present fewer ecological issues. They also benefit from existing pipeline and port facilities, including a gas pipeline between Turkmenistan and Iran. Plans for extending this pipeline onward to Turkey are underway with oversight by a SHELL-affiliated company. However, global concerns—expressed by both oil firms and governments—stem from the possibility that expanding these southern routes would strengthen the world's dependence on the Strait of Hormuz. This apprehension has hindered the completion of the project.

The Kazakh option is appealing to China because it is the closest to it and there is a great possibility of access to energy sources. It was in this context that an agreement to build an oil pipeline between the two countries was reached in 1997. China has an increasing need for energy and needs to search for new markets. Eastern Roads: It is the favourite of China. China has an increasing need for energy and needs to search for new markets [139, 12p.].

South-eastern Roads: it is preferred to Pakistan and Afghanistan, and the most important project in it is planning the Unocal Corporation company, the Saudi Delta Oil company, and another American company, to establish a pipeline that would transport Turkmenistan's oil and gas to Kazakhstan, through Afghanistan, to Pakistan,

and finally to India; however, a number of political obstacles and security concerns prevent this project from materialising at the present time.

Over the course of the past half century, China and Turkey have kept up their diplomatic relations. Both nations have worked together to address

A variety of global concerns, including regional security, the fight against terrorism, and the protection of human rights. Turkey sees China as a crucial partner in its efforts to broaden its diplomatic and economic links beyond the Western world, while China acknowledges Turkey as an essential partner in the Middle East and North Africa region.

The political relationship between China and Turkey has been strengthened during the past several years as a result of high-level visits between the presidents of the two nations. During his visit to Turkey in 2017, Chinese President Xi Jinping signed a number of bilateral agreements with Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the President of Turkey. The agreements primarily focused on increasing cooperation in the areas of commerce, investments, tourism, and infrastructure development. During his trip to China in 2019, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan was able to meet with Chinese President Xi Jinping and sign a number of agreements aimed at bolstering the commercial links that exist between Turkey and China[131].

The political relationship between China and Turkey is largely positive; nonetheless, there have been certain areas of conflict between the two countries. There have been rumours that Uighur Turks are being deported from Turkey to China, and Turkey has been vocal in its criticism of China's handling of the Uighur Muslim minority that it has. Turkey has also been critical of China's One Belt, One Road (OBOR) plan, which Turkey perceives as a danger to Turkey's own aspirations to increase its influence in the region. Turkey has shown its criticism of OBOR through its criticism of China's One Belt, One Road initiative [131].

The economic ties between China and Turkey are developing at a rapid pace. In recent years, the two nations have strengthened their connections in the areas of commerce, investment, and tourism. Over \$20 billion was exchanged in goods and services between Turkey and China in 2019, making China Turkey's second-largest trading partner.

The two countries have also established numerous bilateral agreements aimed at strengthening economic collaboration. In 2018, China and Turkey finalized a currency swap arrangement, enabling commercial transactions to be conducted directly in their respective national currencies instead of relying on the US dollar. This initiative was designed to reduce both nations' dependency on the American currency while fostering increased bilateral trade volumes. Furthermore, China has channeled substantial capital investments into Turkey's critical infrastructure, focusing heavily on the energy sector. For instance, in 2015, the Chinese state-backed corporation CMEC secured a contract to construct a nuclear power facility in Turkey. Similarly, in 2018, TBEA, another Chinese state-owned enterprise, entered into a strategic agreement to finance upgrades to Turkey's energy infrastructure.

Both of these deals were made possible because to the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between China and Turkey. Some commentators believe that China's

investment in Turkey's infrastructure is a strategy for China to enhance its influence in the area. This perspective is shared by Turkey's government[132].

There have been certain difficulties despite the growth of economic relations between China and Turkey; yet, these ties have expanded. There have been some debates about the terms of Chinese investment in Turkey's infrastructure, which has caused Turkey to express some concern regarding the influence that China's One Belt One Road plan will have on Turkey's own economic interests.

The political and economic connection between China and Turkey has developed at a rapid pace over the past several years, with the two nations strengthening their cooperation in the areas of commerce, investment, and infrastructure. The connection between the two countries has been improved as a result of high-level visits between the leaders of both countries as well as the signing of various bilateral agreements that aim to deepen collaboration. However, there have been certain areas of contention, such as Turkey's worries regarding China's treatment of its Uighur Muslim minority and the influence of China's OBOR programme on Turkey's own economic interests. Both of these issues have been a source of friction between the two countries. In spite of these hurdles, it is expected that China and Turkey will continue to deepen their connection as both nations want to diversify their diplomatic and economic relationships beyond the Western world[133].

On the level of Iranian-Chinese ties, China has refused the American dictates of the Chinese economic policy with regard to commercial dealings with Iran, therefore China continues to be Iran's primary trade partner. This is because China has rejected the American economic policy on commercial dealings with Iran. China has taken steps to fill the investment void left behind as a result of European corporations pulling out of projects at the same time. Iran's participation in the Chinese "One Belt - One Road" initiative was terminated as a direct result of China's decision to stop providing Iran with significant financial assistance in the form of loans and investments .

Despite the fact that China does not have a coastline along the Caspian Sea and that it did not participate in the Aktau accord, it is possible to count China as one of the successful countries. It is not a coincidence that the signing of a new port on the Caspian Sea in the city of Kuryk, Kazakhstan, as part of the Chinese Silk Roads project took place the day before the signing of the Aktau agreement [134, 96 p.].

Kazakhstan, with its wide territory and enormous resources, holds a vital place along the Silk Road. Kazakhstan has linked its economy with China and initiated programmes to expand its infrastructure in order to account for the massive amount of investment coming from China.

This agreement aligns with the objectives of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), which prioritizes advancing multilateral collaboration among participating states. Notably, Russia, Kazakhstan, and China are original signatories of the SCO, while Azerbaijan holds observer status. Iran sought membership years earlier but faced delays in finalizing its accession due to international sanctions [135, 21 p.]. China's engagement in the Caspian Sea region reflects its broader strategic objectives and diplomatic priorities. A key focus is maintaining border security and

stability established post-Soviet dissolution, thereby countering external meddling in its western territories. Moreover, energy security represents one of the four pillars defining China's geopolitical and diplomatic agenda in the Caspian, guiding its regional initiatives.

These principles are: China has strat It is becoming increasingly crucial to China's internal growth that China pursues its economic and commercial interests in the region, particularly with regard to the development of resources in the energy sector.

Because it is adjacent to China and three of China's countries have direct borders with it (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan), the Caspian Sea has geographical characteristics that increase its value for a strategy for China. This is what enables the transportation of oil and gas towards the Chinese mainland and from it towards the most energy-consuming regions of China, which are concentrated especially on the east coast. The passage of oil supplies from the huge Pacific and Indian oceans as well as the perilous fjords, the most dangerous of which is the Strait of Malacca, can be avoided by Beijing [136, p.96].

Iran is content with the prospect of Chinese dominance in the region surrounding the Caspian Sea. Iran's relations with the Chinese superpower are improving on an almost daily basis, and China is in agreement with Tehran and Moscow that the United States should not attempt to exert authority over Central Asia [137].

The Iranian site is of geopolitical importance to China because of its location in the southwest of the continent of Asia, and its overlooking the most important strategic water bodies, which are the Persian Gulf, the Arabian Sea, the Indian Ocean, and the Caspian Sea. This made it the link between East and West, and serves as a natural corridor for the trade world, of which China is one of the pioneers. In addition, the Iranian site overlooks the Caspian Sea, which made it the link between East and West [138].

Therefore, this strategic location gives China a foothold in the vital Middle East region, with all of its strategic goods, natural and mineral resources, and wide markets and international shipping lanes through which oil tankers pass to China, and the Iranian position enables China to be present in the region to compete with the role played by the United States, and Iran also enables China to expand its geostrategic influence beyond its immediate vicinity in the Asia-Pacific region. Consequently, this strategic location gives China a foothold in the vital Middle East.

Historically, there has been a lack of trust between the Iranians and the Russians due to the Russians storming parts of Iranian lands, so the Iranian strategic mind is obsessed with the continuity of the Russians' permanent support. The Chinese veto provides a second international strategic balance after the Russian veto, protecting Iranian interests from American threats and sanctions. November 2017 "We will not betray you" [139, 15p.] Armed clashes between pro-Russian and Iranian forces in Syria over the areas of control reached a breaking point, adding to the persistent indicators of tension in the Russian-Iranian relations in the Syrian file [140, 15p.].

As much as China is aware of the significance of Iran as a dependable commercial and political ally in the Middle East region, Beijing is also aware of the fact that instability in the Arab Gulf will inevitably endanger China's interests by the United States in more than one region, particularly in the strategic and vital Arab Gulf region for China. Due to the fact that instability in the Middle East threatens Chinese trade ships and energy supply lines, China prefers the collective security option i.e. cooperating with other nations in the region[141].

The Caspian Sea, recognized as the world's largest inland body of water, borders several nations, including Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. This shared coastline has profoundly influenced these countries' political, economic, and cultural development. Below, we explore the sea's geopolitical and economic significance for the region. As Central Asia's largest state, Kazakhstan shares terrestrial boundaries with Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Situated on the Caspian's eastern shore, this geographically landlocked country possesses vast reserves of oil, natural gas, and mineral resources. These assets form the backbone of Kazakhstan's economy, with the nation emerging as a global leader in energy production through sustained advancements in its hydrocarbon sector. The Caspian Sea serves as a critical transit corridor linking Kazakhstan to international markets, playing a pivotal role in its economic growth. To bolster regional commerce, Kazakhstan has developed extensive port facilities along its Caspian coastline. Furthermore, pipelines crossing the Caspian basin enable the export of the country's oil and gas reserves to consumers across Europe and Asia.

Another country that has a coastline along the Caspian Sea is Azerbaijan. The nation is well-known for its substantial oil deposits and may be found on the western coast of the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan's oil industry is the backbone of the country's economy, and the Caspian Sea has been an important source of oil and gas for the country.

The oil reserves in Azerbaijan weren't discovered until the 19th century, but the country has been selling its product internationally since the early 20th century. Pipelines that travel over the Caspian Sea to markets in Europe and Asia have made the Caspian Sea an essential transit route for Azerbaijan's oil and gas exports over the past several decades. Azerbaijan has also upgraded its port infrastructure along the shore of the Caspian Sea in order to make it easier for the country to do trade with the other nations in the region.

Among the Caspian Sea's bordering nations, Turkmenistan has the smallest population and occupies the most geographically isolated position on the sea's eastern shoreline. Renowned for its vast natural gas reserves, the country's energy sector has relied heavily on the Caspian's strategic role. Turkmenistan's gas resources are exported to international markets across Europe and Asia via pipelines that cross the Caspian basin.

Along the shore of the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan has built its port infrastructure in order to promote trade with other countries in the region. Because of its advantageous location along the Caspian Sea, the country has emerged as a significant hub for the transportation of goods travelling between Europe and Asia.

The cultural advancement of these nations has also been significantly influenced by the Caspian Sea's presence throughout history. Artists and authors have found that the sea, with its breathtaking scenery and extensive history, is a source of inspiration for their work. The area surrounding the Caspian Sea is home to numerous different linguistic and ethnic communities, and each of the countries in the region has its own distinct culture and set of customs.

In summing up, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have all relied significantly on the Caspian Sea as an important resource. Because it acts as a portal to the rest of the world, the sea has been extremely important to the political, cultural, and economic growth of these countries over the course of their history. In order to move their natural resources to markets in Europe and Asia, these nations have established the port infrastructure and pipeline networks in their respective countries. Moving forward, the Caspian Sea is poised to remain a critical driver of innovation and economic progress for the region's nations. Among these, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan hold a distinct advantage due to their extensive oil and gas reserves, largely concentrated in the Caspian's eastern sedimentary basins. These geological formations are notably richer in hydrocarbons compared to those of neighboring states. While other countries in the area possess fewer energy resources, their strategic value lies in serving as transit hubs for transporting oil and gas to East and Southeast Asian markets. As the largest nation in the region, Kazakhstan dominates both territorially and economically. Its national income surpasses 50% of the combined revenue of all Central Asian republics, and it holds the region's most substantial oil reserves. The 1990s marked a turning point for its oil sector, driven by the commissioning of new fields, expanded drilling operations, modernization of aging infrastructure, and advanced exploration technologies. Globally, Kazakhstan ranks 11th in oil production, positioned between Nigeria (8th) and the United States. Most of its oil reserves are clustered near the Caspian basin in the west, with the exception of the Karashaganak field, situated farther north near the Ural Mountains.

A number of studies estimate the oil reserves of Kazakhstan to be between 30 and 40 billion barrels of crude oil. This is equivalent to about half of the Russian reserves and 11% of thei Kazakhstan is emerging as a producer and exporter of world markets due to its large reserves of oil and gas and its low energy consumption (only 15% of Kazakhstan's oil production is consumed locally) [142]. Kazakhstan's large oil production and small population, in addition to the backwardness of the oil refining industry, are all factors that are forcing Kazakhstan to search for new methods and initiatives to reach potential consumers .

Turkmenistan dominates natural gas production within the Caspian region, boasting reserves estimated at 2.1 trillion cubic meters. These reserves represent roughly 2.1% of global gas supplies, securing the country's position as the thirteenth-largest holder of natural gas reserves worldwide.

Furthermore, with such large reserves and a population, Turkmen citizens and companies do not need Except for a portion of the state's natural gas companies. For instance, in 2002, "Turkmen Gas" and "Turkmen Oil" companies, which are the only players in the Turkmen energy market, produced 71 billion cubic metres [76, 14 p.] of

gas. However, Turkmen citizens and Turkmen industries only consumed 15 billion cubic metres, which is equivalent to only 21% of the total Production, while the remaining 80% was directed for export .

And the oil sector in Turkmenistan is characterised by modesty, in accordance with the standards of the world; however, it is a candidate for high touched earlier in terms of production and export, because estimates of the operations of the survey seismic carried out by western companies and the US under the supervision of the government of Turkmen, reported the existence of reserves of 11 billion tonnes of oil Crude is in Turkmenistan's share of the Caspian Sea basin, and this i is in Turkmenistan's .

As for Azerbaijan, because of its placement on the map, Iran places a significant amount of strategic importance on the country because it serves as a connection to Russia in the country's northernmost region. In addition to the cultural and theological similarity that is symbolised by the fact that the majority of its population is Shiite Muslims, it has, for various reasons, always been the main point of emphasis in Iran's orientation towards the Caucasus. This is because of the proximity of the two regions.

The Nagorno Karabakh problem, the Iranian position on the issue, regional and international competition in the South Caucasus region, and the tendency of the Baku government to strengthen its relations with the axis that Tehran sees as its opponent and that its influence in the region constitutes a threat are among the primary factors that prevent the development of joint cooperation relations. Iran was aware of the fact that Azerbaijan has the largest economy among the countries of the South Caucasus; nevertheless, despite this knowledge, it was unable to successfully use its capabilities to build economic connections with Azerbaijan [77, 78 p.]. Iran's national security concerns and the fact that Azerbaijan has the largest economy among the countries of the South Caucasus.

The geographic positioning of Iran and Azerbaijan as Caspian littoral states, combined with their shared membership in the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), enhances opportunities for advancing regional economic collaboration. Alongside other stakeholders advocating for multilateral partnerships, both nations prioritize joint initiatives in sectors such as energy resource management, cross-border trade, logistics infrastructure, telecommunications networks, and institutional capacity building to deepen collaborative frameworks [77, 16 p.].

The presence of foreign powers' control in the South Caucasus region is one of the variables impacting the region and influencing the curbing of Iranian influence. This presence is one of the causes affecting the region. The government of the United States has been successful in excluding Iran from regional projects by applying pressure and making concessions to the countries of the region. This has been demonstrated on multiple times, with the removal of Iran from the international oil consortium project being the most significant of these instances. In Azerbaijan: In the nineties of the twentieth century, Russia sought to monopolise the transportation of Azerbaijani oil via a line from Baku to the Russian port of Novorossiysk overlooking

the Black Sea. The infrastructure, however, lacked the necessary capacity to process and distribute significant oil volumes, ultimately undermining Russia's ambitions to leverage this system for its intended geopolitical influence [78].

In return for Turkey and the United States' opposition to the Russian line, the United States supported a project to transport crude oil from the Azerbaijani Sheraj Gunzli field through a line that passes through the capital of Georgia, Tbilisi (to avoid Armenia's dispute with Baku), to the Turkish port of Ceyhan overlooking the Mediterranean Sea for export to world markets. This was done in exchange for Turkey and the United States' opposition to the Russian line. Thus, the United States could contribute to breaking the Russian monopoly and avoiding crossing the lines through Iranian territory [76] and excluding Iran from initiatives to enhance energy security, including what some countries have started TAG The three (Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia) since 2006, from manoeuvres and military training under the umbrella of NATO, [77, p.201] Iran does not seem satisfied with the economic and military cooperation between a triangle of staggered interests. Since 2013, Azerbaijan and Turkey have been increasing the number of cooperative military exercises as well as the establishment of combined military formations for the purpose of protecting crucial projects, facilities, and gas and oil pipelines [78]. The development in international collaboration in the sphere of energy and the extension of oil and gas pipelines coincides with an increase in security and military cooperation as well as an increase in armament capacities, which poses a challenge to the Iranian role in the region [79, p.210].

Iran makes significant contributions to the energy sector in Azerbaijan, and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) owns a ten percent stake in the consortium that operates the Shah Deniz field in Azerbaijan. This is the location from which the South Caucasus gas pipeline BTE originates, and it is planned to feed the Trans-Adriatic Gas Pipeline via the Trans-Anatolian Gas Line, both of which are planned to supply Europe with gas. In 2013, the US administration exempted the company's activity in the Shah Deniz field from a new package of sanctions against Iran [80] In addition to the Shah Deniz field project, (NIOC) owns 10% of the shares of the company that manages the South Caucasus Gas Pipeline. Given the strategic importance of the Shah Deniz field, the European Union requested that the US administration exempt activity (NIOC) Exclusively, the project is one of the sanctions imposed on Iran[81]

In summing up, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have all relied significantly on the Caspian Sea as an important resource. Because it acts as a portal to the rest of the world, the sea has been extremely important to the political, cultural, and economic growth of these countries over the course of their history. In order to move their natural resources to markets in Europe and Asia, these nations have established the port infrastructure and pipeline networks in their respective countries. In the future, the Caspian Sea will continue to serve as a vital source of ideas and advancement for these countries.

Earlier sections of this analysis examined Iran's diplomatic and strategic engagements with key regional actors in the Caucasus, encompassing both Caspian

coastal states and external powers seeking to exploit the basin's energy resources. This segment explores the interplay of collaboration and competition shaping Iran's role in Caspian-related affairs within regional and global spheres. Emphasis is placed on how these dynamics influence geopolitical and economic strategies tied to the Caspian Sea.

Iran holds a key role in the Caspian Basin due to the fact that it is in possession of around 13% of the coastline of the Caspian Sea. Iran is the only country in the region that has access to both the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf; as a result, this gives Iran a strategic edge in the region. The Persian Gulf is located to the south of Iran. Because of its location in the Caspian Basin, Iran has access to numerous significant transportation routes. One of these is the Trans-Caspian Railway, which links Central Asia, Iran, and the Persian Gulf [82]

Iran's abundance of diverse energy resources amplifies the Caspian region's heightened geopolitical significance. The country holds substantial oil and gas reserves, alongside access to the Caspian Basin's globally prominent hydrocarbon deposits. These assets solidify Iran's role as an influential actor in international energy markets and grant it strategic leverage in shaping regional and global political dynamics. Strategically situated within the Caspian Basin, Iran has long exercised a pivotal role in the area's political landscape.

For decades, it has played an active role in regional diplomacy, particularly in shaping the legal and governance structures of the Caspian Sea. A landmark moment occurred in 1991, following the Soviet Union's dissolution, when the five coastal states ratified the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation to formalize collaborative governance of the sea.

This document laid the groundwork for the equitable distribution of the sea's resources. However, the treaty did not settle all of the problems that were associated with the legal status of the Caspian Sea, and negotiations have been ongoing up until the present day.

The equitable distribution of the Caspian Sea's resources is one of the most contentious questions about the sea's legal status. Russia and Kazakhstan have campaigned for a share of the sea's resources based on the length of each country's coastline, whereas Iran has long supported for an equitable division of the sea's resources among the five coastal states. Both Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have adopted a more circumspect strategy in an effort to forestall any conflicts and arrive at an understanding that is favourable to both parties. After several years of discussion, parties still have not arrived at a conclusive compromise.

The dispute over who has jurisdiction over the waters of the Caspian Sea has important repercussions for Iran's standing in the region. Iran would gain major economic and strategic advantages from a final agreement on the split of the sea's resources, as this would enable the country to develop its own resources and access those of its neighbours. It would also assist to stabilise the region and lessen tensions between the five Caspian littoral governments, both of which would be benefits of doing this.

In addition to its significance for both the economy and the military, the Caspian Basin is notable for the role it has played throughout history and the culture of the region. There is evidence of human habitation in the Caspian region dating back thousands of years. During this time, a number of different civilizations have called this area home, including the Persian Empire, the Parthian Empire, and the Sassanian Empire. The area was also an important hub for business and commerce for centuries, and it was connected to the historic Silk Road, which served as a trade route between East and West for countless years. To this day, the Caspian region is recognised as an important cultural and historical centre, and it is home to a great deal of territory that is rich in historical and archaeological sites.

The location of Iran within the Caspian Basin also has significant repercussions for the safety of the surrounding area. Since ancient times, the Caspian Sea region has been at the epicentre of geopolitical struggle, with numerous countries seeking for influence in the area. Iran's strategic location in the region has made it a major player in this competition, and it has frequently found itself in conflict with other regional powers such as Russia and the United States. This is because Iran's strategic position in the region is located in the heart of the Persian Gulf.

The threat posed by extremism and terrorist organisations is one of the most significant problems to regional security that is currently being faced. ISIS and Al Qaeda are only two of the terrorist organisations that have carried out operations in Iran and other nations in the region. The Caspian region is home to a number of other terrorist organisations as well. Iran has been an active player in the battle against terrorism and extremism in the region, and it has worked closely with other nations in the region to tackle these dangers. In addition, Iran has been a strong supporter of international efforts to combat terrorism.

The spread of weapons of mass destruction is yet another obstacle for the region in terms of maintaining its security. The Caspian region is home to a number of countries, notably Russia and Israel, that are in possession of nuclear weapons. The nuclear programme of Iran has also been a cause of conflict in the region, as some nations consider it to be a threat to the security of the region. Iran has always claimed that its nuclear programme is being conducted solely for peaceful reasons, but the subject continues to be a cause of concern in the area [83].

In spite of these obstacles, the Caspian Basin possesses the potential to become a key driver of economic expansion and development for the surrounding area. The Caspian region is home to a variety of natural resources, such as oil, gas, and minerals, all of which have the potential to contribute to the region's economic growth and development. Additionally, the area is home to a number of significant transportation corridors, such as trains and pipelines, which have the potential to assist with the region's integration into the global economy. However, in order to take use of this potential, the countries that make up the region will need to collaborate in order to meet the numerous issues that are now being faced by the region. For this to be accomplished, there will need to be communication and collaboration amongst the numerous nations that make up the region, as well as a dedication to maintaining peace and tranquilly [84].

Iran is going to have a significant impact on the outcome of this process. Iran has a huge impact on the politics and economy of the Caspian Basin as a result of its position as one of the most important players in the region. Iran has also shown a commitment to regional cooperation and has worked closely with other countries in the region to address difficulties that are shared by all of the countries in the region.

Iran has made efforts in recent years to strengthen its relationships with both its immediate neighbours and the international community as a whole. Iran struck a historic nuclear agreement with the United States and other world powers in 2015. As part of this agreement, international sanctions against Iran were eased in exchange for Iran agreeing to place restrictions on its nuclear programme. Despite the difficulties that have been encountered over the past few years, the accord nonetheless represents a significant advance in Iran's relations with the international community[85].

Iran's geopolitical weight within the Caspian Basin holds immense implications for both regional and global political dynamics. The basin's strategic and economic value, coupled with Iran's pivotal role in the area, profoundly shapes the security and stability of neighboring territories. While the Caspian region holds promise as a catalyst for economic progress and development, harnessing this potential requires robust collaborative frameworks among littoral states—a goal complicated by persistent challenges such as competing territorial claims and resource disputes [86].

3.3 Iran and Energy in the Caspian Sea - Between Cooperation and Conflict

Iran is a nation that can be found in the region known as the Middle East and has a population of roughly 85 million people. It is recognized as a regional power and has considerable influence not only in the Persian Gulf region but also in other parts of the world. Because of its rise to prominence as a regional force and its involvement in a wide variety of disputes and problems, Iran has been the focus of a great number of academic investigations, particularly in the recent years. The New Regional Role Theory (NRRT) is one of the theoretical frameworks that is utilized in the process of analyzing Iran's regional role. This idea places a strong emphasis on the influence that intangible aspects, such as a nation's identity and culture, have on the role that it plays in its region. In this study, we will use the NRRT framework to investigate Iran's regional role, and then analyze the repercussions of that role for the area. [143, 96 p.].

In the past few years, Iran's role in the region has experienced considerable transformations. Following the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the country's foreign policy altered to place a greater emphasis on spreading the Islamic Revolution and providing support to Shia populations throughout the region. This dynamic intensified friction with nearby Arab nations, which perceived Iran's actions as jeopardizing their domestic stability and regional security, while also casting the nation as a likely provocateur in area disputes. The fact that Iran backs terrorist

organizations like Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen has contributed to the escalation of tensions between Iran, the United States, and its allies.

Iran's role in the area has changed significantly over the past few years, with a larger focus placed on economic and cultural issues. Iran has made efforts to strengthen its economic relations with its neighbors, particularly those nations' energy sectors, in recent years. Additionally, Iran has endeavored to expand its cultural sphere of influence throughout the area, with an emphasis on the dissemination of its Persian language and literary works. Iran's engagement with the region has also been affected by the conflict in Syria and the growth of ISIS, which has led to increased cooperation with Russia and Iran. This has been the result of Iran's engagement with the region.

The New Regional Role Theory, often known as NRRT, is a conceptual framework that is utilized for conducting research on the regional role of a nation. The Non-Material Factors function in Shaping a Country's Regional Role The NRRT places an emphasis on the function that non-material factors, such as culture and identity, play in shaping the regional role of a country. The National Role of a Country in the Region The NRRT asserts that the regional role of a country is formed by the country's national identity, which is in turn created by the country's history, culture, and religious traditions.

Traditional realist theories of international relations, which place a greater emphasis on material elements like as economic and military might, cannot be compared to the NRRT because of this. The Non-Material Factors are Just as Important as Material Factors in Shaping a Country's Behavior and Influence in the Region, according to the NRRT's Arguments. In addition to this, the NRRT places an emphasis on the role that normative elements, such as a nation's values and beliefs, have in the formation of that nation's foreign policy.

The NRRT model can be used to conduct an analysis of Iran's influence in the area. The historical events, rich culture, and deeply held religious beliefs of Iran all contribute to the formation of the country's unique national identity. Iran's history is largely influenced by the ancient Persian empire, which contributed to the development of a robust feeling of national pride and identity. Iran's national identity was significantly influenced by the Islamic Revolution of 1979, which placed a strong emphasis on Islamic values and principles.

Additionally notable is Iran's cultural influence over the region. The Persian language and literature of Iran have had a great influence on the surrounding area, particularly in nations such as Afghanistan and Tajikistan. Iran's regional involvement is heavily influenced by its Shia Islamic identity, which places a focus on providing support to Shia populations around the region.

The disputes and tensions that Iran has had with its neighboring countries have also had a role in shaping Iran's regional role. Iran's backing for organizations such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen has led to tensions with neighboring Arab countries, which perceive Iran as a threat to their security and stability. These countries view Iran as a threat because Iran supports groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon and the Houthis in Yemen. Tensions have arisen between Iran and Turkey

and other nations in the region as a direct result of Iran's involvement in the conflict in Syria.

Iran's economic interests have had a role in influencing the nature of its interaction with the region. Iran has made efforts to strengthen its economic relations with its neighbors, particularly those nations' energy sectors, in recent years. Iran's economic interests have also led to its engagement in conflicts such as the war in Syria, in which it has sought to safeguard its economic interests by providing backing to the Syrian government. Iran's involvement in these conflicts was also motivated by Iran's desire to protect its economic interests.

The interaction of Iran with the area has also been influenced by normative considerations such as the Islamic ideals and principles that Iran adheres to. Iran's backing for organizations such as Hezbollah and the Houthis is driven in part by the country's aim to support populations that are being oppressed and struggle against Western imperialism. Iran's antagonism to Israel, which it sees as a colonial and illegitimate state, also plays a role in its interaction with the region. Iran views Israel as illegitimate and colonial.

The role that Iran plays in the region has important repercussions for the surrounding area. Tensions have arisen between Iran and its neighbors as a result of Iran's engagement in crises such as the war in Syria and its support for parties such as Hezbollah and the Houthis. Particularly problematic is Iran's relationship with Israel and Saudi Arabia. The United States and its allies see Iran as a possible nuclear threat, which has led to increased tensions between the two countries as a result of Iran's nuclear programme.

According to the NRRT framework, intangible aspects such as Iran's identity and culture may have a part in determining the country's role in the area. This provides evidence that Iran's involvement in the region is driven by factors other than merely its desire to further its material interests. Iran's involvement in the region is also impacted by its desire to further the Islamic ideals and principles it upholds and to lend assistance to groups that are being persecuted.

Additionally, the NRRT paradigm argues that Iran's regional position is not static, but rather is subject to change over the course of time. This provides evidence that Iran's engagement with the area may vary in the future, based on developments in both Iran's national identity and the dynamics of the region. Alterations in the global political landscape, such as shifts in the regional balance of power and modifications to the structure of the international system, may also have an effect on Iran's interaction with the surrounding area.

Iran's historical, cultural, and religious identities all play a part in shaping the country's complex and diverse role in the area. These identities also contribute to Iran's religious identity. The NRRT framework is a helpful tool for analysing Iran's regional role because it places an emphasis on the role that non-material factors have in determining the foreign policy and influence of a country in the region[144, 96 p.].

The involvement of Iran in the region has enormous repercussions for the region as a whole, including the escalation of tensions with surrounding countries and with the United States. However, the NRRT framework shows that Iran's regional

role is not fixed and can fluctuate over time depending on changes in both Iran's national identity and the dynamics of the region. This conclusion is drawn from the fact that Iran's role in the region is not a static one.

The NRRT paradigm could be used in further study on Iran's regional role to investigate how changes in Iran's national identity and regional dynamics could influence the country's future engagement with the area. This research could also examine the ways in which Iran's engagement with the area is influenced by normative issues such as Iran's Islamic beliefs and principles, and how this may affect Iran's relations with surrounding countries and the United States.

When discussing the regional orientation of a country and differentiating it from the global trend on the grounds that there is a foreign policy directed mainly to the region in which the international unity exists, and there are other policies that extend beyond the immediate geographical region to include the whole world, it is important to keep in mind that the regional foreign policy maker is primarily concerned with the existing international units. To the extent that global perceptions have an effect on this region, and only this region, is the only thing that concerns him in his territory. As for the person who makes decisions about global foreign policy, his interests are dispersed throughout many different parts of the world. Iranian regional policy can be included by virtue of the main functions and determinants that the state enjoys to be affecting at the regional level, so we find that the political stations Iranian territorial by virtue of the multiplicity and diversity of Iran's neighbours, so from the east Afghanistan and in the west Iraq, Turkey and north countries of formerly under the Soviet Union and in the south of the Arab Gulf states, this briefing geopolitical location of Iran, this briefing geopolitical location of Iran in the Middle East In point of fact, these events brought out the characteristics of change in Iran's relations beyond the countries of regional direct neighbourhood to the wider regional circle, and there were positive relationships with Egypt and the countries of the Maghreb. Changes have also occurred in Iran's relations with India and Pakistan, as well as countries that are no longer under the control of the former Soviet Union, and we can discern Iran's regional policy on three fundamental levels.

It is a model of rising collaboration for Iran with Syria, the Arab Gulf states, and Russia to construct the base for a prospective regional economic and cooperative system. The first level of this model is as follows:

The second level: It is reflected in the policy of consensus that is practically embodied by the reality of Iran with Turkey and Iraq, while the first ties with Israel and the United States comprise the role of direct obstacle to hinder the growth of Turkish-Iranian relations. The third level: It is represented in the policy of cooperation that is practically embodied by the reality of Iran with Iraq[145, 96 p.].

The third level: Third tier: Iran's regional strategy prioritizes conflict resolution and unity-building, a principle most evident in its engagements with the Palestinian leadership and Afghanistan's post-Taliban government. This approach underscores how Iran's foreign policy in the region balances pragmatic and adaptable strategies that occasionally conflict with its stated ideological rhetoric. Analyzing these efforts through the lens of soft power—emphasizing cultural, diplomatic, and economic

influence over coercion—provides critical insights into the mechanisms driving Tehran's regional decision-making, especially at the regional level, where the tools for implementing Iran's soft power are located, to understand the tools for analyzing Iranian foreign policy, especially at And the other most significant tool is the media tool, as the largest media empires in Asia and the world. This is the most vital instrument. Iran is attempting to pass its current foreign policy through the use of political Shiism, together with anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric. However, there are those who believe that these new Iranian soft powers do not have a significant influence. This is something that Iranian researcher Dr. Mohammad Reza Bajuh points out: "Iran does not use the country's capabilities in soft power correctly, which if it were employed in foreign and diplomatic policy, would have a deeper and greater influence in the regional and international system." On the basis of this, it is possible to raise the question of whether or not Iran is able to use its international tools in its interactions with the countries of the Caspian region in order to expand its regional sphere of influence [146, 58p.]

Iran regards the Caspian Sea as a critical geopolitical priority, driven by the belief that its strategic value surged following the Soviet Union's dissolution in 1991. The emergence of newly independent littoral states transformed the region into a collaborative arena for shared resource management. Before this shift, Iran and the USSR held exclusive access to the Caspian's energy and maritime assets, but the post-Soviet era expanded participation, fostering multilateral partnerships to harness the sea's economic potential. As we have discussed in the past, the Iranian perspective on the Caspian Sea is governed by three determinants

First, the Caspian Sea is an important economic factor for Iran and a source of pride for the country's future. Despite the significant technical challenges that oil and gas extraction faces in this region, Iran considers it to be one of the richest oil basins in Central Asia and the entire world. Despite these challenges, the Caspian Sea remains a source of pride for Iran.

Second: There is a legal problem, as we previously analysed in a previous section the legal status of the Caspian Sea, as Iran wants to reach an agreement that allows the joint exploitation of the sea surface and its enormous wealth on the basis that the wealth of the Iranian sector is located at a great depth, where it is difficult to extract them. This presents a problem because the wealth of the Iranian sector is located where it is difficult to extract them.

Third: It seems that the security and political concerns and challenges posed by the geographic location of the Caspian Sea, where it is located on road lines that compete regionally and internationally, in geopolitics Iran is watching two giants, namely Russia and the United States, who are competing to contain the countries of the region and control their energy resources [147, 98p.]. Fourth: It seems that the geographic location of the Caspian Sea on road lines that compete regionally and internationally poses a challenge for Iran.

As for the factors that made Iran revolves in the orbit of the Caspian Sea, it can be listed below:

Geographical factor

Iran's strategic geography affords it multiple advantages, particularly in accessing present and future Caspian Sea resources. Its northern territorial boundary stretches to the Caspian coastline, providing an optimal transit corridor for oil exports to the Arabian Gulf in the south—a critical objective of Tehran's current regional strategy. By positioning itself as the primary route for Caspian oil shipments across its territory, Iran aims to amplify its geopolitical influence and assert near-total dominance over the Arabian Gulf. This ambition is supported by its extensive infrastructure, including road networks and ports along the Caspian's southern shore. Such connectivity also establishes Iran as a vital logistical hub for landlocked Central Asian states lacking direct maritime access. Notably, Iran and Russia remain the only nations offering integrated land-sea transportation links to Central Asia.

The diplomatic factor

Immediately after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Iran intended to link diplomatic and political relations on the basis that Iran's relationship with the countries of the region is governed by two important considerations, which are: [148, 58p.]

- Iran is trying to take advantage of the opportunity granted to her in 1991 in order to break the diplomatic isolation suffered at the international stage because of its Islamic militarization, becoming element dynamically, and cannot be neglected in the new regional formation, which imposed itself on its doors so deliberately Iran to attempt to drag foreign states to recognize with its strategic importance, as Iran made official visits to the Caspian Sea countries, and several agreements were signed that complemented the interests of both sides, especially the borders, and it developed its relations with Turkmenistan after Iran opened its embassy in Ashgabat in 1992 and the 1994 border delimitation agreement between them was drawn up.

-The same applies to the opening of the space for bilateral cooperation from Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, especially the agreement not to interfere in the internal affairs of any of the parties, as Iran, at the beginning of its relationship with the Caspian Sea countries, passed a flexible, calm policy aimed at the same time to build an impregnable fortress on the countries of the region.

The cultural and civilizational factor:

The cultural field witnessed a remarkable development between Iran and the Caspian Sea countries. Since the beginning of these countries' independence, Iran has supported and strengthened cultural relations through the establishment of the Organization of Persian language In 1992, whose goal was to support Persian vocabulary and Persian literature as well as teaching the language in schools and universities, and what highlights the importance of the cultural factor in light of the Islamic political heritage, Iranian culture and the Persian language as a way to achieve political independence. Iran also contributed to the development of a number of scientific and educational centers and institutions, cultural and media in the countries of the region.

Economic factor:

Iran began focusing on strengthening its economic relationship with the countries of the region after realizing that its policy was not accepted and approved by the countries at the beginning, so it moved towards activating economic relations with these countries. especially because of its wealth, addition to Iran's geographical proximity to it, as Iran rushed to invite the Caspian Sea countries to attend the summit conference of the (ECO) Which was held in the Iranian capital Tehran in 1992, and it also established the "Caspian Sea Cooperation Organization" that brought together Russia and Iran to exploit the Caspian Sea resources. It also signed more than 200 agreements, memoranda of understanding and cooperation in various fields, especially oil and gas, with Turkmenistan and in 1996, and proposed The railway route (Shahid - Sarakhs - Tajan) that extends from Iran to Turkmenistan and the length of this line is about 395 km, and the importance of strengthening relations between the two sides increased, which was what the Iranian Minister of Trade Muhammad Shariat-Madari said upon his visit to Tajikistan in 2005: "The relations between the two countries are strategic and of great importance". Together, these factors played an important role in building Iranian rapprochement relations with the Caspian Sea countries, but these factors had implications and hidden objectives in Iran's foreign agenda towards the countries of the region, and therefore a question can be raised on Iran's intentions and goals in rapprochement with the Central Asian republics[149].

Mismanagement of the Iranian economy by the system from the post-cold war has affected exacerbated the problems of this economy, which greatly affected the appetite of foreign companies to invest their money in Iran, which led the latter to impose reforms in order to protect the interests of foreign capital, it is a move that is opposed by conservatives who oppose the presence of foreigners and their money in Iran and coincided with the increase in the energy dilemma in Iran, a clear crisis due to the population distribution that determines the internal demand and the actual location of the reserves it possesses of oil and gas, where the main share of oil and gas wealth is located in the south of the country, and in the south-west, while the majority of the population lives in the north.

And due to the imbalance between the location of energy resources and markets, there is who offers an attractive alternative in the form of oil and gas from Iran's northern neighbours to meet the demand in northern Iran. From the point of view of Iran is considered the idea of oil swaps with Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and linking Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, with its aim to use in the Iranian market and compensate in equal terms taken from the quantities of Iranian oil in the southern fields and shipped to markets in Europe and Asia, and on this basis Iran proposed to extend a new pipeline from Neka Port on the Caspian Sea to Tehran, which allows the flow of Caspian Sea oil to refineries in Tehran, and like all issues related to cooperation in the Caspian Sea region, many considerations regarding this matter depend on the feasibility of the logistical side such as these moves, in the end the oil can be transported by means many producing countries arrive at the port of Neka on the Caspian Sea, whether by transport means: boats, ships, pipelines, or trains, in light of the terrible distress experienced by the economies of countries, and in this

regard, any revenues from these countries will benefit them primarily economically on the basis that if the Iranians are able from the completion of bartering oil with their neighbours, this work may encourage investment in the development of transportation infrastructure in Iran, which ultimately leads to an increase in the amount that is exchanged to between 400 and 500 thousand barrels per day, and according to the Iranian destination, the success of this project It will boost traffic across the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz [150].

Therefore, Iran intends to achieve its strategic objectives in the Caspian Sea basin, without involving the parties to the game in the arena of competition for energy sources in the Caspian Sea. These major goals can be included in Iran's foreign agenda as follows:

1) Penetrating the US blockade imposed on Iran and its role in the region and getting rid of the negative effects of the Damato Law and compensating for its role in the Arab Gulf with a greater role.

2) Activating the common factors and components with these republics, with the aim of strengthening relations with them and obtaining the largest possible capacity of interests and influence in them.

3) The possibility of Iran using its position as a crossing point for the exports and imports of these countries as closed countries, and then Iran benefits in this regard because of its economic benefits.

4) Enhancing security in its northern borders according to its military, economic and technical capabilities, by establishing strong relations with these countries or some of them to the point of alliance.

5) An attempt to present the Iranian religious model to these republics, as a system in which these republics can get rid of the crises they suffer from and enable them to build their political and economic system .

6) Establishing a network of developed economic relations, with the aim of ensuring the enhancement of their food security with these republics, as well as making use of cheap technology as a popular market for Iranian goods.

7) Desire to obtain nuclear energy and technologies due to the nuclear weapons and programs that some of these republics possess.

8) Contribute to controlling ethnic, ideological, or national conflicts that could extend into Iranian territory or cause an influx of more refugees into Iran.

9) Strengthening Iranian influence in a way that does not provoke conflict with Russia or these republics regimes [151, 45p.].

Regarding the Iranian project, the most convenient and cost-effective approach to achieve equilibrium with other initiatives involves exporting directly through pipelines. This method entails connecting the Azerbaijani, Turkmen, and Kazakh oil fields to the preexisting Iranian pipelines. In light of this, Iran has proposed to Azerbaijan the potential establishment of a pipeline originating from the port of "Bandar Anzali" situated on the Caspian Sea within the province of "Gilan". The Neka-Ray project commenced its initial phase in May 1998, aiming to construct a pipeline connecting the Neka oil refinery and the Tehran pipeline. This project, announced in the same year, spans a length of 392 kilometres and constitutes the first

phase of the barter oil agreement. Under this agreement, the Iranian government will receive a tax swap payment ranging from 1.5 to 2 dollars per barrel. It is worth noting that the Neka-Tehran pipeline has a capacity of up to 170 thousand barrels per day. Iran has expressed its intention to augment its daily oil production to 500 thousand barrels. In support of this objective, the former Iranian Oil Minister, Bijan Namdar Zangeneh, has affirmed that the Neka-Tehran pipeline is the most optimal means for exporting oil from the Caspian Sea. Zangeneh emphasised that this route possesses unparalleled economic advantages, asserting that no alternative method can rival its benefits. Regarding Iran's geopolitical intentions in the Neka-Ray area,

a) one of the key objectives is to enhance Iranian influence inside the region.

The collapse of the Soviet Union represents a significant event that has had implications for Iranian security and national interests. Historically, Iran has viewed the countries of the South Caucasus as potential components of a larger entity known as "Greater Iran." This perspective is based on historical, cultural, and economic ties that Iran believes it has with the countries in the region. Iran aims to address the void by prioritising the expansion of its economic, cultural, and political links. Hence, this elucidates Iran's strategy of investing in regional countries as a means to acquire energy resources through several procedures and techniques, so bolstering its presence and influence in the region.

b) Strengthening Iran's Trade Relations with Regional Countries: From an economic perspective, Iran recognises the countries in the region as a significant market for Iranian goods consumption. This is particularly true given the importance of oil and its transportation in establishing a solid economic foundation for fostering closer ties between Iran and regional nations. Notably, Iranian pipelines are expected to play a pivotal role in bolstering Iran's trade exchange with these countries. These countries, on one side, want to enhance the availability of employment prospects for several Iranians, particularly in the northern areas where electricity transmission lines are established. This development holds significant benefits for Iran, particularly if it successfully implements its own oil project [152].

c) Enhancing Iran's security alliances with neighbouring countries: It is noteworthy that Iran, akin to its regional counterparts Russia and China, has a vested interest in addressing the disputes prevalent in the region. Hence, Iran maintains the perspective that safeguarding security and stability in the Caspian Sea - Caucasus nations will engender the potential for economic development within this regional cluster via collaborative efforts. Consequently, Iran has endeavoured to capitalise on its regional influence. By establishing the Caspian Sea Cooperation Council (CSCC) and implementing projects focused on communication and regional integration, efforts have been made to enhance security in the region. Strengthening security in the region is one of the key priorities of the CSCC, which aims to achieve this through economic cooperation.

Based on this foundation, one can analyse the prospective geopolitical trajectory of Iran within the area by considering several scenarios.

The initial scenario involves Iran's pursuit of maintaining a consistent effort to exert influence in the region occupied by its neighbouring countries to the north. This

objective aims to increase the likelihood of activating Iran's project, similar to the Baku-Ceyhan project. If Iran successfully accomplishes its goal of transporting oil from the Caspian Sea, it will subsequently endeavour to attract the northern countries of Iran towards the Persian Gulf by utilising its territory. Consequently, Iran would be able to establish an economic bloc with regional countries and effectively encircle the American-Israeli role in the region.

The second scenario involves the preservation of American dominance and efforts to isolate Iran in the transportation of energy resources from the Caspian Sea. This would be achieved by enhancing the involvement of NATO in the region, thereby facilitating the resolution of conflicts related to the transportation of energy along routes originating from the Caspian Sea [153].

The Caspian Sea's role in the Azerbaijani-Iranian conflict is a significant factor to consider.

Iran and Azerbaijan are neighboring countries with a shared border spanning over 760 km. Additionally, both countries have access to the Caspian Sea, which is known for its abundant reserves of oil and gas. The two nations also have significant cultural, ethnic, and religious connections. However, despite these factors fostering closeness and cooperation, there exist profound and intricate disparities in the realms of politics, economics, and cultural relations between the two countries. The bilateral relationship between the two nations exhibits several sources of conflict that are distributed over political, geographical, and religious dimensions. The independence of Azerbaijan has raised concerns within the Iranian regime regarding religious and national allegiance. Specifically, there is apprehension about the potential emergence of separatist sentiments in the northern Azerbaijani region of Iran. The Iranian government is wary of the influence that Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan, may exert on the loyalty of its Azerbaijani citizens, who constitute a population of over 17 million. Furthermore, Azerbaijan's status as a secular state poses the possibility of influencing the prevailing Islamic ideology in Iran. Regarding the conflict in the Nagorno-Karabakh region, Iran expresses concerns about the Azeri regime due to Baku's regional alliances that are perceived as hostile towards Iran. Similarly, Azerbaijan harbours apprehensions about Iran's indirect support for Armenia, fearing that it may exacerbate tensions between the two parties. Iran strategically employs its mediating role between Azerbaijan and Armenia to position itself as a regional actor, aiming to counteract Western pressures and enhance its influence in the region. Azerbaijan holds significant strategic importance as a key ally of the United States of America. Efforts have been made to prevent its alignment with Russia by advocating for political and civil reforms that align with liberal principles, as outlined in the "Contract of Century." Encouraging the involvement of Western companies in the extraction of oil and gas in the region has further contributed to limiting Iran's influence. Azerbaijan is also viewed as a potential location for establishing mi In 2009, Azerbaijan was observed to export approximately 25-30% of its oil requirements to Israel, hence contributing to the escalation of tensions between Iran and Azerbaijan[154, 96 p.]. The situation is further complicated by the United States' intentions to exploit and invest in the unstable conditions in the southern Caucasus

region for the purpose of deploying American forces. The presence of these bases carries hidden implications for the American strategy to expand its influence in the region. It is believed that the presence of these forces will allow the United States to concentrate its efforts along the Azerbaijani-Iranian border. This poses risks to Iran, which can be observed in the following ways: 1. All of Iran's vital installations are situated in the central and northern regions. 2. The weakening of Armenian-Russian relations, as well as the already fragile Armenian-Turkish relations.

- Preventing the potential for any reconciliation between Iran and Azerbaijan.

- Preventing the possibility of the advancement of bilateral relations between Turkey and Iran.

The Western nations' attention towards the region extended beyond the United States and encompassed the European Union member states in their efforts to address the Nakhchivan-Karabakh conflict. This can be attributed to the Europeans' growing recognition of the escalating significance of the southern Caucasus region in terms of facilitating the transportation of oil and gas supplies. It is worth noting that this region serves as a pivotal extension point in this regard. The Balkan region, characterised by many challenges, is a significant security concern for the countries within the European Union [155].

The significance of Iran's involvement in contrast to Azerbaijan lies in the pivotal and covert influence of the energy factor in shaping their relations. In 2001, Iran asserted its affiliation with a region known as "Alborz" and claimed ownership of an oil field within it, which Azerbaijan has been exploiting. The conflict between the two parties primarily revolves around the exploitation of oil fields in the Caspian Sea. In response to this issue, the Assistant Minister of Iranian Foreign Affairs, Ali Akhaneh, summoned the Azerbaijani Chargé d'Affaires to Tehran. During the meeting, Akhaneh conveyed Iran's stance that it will not tolerate any harm. Furthermore, the official statement released by the Iranian Ministry of Oil asserts that any contract entered into by foreign companies to engage in activities within the Iranian sector without a license will be deemed null and void. It further emphasizes that the Iranian authorities will take appropriate measures to address any oil extraction activities conducted by foreign companies in this sector. The Ministry of Oil also declares its intention to refrain from signing contracts with companies. The user did not provide any text to rewrite. Furthermore, the stress equation existing between the two nations necessitates an examination of the (Trans Caspian) pipeline. In relation to Iran and Azerbaijan, the European Union has held the belief since the late 1990s that the connection of Turkmenistan's gas fields with Europe would enhance energy security in Europe, which is currently threatened by Russia. In the 1990s, discussions began to expand a natural gas pipeline network from Turkmenistan across the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan and onward to Turkey, with the long-term vision of supplying European markets. A central goal of this energy corridor was to circumvent Iranian territory. However, rerouting the pipeline through Iran could recalibrate regional power dynamics by bolstering Azerbaijan's geopolitical leverage vis-à-vis Iran in both economic and military contexts within the Caspian region. Such a shift would also

foster equilibrium in Iranian-Turkish relations and mitigate underlying tensions between Turkey and Azerbaijan tied to competing energy infrastructure projects, which are crucial for the success of the project. Consequently, it is necessary to actively involve Iranian energy diplomacy in the context of the new president's initiatives, specifically those led by Hassan Rohani. By doing so, it is possible to resolve the disputes between Iran and Azerbaijan. While the economic factor may be a central concern in fostering cooperative relations, it may not currently reach the level of a partnership in the medium term. This is particularly evident in light of Azerbaijan's alignment with Western powers, which significantly impacts the relaxation of tensions between the two countries [156].

The five Caspian countries, which signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea four years ago, agreed to use the sea for peaceful purposes and turn it into a zone of peace and friendship. Is it possible to call the Caspian Sea, which Russia now uses for war, launching missiles at Ukrainian civilian targets, a “sea of peace and friendship”? Why are the Caspian states silent? [155].

“His [Putin’s] soldiers are firing Grads at civilians, hitting residential areas, orphanages, maternity hospitals with ballistic and hydrogen missiles, Ukraine is our home!” This marks the final entry on the social network of Valeria Glodan, a 28-year-old resident of Odessa. On the fateful day of April 23rd, a missile launched from the Caspian Sea found its tragic target, the 16-story residential building that Valeria and her family called home. In the aftermath of the missile strike, the fourth and fifth floors of the building crumbled, giving way to a devastating fire. Amidst the chaos, 20 individuals suffered injuries while 8 lost their lives. Among the most heart-wrenching losses was a multigenerational tragedy that unfolded on the fourth floor: Valeria, her infant daughter Kira (only three months old), and Valeria's mother Lyudmila Yavkina, all perished as a result of the rocket's impact. [156].

Yury Glodan, Valeria's husband, had gone out to the store not long before the missile attack in order to stock up on food and other necessities for the family. As soon as Yury learned about the rocket strike, he made a beeline for his house and immediately begged the people who were helping to save him to let him into the burning flat. After obtaining entry, he went through the house and found the lifeless bodies of both his wife and her mother in the residence they shared. After thereafter, the search and rescue team somberly retrieved the body of their daughter, who had been missing for three months.

The tragic event, in which a missile fired from the Caspian Sea killed the lives of three generations in succession within a single family, was brought to the attention of the world through a video communication delivered in the evening by the President of Ukraine, Volodymyr Zelensky. This information was shared with the world by the President of Ukraine. In his letter, Zelensky expressed his profound sorrow and brought attention to the fact that one of the victims was a defenceless infant girl who was just three months old. He questioned the logic behind such a terrible loss and emphasised that the act of inflicting harm on children looked to have

been alarmingly sanctioned on a national level within the Russian Federation. He was referring to the Russian Federation. [154].

One of the earliest deaths to occur beyond the bounds of a battlefield was a sombre reminder of the impact that the fighting had. At that point in time, the fight, which was being referred to as a "special operation" in Russia, had spread to places like as Kherson, Zaporozhye, and Nikolaev, all of which were located hundreds of kilometres away from Odessa. Russia continued to attack civilian locations even though they were located a significant distance from active combat zones, despite the geographical distance between the two.

Tu-95 strategic bombers launched high-precision missiles from the Caspian Sea on May 3 targeting the infrastructure of cities and areas including Lviv, Dnipropetrovsk, Kirovograd, Vinnitsa, Kyiv, and Transcarpathia. These missiles were launched from a position over the Caspian Sea. Explosions along the tracks were caused by this attack, which brought an end to train operations. As a result of problems at electricity-generating facilities, inhabitants in a variety of locations experienced power outages, which left them in the dark.

As of the 26th of June, Russia had fired off six X-101 high-precision missiles from Tu-95 and Tu-160 rocket launchers, aiming them towards Kyiv from the Caspian Sea. These missiles were launched from the Russian Federation. Despite the fact that Ukrainian air defences were successful in shooting down numerous missiles, one of them nevertheless managed to hit a residential structure in Kyiv, which resulted in the death of one person and the injury of five others.

Throughout the months of July, August, and September, the regular pattern of missile launches from the Caspian Sea continued. After suffering territory losses on the southern and eastern fronts, the Russian military increased the number and intensity of its missile attacks in October and November. Moscow targeted electricity and water facilities across Ukrainian regions by utilising missile-carrying planes in the Caspian Sea, ships in the Black Sea, and the Rostov region. As a result, millions of people are currently without access to crucial utilities. After the attack on October 10th, the Russian Ministry of Defence declared that the missile strikes that were carried out on military installations and electrical systems were successful.

Four years ago, the leaders of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan adopted a landmark agreement establishing the legal framework for the Caspian Sea. This convention, finalized after 22 years of negotiations, defined the rights and obligations of the signatory states concerning the sea's waters, seabed, natural resources, and airspace. Central to the agreement was the explicit commitment to restrict Caspian activities to peaceful purposes, rejecting militarization. [155] At the 2018 Caspian Summit in Aktau, former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev celebrated the convention's ratification, declaring the Caspian a "sea of friendship." His remarks mirrored Article 3, which mandates the sea serve as a "zone of peace, good neighborliness, and cooperation." [156] Other leaders echoed this optimism. Iranian President Hassan Rouhani stressed the need to implement the treaty beyond symbolic gestures, while Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev praised it as a "historic document" fostering "stability and security." Russian

President Vladimir Putin termed the convention an “epoch-making event,” asserting it ensured the Caspian’s exclusive use for nonviolent aims. [157, 78p.]

Four years later, however, Russia weaponized the Caspian by launching missiles at Ukrainian civilian targets, directly violating the convention’s principles. Despite Ukraine’s urgent appeal to the Caspian states—demanding they pressure Russia to comply with its legal obligations—Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan remained silent. This inaction persisted even as leaders reconvened at the Sixth Caspian Summit in Ashgabat, where they reiterated their commitment to the treaty’s peaceful-use clause in a joint statement. Notably, none addressed Russia’s militarization of the sea, underscoring the gap between the convention’s ideals and enforcement. The Caspian Sea’s transformation into a conflict zone starkly contradicted the 2018 pledges. During the Ashgabat summit, leaders reaffirmed the sea’s designation as a zone of peace but avoided condemning Russia’s actions, raising questions about the convention’s practical authority. Ukraine’s foreign ministry highlighted this hypocrisy, urging Caspian states to enforce the agreement rather than issue hollow declarations. Russia’s exploitation of the Caspian for warfare exposed the fragility of multilateral commitments when geopolitical interests clash. The convention’s failure to deter militarization underscores the challenges of balancing sovereign interests with collective security.

While the agreement codified shared aspirations for stability, its enforcement mechanisms remain weak. The Caspian states’ reluctance to confront Russia reflects broader geopolitical realities, where economic ties and regional power dynamics often override legal obligations. This dissonance jeopardizes the convention’s credibility, transforming it from a binding pact into a symbolic gesture. The Caspian’s legal status, once hailed as a triumph of diplomacy, now faces existential scrutiny. Russia’s actions have not only violated international law but also tested the resolve of fellow signatories. The silence of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan sets a dangerous precedent, signaling that the convention’s principles are negotiable under political pressure. For the Caspian to truly become a “sea of friendship,” its littoral states must prioritize accountability over expediency, ensuring the agreement evolves from aspirational rhetoric to enforceable practice.

“Azattyk” has asked Kazakhstan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs to investigate why the country has not responded to Russia's breach of the Caspian Convention, which was demonstrated by the launch of a missile towards Ukraine from the Caspian Sea [158]. In his inquiry, Azattyk is seeking clarification on why Kazakhstan has not addressed Russia's breach of the Caspian Convention. In its response to RFE/RL, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs elaborated that the provisions enshrined within the Convention, including Article 3, Paragraph 2 — which emphasises the Caspian Sea's purpose for peaceful undertakings, cooperative resolutions, and non-interference — pertain exclusively to interactions among the Caspian states, and do not extend to interactions with nations that are not members of the Convention[158, 54p.]. In other words, the Convention's provisions only apply to interactions between Caspian states.

The convention does, as most specialists in the field agree, continue to place a primary emphasis on regulating interactions among the governments that make up its

membership. Under the Convention, Caspian nations are obligated to uphold mutual territorial sovereignty, refrain from military aggression against one another, and avoid interference in internal affairs, as outlined earlier. Notably, the agreement includes just one provision addressing non-regional actors, emphasizing the imperative to exclude foreign military forces from the Caspian zone. This underscores the treaty's focus on regional autonomy and collective exclusion of external armed interventions [158, 55p.].

In my opinion, the only thing that matters for the Caspian states is whether Russian ships are in international or Russian waters, regardless of whether they are in the Caspian or not. According to Paul Goble, an expert with the Jamestown Foundation in the United States, "the only thing that concerns them is preventing third countries from entering the waters [159].

An attorney and professor at the University of Warmia and Mazury's Faculty of Law and Administration in Poland, Micha Pietkiewicz, has studied the Caspian Convention and calls attention to the fact that it is merely a regional agreement, a closed system for coastal countries. He emphasises that only the countries bordering the Caspian Sea are bound by the Caspian Convention. Since Russia's actions in the Caspian states were not found to be in violation of the treaty, he concludes that his claims are false [159].

"In the preamble of the convention, the parties to the accord emphasised that they had exclusive jurisdiction over all matters pertaining to the Caspian Sea. This provision can be found in Article I of the Convention. It has been suggested that Russia may be in violation of the "peaceful purposes" section of the agreement if it carries out hostilities against a state that is not a signatory to the convention from Russian territory. In this context, another question needs to be asked: did Russia use force or threaten to use force against the territorial integrity or political independence of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, or Turkmenistan? Did Russia take measures that were inconsistent with the norms of international law embodied in the Charter of the United Nations? According to Petkevich [160], the answer is "no."

In response to a question posed by RFE/RL, the Kazakhstani Ministry of Foreign Affairs stated that because the convention had not yet entered into force, "Kazakhstan has no legal grounds to demand Russia's compliance with its provisions" [158]. In 2018, the five countries along the Caspian shore were the first to sign the treaty, and it was subsequently ratified by all nations with the exception of Iran. Iran's refusal was due to the fact that the text was unable to meet the country's strategic interests, particularly the unsolved issue of defining baselines that demarcate sovereign territory in maritime waters.

Michal Petkevich believes that the quiet of the Caspian nations on Iran's missile launches isn't related to Iran's position, despite the fact that Iran has not ratified the treaty. He maintains that each coastline state is still autonomous in its own right and has the ability to act independently. Even if the Caspian Convention might not provide a direct channel for addressing Russia's conduct, the coastal nations, acting together as members of the United Nations, have the ability to potentially utilise international instruments. According to Petkevich, an avenue for legal redress

could be found in international law, which makes it illegal to commit crimes against humanity, war crimes, and genocide[158].

However, experts point to a crucial aspect that underpins the coastal nations' reluctance towards the launch of missiles, and that factor is the coastal states' dependence on Russia. These countries are all members of organisations that are governed by Russia. Kazakhstan's membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organisation and the Eurasian Economic Union demonstrates how dependent the country is on Russian imports, which account for 38 percent of all of Kazakhstan's imports. In addition, Kazakhstan's oil exports to Europe travel through Russian territory, which makes them susceptible to disruptions such as the repeated shutdowns of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium. These shutdowns may be connected to Kazakhstan's refusal to provide support for Russia in its confrontation with Ukraine[158].

Both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are members of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and both countries have commercial links to Russia. Tehran and Moscow strengthened their military collaboration in the wake of Russia's intervention into Ukraine, with some sources alleging that Iran supplied Russia with military drones as part of this cooperation. According to reports, Ukrainian military destroyed more than 300 drones made in Iran. There is even evidence, according to reports published on October 16 by The Washington Post, that Iran has supplied Russia with ballistic missiles.

In an interview with The Economist, Vadim Skibitsky, the deputy chief of the intelligence branch of the Ukrainian Armed Forces, stated that Iranian missiles would make their way to Russian-annexed Crimea via the air and to Russian Caspian ports via the water. This information was provided by Skibitsky. According to a forecast made by The Economist, the acquisition of these missiles could lead to an increase in the frequency and intensity of Russia's aerial bombardments [161].

"There is a lack of responsibility for other states (specifically, for Ukraine) as well as a lack of solidarity with other states (Ukraine). Additionally, many nations are unwilling to risk losing their ability to export oil and gas because they are paralysed with fear. Sometimes the interests of particular governments are prioritised higher than the condition of affairs on the global stage. However, if we do not speak out against the breach of the fundamental standards of international law, we are giving the aggressor carte blanche to carry out their actions. Aggression could extend to other territories, including "silent" states, according to Petkevich [162].

"I believe the remainder of what has been said should make it quite evident that Russia's exploitation of the Caspian Sea in this manner is incompatible with the spirit, and possibly even the content, of the agreement. According to Paul Goble [163], "I'm afraid that none of them will want to do it on their own, and I don't see many prospects for a collective demarche"[158].

The intricate web of links and shared interests that exists between Iran and Russia is highlighted by the fact that both countries are currently attempting to navigate a variety of political, economic, and military complications in the Caspian Sea. Iran's primary maritime focus has traditionally been on its southern waterways;

but, in recent years, the country has placed an increased emphasis on problems pertaining to the Caspian Sea. This is especially the case in connection to its formidable neighbour Russia and its aspiring counterpart Azerbaijan.

Domestic opposition within Iran to the 2018 Caspian Sea Agreement—signed in Aktau, Kazakhstan—has significantly influenced Tehran’s proactive stance on Caspian governance. Historically, Iran and Russia jointly managed the Caspian under bilateral treaties from 1920 until the Soviet Union’s collapse in 1991. The emergence of three new littoral states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan) disrupted this framework, with each nation asserting claims to roughly 20% of the sea’s waters. Despite these shifts, Moscow and Tehran continue to advocate for upholding Soviet-era maritime agreements, resisting revisions to the historical status quo [164, 15p.].

The Aktau Agreement effectively addressed the longstanding challenge of delineating territorial boundaries among Caspian coastal states. Finalized after 22 years of negotiations involving 52 specialized task forces and five high-level summits, the pact allocated each littoral nation 15 nautical miles of sovereign waters. Additionally, a 10-nautical-mile exclusive fishing zone was designated per coastal state. Beyond these zones, the remaining expanse of the Caspian was classified as shared commons, accessible to all bordering countries. Despite substantial advancements in resolving surface-level disputes, signatories failed to reach consensus on partitioning the vast subsea hydrocarbon reserves. Instead, they established a specialized legal regime customized for the Caspian’s unique status—neither fully a sea nor a lake—thereby sidestepping conventional maritime or lacustrine international laws. This framework deferred definitive resource allocation to future negotiations while maintaining collaborative dialogue. To preserve unanimity, Iran and Russia insisted that any infrastructure initiatives involving subsea pipelines require unanimous approval from all five coastal states, even those not directly participating. This stipulation enabled both nations to stymie efforts by Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan to construct independent pipelines, thereby securing greater leverage over energy exports to European markets. Iran and Russia both took this strategic stance. This attitude simultaneously provided Iran with the ability to exert influence over the intentions of the Republic of Azerbaijan over the development of a contentious oil field that is located between the two countries. In the end, the successful installation of the pipeline was contingent on all parties involved in the project reaching a compromise. Even if other countries have the right to voice concerns about the environment, it is highly doubtful that these issues will pose significant obstacles to the completion of the project [165].

Iran and Russia both gain advantages as a result of the prohibition on the presence of the fleets of non-coastal countries in the Caspian Sea. At the same time, Iran and Russia's navies are allowed to travel freely in the area that extends beyond 25 nautical miles from the coast of any country. It has long been a source of concern for both Russia and Iran that Western powers have a presence in the Caspian Sea; indeed, preventing Western powers from maintaining a foothold in the Caspian has been one of the most significant areas of shared interest between the two countries in

the Caspian Sea. The lack of constraints imposed by the Aktao on the size of the fleets of coastal countries effectively gives the upper hand to the dominant Russian navy. Iran, which is the second Caspian naval power, also benefits from this as a result of the lack of restrictions.

Both Moscow and Tehran have made no secret of the fact that they maintain military bases in the Caspian Sea. Cruise missiles launched from Russia's Caspian Fleet in November 2015 hit targets in Syria located approximately 600 kilometres away. A portion of Russia's Caspian fleet was dispatched to the Black Sea in 2021 in order to present a challenge to Ukraine's aspirations in that body of water. The majority of Iran's Caspian fleet operations have been in response to Azerbaijan. The activities of an exploratory vessel belonging to the British Petroleum Company, which was a party to the agreement with the Republic of Azerbaijan, were thwarted in July 2001 by the Iranian Navy.

Iran conducted a military exercise in the seas of the Caspian Sea in June 2021 as its most recent display of might in retaliation for Azerbaijan's military drill in the previous month. It has been reported that during the exercise that was carried out by the Republic of Azerbaijan, the armed forces of this country practised striking the said opponent in the Caspian region, which was presumably Iran. Iran's reaction came quite quickly. Iran challenged the Aktao accord as well as the military force of the Republic of Azerbaijan by conducting a manoeuvre in the 20% of the Caspian Sea that it claims as its own [166,123p.]. The manoeuvre took place only a few days later.

Moscow and Tehran's military ties have been particularly active in the Caspian region in recent years. Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu of Russia visited Tehran in 2015 to seal a military pact with his Iranian counterpart. The two countries' militaries will train and exercise together, share intelligence, and work together to combat common threats like terrorism and insurgency as part of this pact. Shoigu's visit to Iran makes him the highest-ranking Russian military official to travel there since 2002. In 2017, he paid a visit. The Iranian media has largely praised the agreement, seeing it as the coordinated response of the Iranian government to the United States' actions. In 2020, Iran participated in a Russian-hosted military exercise called Caucasus-2020. The two countries had agreed in 2019 to step up their military cooperation in the Caspian region, and this was the result. Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan have all arrived in Bandar Anzali, Iran, to compete in the sixth Caspian Cup. The strong military ties between the two countries are once again on display[158].

Despite positive signs of cooperation between Iran and Russia, some have argued that Russia's interests in the Caspian have not always coincided with Iran's. In the post-Soviet era, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan faced significant pressure from Iran and Russia to honor commitments established during their time as Soviet republics. Both nations invoked the 1991 Almaty Declaration, under which these states—alongside other former Soviet territories—pledged to uphold international obligations inherited from the USSR. Russia eventually shifted tactics, prioritizing bilateral agreements with individual Caspian states over multilateral frameworks. This policy shift predated the Aktau negotiations by years. For instance,

in 2003, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan signed a trilateral pact dividing portions of the Caspian seabed (19%, 18%, and 27% respectively) and affirming shared maritime usage—a move Iran opposed but could not block [158]. This was achieved despite Iran's opposition to the accord.

Despite Russia's insistence, Iran is the only country that has not given its full recognition to the Aktau agreement, and there is strong domestic opposition to the proposed Caspian Sea divide. Adopting Aktau will reduce Iran's reported contribution to the whole. Considering Iran's small size and its limited oil and gas reserves, the country's point of view is understandable. Rouhani's government has been criticised and accused of being unable to resist Russian pressure by both the Iranian public and official officials, such as several members of parliament from this country [167].

During the Turkmenchai Agreement, Iran was forced to give huge parts of the South Caucasus to Russia after suffering a heavy loss. Many Iranians believe that the Aktau Agreement will be similar to the Turkmenchai Agreement. Many people feel that Iran, which is susceptible to sanctions from the United States, accepted Aktau because Russia exerted pressure on it to do so. The time of the signing of Aktau has not been hidden from criticism. In any case, Iran was deprived of the financial and technological resources necessary for the extraction of Caspian resources as a result of the severe sanctions imposed by the United States. Even up until that point, despite limited collaboration between Tehran and Moscow in line with the OPEC agreements, Iran's ambitious plan to exchange its oil for Russian goods and services had not come anywhere near its intended destination [168,51p.].

Russia and Iran are not in an all-out alliance with one another; rather, they each pursue their own agendas in the Caspian region. This is true despite the fact that both countries want to keep western powers away from the waters of the Caspian Sea. It is widely acknowledged that Russia is the preeminent force in the Caspian Sea and is the only country along the Caspian coast to possess warships in its fleet of the frigate class. At the same time, Iran's fleet is in a state of disrepair, and the country's status as the second naval power in the Caspian naval is rapidly deteriorating in comparison to the Caspian coastline countries, particularly the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Tehran can make up for some of the shortcomings of the Caspian fleet by sending a part of the Persian Gulf fleet, but due to Russia's objection to Iran's use of the Volga-Den canal, this country's plan to enhance its fleet in the Caspian remains fruitless. Tehran can make up for some of the shortcomings of the Caspian fleet by sending a part of the Persian Gulf fleet. During this time, the fleet of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been significantly improved thanks to Turkish and Israeli contributions of vessels and equipment. The Republic of Azerbaijan possesses 44 vessels in the Caspian Sea at the moment, the majority of which, despite their size, have a significant amount of firepower [169,280p.].

It has been argued that Russia's unfriendly foreign policy towards the Caspian region is part of a larger pattern and should be examined in the context of Russia's foreign policy towards Iran. Even though the two countries cooperate and have many shared interests, Moscow is against the Western investment in Iran's oil and gas sector.

Moscow is wary of these investments because they could boost American competitiveness in oil and gas exports and the takeover of Russian markets.

In April 2021, a confidential interview with Mohammad Javad Zarif, then Iran's foreign minister, surfaced publicly, exposing sensitive details about covert Russo-Iranian collaboration. Zarif alleged that Moscow actively obstructed efforts to normalize Iran's diplomatic relations with Western nations, even intervening to derail Tehran's nuclear negotiations. The leak further revealed that Russian President Vladimir Putin had privately pressured Iranian General Qasem Soleimani to escalate Iran's military role in Syria—a decision that primarily advanced Russia's geopolitical interests rather than Iran's [158].

Iran's standing among Assad's allies is said to have worsened as a result of new events in Syria and active involvement by Russia (mostly in the form of air power), according to those who criticise the situation. Iran's participation in the events that transpired in Syria was rapidly diminished by Russia, to the point where despite the initial tripartite framework involving the involvement of Russia, Turkey, and Iran, the Iranian side was excluded from the discussions that took place in Sochi over the destiny of Idlib. Russia also preferred to progress the peace talks in last year's Nagorno-Karabakh war with Turkey and exclude Iran, despite the fact that both nations involved in the war, namely Azerbaijan and Armenia, are Iran's neighbours. [170] In addition to this, Russia preferred to remove Iran from the negotiations.

Recent events seem to indicate that Iran is taking seriously its policy of looking to the East and strengthening relations with the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China in response to the pressure of the severe sanctions imposed by the United States of America (which remained practically unchanged during the administration of Vice President Joe Biden). Nonetheless, critics point to issues like Tehran and Moscow's ties in Syria, Iran's nuclear programme, and the Caspian Sea to argue that Russia views Iran less as a strategic ally and more as a replaceable partner [171, 98p.].

Sanctions imposed on the transport of oil from Kazakhstan to Russia the obstacles and the possibilities

One of the most important factors in Kazakhstan's rapid economic growth and deepening global economic integration is the country's fuel and energy complex. The country's total oil reserves amount to about 30 billion barrels, or 1.7% of global reserves. Kazakhstan ranks 12th in the world by this measure, below countries like Russia and the United States but above those in the Middle East and Latin America[172]. The country processes 1.7% of the world's natural gas reserves, or 3.9 trillion cubic metres. There is the highest concentration of natural gas reserves in West Kazakhstan (19%), Atrau (43%), and Mangistau (29%).

There are over 250 oil and gas reserves in Kazakhstan, and 104 companies are involved in their extraction. If a comparable figure is required, we can say that in 2017 there were 99 businesses and that in 2018 there will likely be 100 [172, 65p.].

Investors find crude oil and natural gas production to be the most promising sector of the economy in which to place their funds. Recent years have seen a rise in

FDI to \$9.5 billion, or 51.6% of the total FDI attracted¹. Tengiz, Karachiganak, and Kashagan are three major oil and gas projects in Kazakhstan that have received between 80% and 90% of their funding from overseas investors [172, 68p.].

The country has a total of about 10715 kilometres worth of oil and gas pipelines that are used for transporting hydrocarbons. In spite of this, there are still a lot of issues that need to be worked out when it comes to transporting oil to different markets in the country, both internal and international. A key challenge for Kazakhstan lies in the geographic mismatch between its oil production centers and domestic demand zones. The bulk of the nation's oil reserves and extraction activities are clustered in western regions, while primary consumption hubs—including major urban areas and industrial clusters—are situated in the northern and southeastern territories. This spatial disconnect stems from Soviet-era infrastructure planning, where western oil reserves were routed through Russian pipelines for international export, while eastern domestic needs relied on Siberian imports. However, these aging transit networks, constructed during Soviet rule, were engineered to serve centralized economic objectives rather than align with Kazakhstan's modern priorities as a sovereign state.

The Caspian Pipeline Consortium (also known as CPC) is now the most significant of a number of ongoing improvement initiatives that are currently in various stages of development. These initiatives are all geared towards enhancing the current situation.

Russian, Kazakh, and Omani officials signed an agreement in 1992 to build a 930-mile pipeline from the Tengiz oil field to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. Since Chevron's initial investment in Kazakhstan, several other oil companies have set up shop there as well. They also supported the CPC project⁴ because they wanted the produced oil to be transported by a pipeline other than the one already in place in Russia.

Mobil, Shell, British Petroleum, Oryx, Agip, Lucarco BV, Rosneft-Shell Caspian Ventures, Kazakhstan Pipeline Ventures LLS, Chevron, and British Gas are the current shareholders of CPC. Mobil, a Member of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium Caspian Russian, Kazakh, and Omani firms like (NA) NV, BG Overseas Holding Limited, Oryx Caspian Pipeline LLS, Rosneft, and LUKOIL are part of the Pipe International consortium [173, 48p.].

The CPC is widely regarded as one of the most significant projects for the distribution of oil produced in Kazakhstan. The present amount of money being spent on shareholders is greater than \$2.5 billion. If the permeability capacity was initially 28 million tonnes per year, then it steadily rose up to a maximum of 67 million tonnes till it reached its maximum.

There will be significant repercussions as a result of the transfer of oil from Kazakhstan through the Transneft system to the CPC. Because of this, fulfilling the remaining heavy oil transport requests has become more difficult, and the direction of sea and other light oil transport will alter as a result [174, 85p.]. This is because

Transneft has made certain standards regarding the quality of the oil that is allowed to enter its system.

The Kazakhstani government made a special decision to go forward and authorize the CPC pipeline, and as a result, the consortium was given the authority to determine the tariffs and taxes that apply to the pipeline transportation of oil throughout the country. In addition, by the same decree, it granted the CPC the authority to define and regulate the regulations that govern its access to the CPC system in Kazakhstan's territory. In Russia, a decree with the same wording went into effect.

The Chief Agreement that was made between the owners of CPC said that the pipeline would only be constructed for the purpose of transporting the oil that was produced by the shareholders. It is not necessary for there to be a correlation between the amount of oil that is transported through the pipeline that is held by the shareholders and the amount that they contribute to the authorized capital. Production firms possess 50% of the shares, while Russia, Kazakhstan, and the Sultanate of Oman⁶ each own 50% of the remaining shares [76]. If a shareholder doesn't use the entire portion of the pipeline capacity that was allotted to him, he has an obligation to provide the remaining capacity to the other shareholders, starting with shareholder states and then moving on to industrial facilities. In the event that none of the shareholders are interested in reserving this capacity, it may be made available to outside parties at rates that are specified in a separate agreement.

China will be able to import oil for the first time directly from Central Asia thanks to a pipeline that connects Kazakhstan and China. It starts at the Caspian Sea coast in Kazakhstan and goes all the way to the Chinese frontier. This pipeline is jointly owned by the China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) and the Kazakh oil company Kaz-Munay Gas [76].

There is a capacity of 200,000 barrels of oil per day and the pipeline stretches for 2,228 kilometres (1,384 miles). It starts in the Kazakh city of Atyrau and ends in the Chinese city of Alashankov in Xinjiang [76].

The Kumgol oil field and the Aktobe region are the sources for the oil that is shipped to China via the Kazakh-Chinese oil pipeline. In the not-too-distant future, the Kashagan oil field is expected to become a major and primary supplier. Oil from Russia's Omsk pipeline, Kazakhstan's Pavlodar pipeline, and Turkmenistan's Shymkent and Turkmenabat pipelines will all meet at the Atasuv oil terminal before continuing on to Western Siberia. This pipeline will be used to transport oil for the Russian companies TNK-VP and Gazprom Nef [77].

In 2019, more than 10.88 million tonnes of crude oil were transported from Kazakhstan to China via the Kazakh-Chinese oil pipeline. The Gokalt Empire received over 130 million tonnes of oil through the Kazakh-Chinese oil pipeline, ensuring that western China will have a reliable source of power until the end of 2019.

Kazakhstan hopes that, by taking part in the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan project, it will be able to choose the means by which oil produced in Kazakhstan will be transported to markets outside of Kazakhstan thanks to the implementation of the

multi-vector principle. Based on these projections, Kazakhstan pursued a Caspian Sea foreign policy and signed several agreements with Azerbaijan regarding the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

Kazakhstan is attempting to maximize its economic potential by diversifying the routes its oil is transported via before the new oil industry reaches the required level of production. At the year's end, Kazakhstan made the call to move four million tones of Caspian Sea-sourced petroleum hydrocarbons. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline will use three million tonnes, with the remaining one million being stored at the Kulevi terminal on Georgia's Black Sea [137].

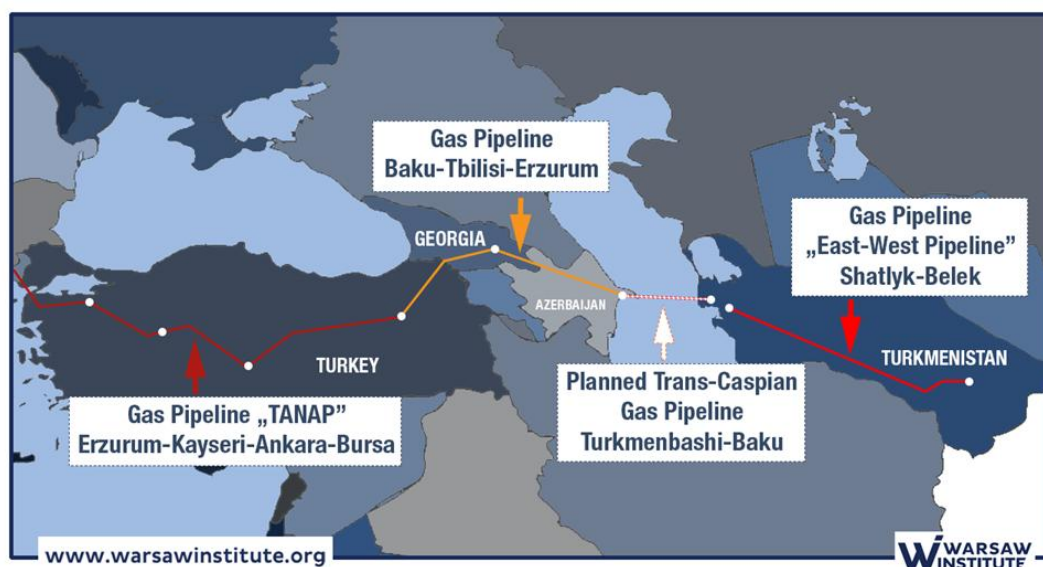


Figure – 5 Schemes of pipelines (Source: <https://warsawinstitute.org/caspian-summit-consequences-region/>)

The goal of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline, also known as BTC, is to transport oil from the Caspian region to the Mediterranean region of Turkey via the cities of Baku and Tbilisi. The pipeline was officially inaugurated on July 13, 2006 in Ceyhan [137].

This pipeline is owned by BTC Co., a multinational corporation. BTC Co.'s list of shareholders includes the following organizations: BP (30.1%), SOCAR (25%), MOL (9%), Equinor (9%), TPAO (UK), Turkey JSC (6.53%), Eni (5%), Total (5%), Itochu (3.4%), INPEX (2.5%), ExxonMobil (2.5%), and ONGC (BTC) Limited (2%, 36) [138].

The BTC pipeline will be used to transport oil and condensate water from the Azerbaijan-Chirag-Guneshli oilfield mining block and the Shah Deniz field, respectively. The pipeline is operated by BP Company.

There is a 1,768-kilometer pipeline that begins in Baku and ends in Ceyhan. Across Turkey, Georgia, and Azerbaijan, the pipeline would cover a distance of 1076 kilometers. It will travel 443 kilometers through Azerbaijan. It is estimated that 1.2 million barrels of oil can be transported every day.

The groundwork for this pipeline was laid with the signing of a statement in Ankara on October 29, 1998. The presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Kazakhstan,

Turkey, and Uzbekistan signed the agreement in the presence of U.S. Energy Minister Bill Richardson. From left to right: Azerbaijan's Heydar Aliyev, Georgia's Edward Shevardnadze, Kazakhstan's Nursultan Nazarbayev, Turkey's Suleyman Demirel, and Uzbekistan's Islam Karimov. Whether or not Azerbaijan had enough oil to justify the new pipeline's construction wasn't known at the time [76].

From January to July of this year, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline transported 18,181.4 metric tonnes of oil, or 81% of Azerbaijan's total oil transit. As of the 12th of December, 2021 [98], the pipeline had transported a total of 500 million tones of oil [78].

The geopolitical motivation behind the pipeline was to provide an alternate route for transporting oil out of Azerbaijan (and later Kazakhstan) to international markets, rather than through Russia. The installation of the pipeline allowed us to achieve this goal. Because of their financial and political investment in the project, the United States and the United Kingdom advocated for making energy export diversification and market stability the project's primary metrics.

The U.S. and U.K. are actively participating in constructing the inaugural oil pipeline traversing Russia within the CIS framework. This initiative has profoundly altered geopolitical dynamics across Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Basin since its inception. Should the project stall, substantial volumes of oil originally slated for the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline risk being diverted through alternative Russian routes, diminishing Moscow's regional leverage. Concurrently, Washington's strategic maneuvers in the Persian Gulf would enable it to secure alternative oil supplies and broaden its spheres of influence.

The oil pipeline project will allow for more effective utilization of the region's resources. This primarily entails exploiting the Kashagan deposit in Kazakhstan and the Azerbaijan-Guneshli deposit block in Azerbaijan.

Numerous experts predict that Russia's annual economic loss will amount to two hundred million dollars once a new route is established for transporting oil from the Caspian region. Because of this, Russian government officials probably decided not to attend the Ceyhan13 opening ceremony [98].

At first, the BTC project was envisioned as a direct pipeline running from Baku to Ceyhan. However, due to the position of Armenia, the pipeline would have been required to travel through that country at some point. Heydar Aliyev was caught off guard when it was suggested to him that the continuation of the pipeline's route through Armenia may be used as an incentive to reclaim Nagorno-Karabakh. As soon as Yerevan announced that it would not be taking part in the project, Azerbaijan made the decision that it would hinder Armenia from taking part in regional projects and from entering western markets via Turkey. The Baku-Ceyhan pipeline had to make an indirect route through Georgia, which resulted in considerable financial losses for Armenia. On the other hand, Armenia was cut off from participation in other regional projects, which increased its reliance on financing from Russia and Iran [99].

The amount of oil extracted from Azerbaijan's resources is insufficient to sustain the pipeline's continued revenue growth. Therefore, it was very essential for

both Kazakhstan's oil owners and the United States, who sold oil to the West via the CPC (Caspian Pipeline Consortium) pipeline and the Russian port of Novorossiysk, as well as the Transneft system. This was due to the fact that Kazakhstan's oil was shipped to the West via the Transneft system and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium pipeline.

In November 2002, Kazakhstan's Kaz-Munay Gas and Azerbaijan's State Oil Company SOCAR started negotiating the terms of Kazakhstan's involvement in the BTC project [100].

An agreement regarding Kazakhstan's participation in the oil pipeline project was signed by Nursultan Nazarbayev on June 16, 2006. The arrangement called for the shipment of oil from Kazakhstan by tanker from Aktau to Baku across the Caspian Sea. After arriving in Baku, the oil would be transported to its final destination via the BTC pipeline. In the beginning stages of the project, Kazakhstan intended to transport approximately 7.5–10 million tonnes of oil each year via BTC [101].

On January 24, 2007, Kaz-Munay Gas National Company and KazTransOil signed a memorandum of understanding regarding the construction of a Caspian oil transportation system in Kazakhstan. Oil from the Kasaan and Tengiz field will be able to be shipped to Europe via the Eskene-Kurik length of the Caspian Sea thanks to this project. The Caspian oil transportation system development project in Kazakhstan was the subject of the memorandum of understanding. It was supposed to start out transporting 25 million tones of oil annually, before eventually increasing to 38 million tones. The planning, construction, and startup phases of the Kashagan deposit's operation should have occurred simultaneously. Problems arose in 2010 and 2011 as Kazakhstan attempted to expand its oil company, delaying the start of oil extraction in the region[98].

On November 3, 2008, oil was first shipped through pipelines in Kazakhstan. Talks about the future of the pipeline's trans-Caspian segment began in earnest in 2012. Despite the lack of a defined legal status and disagreements among the participating countries regarding the finer points of project financing, the Caspian Sea remained a hot topic of conversation.

Approximately 100,000 metric tones of oil per year will be transported from Kazakhstan via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route, beginning in January 2022 [137].

Kazakhstan's oil production has been challenging, but more hydrocarbon resources are expected to become available in the country before 2025. To this point, it has been assumed that the already existing pipeline infrastructure in Kazakhstan will suffice to transport hydrocarbons to international markets. This means that Russia remains Kazakhstan's most important market for hydrocarbon exports. The expanded 67 million tone capacity of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium's pipeline system will be put to good use in the building of this endeavour. After that time, Kazakhstan will have a need for additional export capacity, and new pipeline projects, such as the one crossing the Caspian Sea, will attract more attention [138].

Even before the war between Russia and Ukraine broke out, the government of Kazakhstan held the belief that Azerbaijan and China would become Kazakhstan's

primary transportation routes for oil in the event that the West were to impose severe sanctions on Russia. Kazakh Minister of Oil and Gas, Farbay Karabalin, made the following assessment on the future of the oil and gas sector: "We do not know what the sanctions will be and what will be the most difficult for us. If our export opportunities are to be limited in any way, it may mainly be in the Russian network. In this case, of course, we will reduce our exports. We are waiting here. Here we need to consider other possibilities. Today we will consider different options. This is especially the strengthening of the access to the Black Sea via the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan and Georgia, and the presence of the port of Batumi with Kazakhstan. Our port of Aktau with its own means and pumping power of 12 million tons It has a capacity to carry oil with a capacity of 1. We are also currently following Iran's softening closely. If the sanctions against Iran are lifted, then we have an old export route: Once upon a time, we were transporting it from Aktau via the port of Neka. This is Iran. Good for us until harsh conditions are brought to. I was one direction. Currently, the capacity of our oil pipeline in Atasu-Alashankov section from Atyrau and western regions to China is 20 million tons, our current capacity is smaller. Between Kenkiyak and Kumgöl we were able to add 12 million tons, then 3.6 million tons. Our program plans to strengthen this route within two years and carry out 20 million tons of export overflow to China. We also know that Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan need oil in the south [157].

These aspects have been restored over the years and are one of the main lines of cooperation in the oil and gas field between Kazakhstan and Russia. Potential sanctions may prevent the continued delivery of Kazakh oil to world markets, but they may close all this capacity primarily through the Caucasus direction in order to diversify them. Kazakhstan delivers one third of its oil to the world market via Russia, and this exceeds 25 million tonnes per year.

According to the Azerbaijan State National Committee, the volume of Kazakh oil pumped through the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline amounted to 382,540 tonnes. This is 52% more or 1.5 times more than what was pumped via the pipeline the previous year. Kazakhstan transports 4 million tonnes of oil through Azerbaijan[157].

However, this small volume can be easily transported in comparison to Russian transit. In 2012, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan could not agree on an appropriate tariff to pump oil from the Tengiz field via the BTC pipeline. Baku asked for \$5.5 per barrel instead of the previous \$4. However, the parties were able to come to an agreement later on.

It is unlikely that more serious direct sanctions will be imposed on Russia's oil industry, according to Ramil Askerov, head of the oil and gas market research department of the Central Asian Countries Economic Research Institute. The world knows that Russia is one of the biggest players in the black gold market²⁰. This is not Iran; it will be blocked by sanctions without significant losses. However, if this happens suddenly, any alternative way of transporting Kazakh oil to for export will be expensive and requires a major strategic effort to overcome its effects.

"In order to see clearly that there is a big dependent on transit through Russia, we need to study the dynamics of the transport of Kazakh oil through Russian pipelines in 2013. This will allow us to understand clearly that there is a significant dependency on transit through Russia. Kazakhstan is another country that receives oil from Russia. As an illustration, during the first few months of 2013, when compared to the same time period in 2012, it was 77%. It is now 0.3% higher than it was before. This year also saw the beginning of Russian oil shipments to China, which went through Kazakhstan. According to Muminov [159], "therefore, if at least one of these chains enters the international sanctions regime, the entire structure will begin to fall apart"[158].

However, the predictions of these experts were shown to be unfounded by the sanctions that were imposed by the Russian Federation on a number of Russian individuals and organisations involved in the recognition of the independence of the DNR and the LNR and the occupation of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. During the Russo-Ukrainian war, troops were sent to Ukraine. The sanctions include large-scale restrictions on the Russian financial system (including the Central Bank and large banks), as well as restrictions on the import and export of goods and services [156].

Goods that do not come from Russia, even if they are in transit through or exported from Russia, goods imported from Russia will not be banned," he said, reprimanding the Kazakh Pipeline Consortium as an example. The United States soon stopped importing oil and oil products from Russia. The ban on the import of energy resources by the United States Treasury Department applies to the import of certain goods from Russia to the United States.

In addition, on March 20, a devastating storm in the Black Sea caused damage to the berths of the CPC terminals in the Russian port of Novorossiysk, which led to an immediate restriction in the flow of oil through the pipeline.

It is also speculated that Russia, which is unable to fully export its oil as a result of the sanctions put on the world as a result of this country's declaration of war on Ukraine, may have engaged in sabotage against international oil businesses that originate in Kazakhstan.

The head of the company said it would take at least two months to repair them, but he also said that the hardest part is that foreign companies could not bring the necessary equipment due to the sanctions imposed on Russia. Nikolay Gorban is the director general of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, and he confirmed that two oil wells in the port had malfunctioned. The third unit will not be operational until it is inspected by divers.

According to Nikolay Gorban, even though a down payment was paid in December, the consortium wrote a letter to manufacturers in Europe indicating that they would provide equipment for the repair of facilities, but that they would not deliver the equipment [176]. This was despite the fact that the consortium had previously stated that they would send the equipment.

Officials in Kazakhstan have stated that the event will not have a substantial impact on oil shipments and that the damaged equipment will be restored sooner than the executives of the consortium had claimed it would be.

One of the consortium's pipes that had previously been deemed inoperable has reportedly already been operating normally, as stated by the Minister of Energy of Kazakhstan.

Analysts interviewed by the British Financial Times are sceptical that oil giants such as Chevron and Exxon, which are part of the consortium, have not been sent to inspect damaged equipment, and they predict that only Russia will decide when to restart [177, 5p.]. Western specialists were among the first to predict sabotage.

After Russia invaded Ukraine, the United States imposed a number of penalties, one of which was a complete ban on purchasing oil from Moscow. Some analysts believe that the Kremlin is attempting to stop American oil companies from transferring oil from its territory [155].

Since the sanctions were implemented, Russia has been unable to sell oil. Despite the fact that the price of a barrel of oil on the market is 120 dollars, it is sold for 30 dollars. Because of this, it is possible for Kazakhstan to close the oil pipeline that transports up to 53 million tonnes of oil per year and create an artificial opening. There are political objectives in addition to economic benefits.

Experts from Kazakhstan and other countries believe that the sluggishness in oil transport caused by the TBM is not inconsequential, but this opinion is contingent upon when the malfunction in the TBM will be remedied.

Failure of two plants at the same time is a major problem. If it won't be resolved, it will have a huge impact on Kazakhstan's economy, because now the Tengiz, Kasaan, and Karacganak projects will have to limit oil production by at least 6-7 times. This means that less oil is exported and fewer taxes are paid, and the National Fund and the national budget could receive less than about 200-250 billion tenge.

Since oil is not being sold, there is no dollar anyway, which contributes to the weakening of the tenge. The state is unable to meet its most significant social responsibilities towards its residents, such as the development of health centres, roads, drinking water, and natural gas.

In Kazakhstan, there are 72,000 people employed in the oil industry and more than 120,000 people employed in services associated to the oil industry [163]. If our three operators stopped oil production, another 40,000 people would be out of work.

This information has not lost its relevance, despite the fact that there have been news reports about the industrialization of the country, the creation of new export-oriented industries, and the rapid development of the agro-industrial complex from time to time. The high dependence of the Kazakhstan economy on the oil and gas industry in the news space has been an axiom for a long time, but at least it is easy to believe.

Approximately sixty percent of Kazakhstan's overall tax income and contributions to the state budget come from tax deductions taken from the country's thirty greatest taxpayers.

In 2019, the state budget brought in 9.7 trillion tenge, and the 30 largest taxpayers paid a total of 4.9 trillion tenge in taxes; of this amount, 4.3 trillion tenge

came from oil and gas corporations and affiliated businesses. In other words, the oil and gas sector is responsible for 44% of the state budget.

Kazakhstan's gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 1% in 2016, 4% in 2017, and 4.1% in 2018. At the same time, there was a significant decrease in the prices of "black gold," the price of which was below \$ 40 per barrel in 2015-2016, then GDP also increased due to oil prices.

Consequently, the oil industry is the most important sector of Kazakhstan's economy; it accounts for approximately 15% of GDP, more than half of exports, and more than 40% of state revenues. Nevertheless, despite the fact that this sector helps the country's economy when oil prices are high, we see oil revenues as an important source of volatility in terms of trade and government revenues [164].

In this context, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline connection is the only project that holds any promise. Some industry professionals believe that this aspect will be very expensive for Kazakhstan and will cost between four and five billion dollars. Despite this, they believe that it should be turned in this direction, even though it will be expensive. There is a choice: should we fight for temporary costs or for independence? We ship 53 million tonnes of oil via TBM and 12 million tonnes via Samara, and we believe that our future

In such a challenging circumstance, Kazakhstan started to refocus on the potential of the BTS pipeline. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan met in Baku at the end of March 2022 to discuss the proposal of establishing a joint company to develop the Trans-Caspian international transport route [101].

It is anticipated that the new joint venture will address final tariffs and cargo declaration, utilise joint information technology solutions, and integrate transit cargo into the Trans-Caspian international transport route. Representatives of the Kazakh delegation have called attention to the necessity of reorienting the export flow from Kazakhstan to Europe in the direction of the trans-Caspian.



Figure – 6 Hydrocarbon routes from Central Asia (Source: <https://warsawinstitute.org/caspian-summit-consequences-region/>)

There is already a risk that demand will exceed supply, and these factors will ultimately affect the final consumer. This increases both delivery costs and waiting times. This reality requires a new framework for cooperation and the creation of transit and transport communication. It is clear that the events and the geopolitical situation in the region have created a new reality.

Participants also discussed the unification of tariffs and synchronisation of customs procedures in the international corridor passing through countries in order to increase the volume of cargo transportation in transport corridors. The parties drew attention to the significant potential for cooperation in the field of oil transportation via Azerbaijan, noting that this could be an alternative to the existing routes.

Kazakhstan's oil exports and transportation are in a difficult situation in the face of the sanctions imposed on Russia by the world public opinion. During the years of independence, Kazakhstan directed its oil exports only to the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (HBHK), which passes through the territory of Russia. At the same time, Kazakhstan did not give priority to any other alternative projects. As a result, dependence on Russia has increased, and we see that Kazakhstan, whose main source of income depends on exporting oil via pipelines, and it is not easy to finance and implement this pipeline in a short time, but Kazakhstan's independence and economic strength depend only on the final implementation of this project. In this context, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline is the only way for Kazakhstan to get out of this crisis. Of course, for a long time, the Government of Kazakhstan did not pay attention to this area and did not invest.

Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan will all look to the Caspian Sea for ideas in the years to come. The sea has been an important factor in the political, economic, and cultural growth of these nations because it connects them to the rest of the world. In conclusion, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have benefited greatly from the Caspian Sea.

The Caspian Basin holds immense geopolitical and economic importance, with Iran's active involvement profoundly shaping the security and stability of the broader area. While the region possesses significant potential to spur economic advancement and development, achieving this requires collaborative efforts among neighboring states to overcome persistent challenges. Iran's strategic footprint in the Caspian Basin carries substantial weight, influencing not only regional dynamics but also international political strategies.

- *In my opinion* the geopolitical balance of international powers in the Caspian Sea region is a complex issue in which regional and international interests overlap, especially in light of the major political and economic transformations the world is undergoing. In this context, several key factors that affect Iran's role in the region stand out, including the Caspian Sea Agreement, the international sanctions crisis, and competition over energy resources. In 2018, a historic agreement was reached between the Caspian Sea littoral states (Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan,

and Turkmenistan) that established a legal framework for the division of maritime resources. This agreement is an important step for Iran, as it strengthens its legal position in the sea and opens the way for it to exploit energy resources.

Iran emerged from the US sanctions crisis for a short period, which enabled it to rebuild its economic relations with neighboring countries and enhance its influence in the region at that stage. This exit allows it to participate more effectively in energy and transportation projects in the Caspian Sea, which enhances its role as a regional energy hub.

The Caspian Sea region is a meeting point for a number of regional and international powers, where economic and political interests and ambitions overlap in a complex manner. With vast reserves of oil, gas and other minerals, all the countries bordering the sea are seeking to enhance their influence. Russia is a major power in the region, seeking to maintain its traditional dominance. In contrast, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are seeking to enhance their role in the global energy market, further complicating the regional balance. The United States, the European Union, China, India and Turkey have all entered the Caspian Sea region as international players through partnerships with regional countries, expanding what is now known as the “Great Game”.

On the other hand, Iran faces significant challenges in enhancing its influence, especially in light of the increasing competition from other powers. Iran needs to cooperate with its neighbors to achieve stability in the region, but disputes over borders and exploration rights remain a major obstacle.

Energy in the Caspian Sea is a major focus of cooperation and conflict among the littoral states. Iran has large reserves of oil and gas, and these resources are essential to strengthening its economy. Iran seeks to expand its partnerships with other countries to develop energy projects by using its expertise in oil production and distribution, although disputes over borders and exploration rights are hampering these efforts. Iran also faces threats from major powers seeking to dominate the resources of the sea. Pressure is mounting on it from the United States and Western countries to fulfill its international obligations and reduce its threats to global peace and security, which further complicates the situation.

At the same time, energy remains an opportunity for regional cooperation, where countries can work together to enhance economic and security stability in the region. If Iran can break its international isolation, overcome obstacles, and strengthen its relations with the littoral states, it may be able to achieve a better balance in its regional and international relations, and this process may be reciprocal.

The geopolitical balance of power in the Caspian Sea region remains a complex issue that requires a deep understanding of the overlapping interests of regional countries and greedy major powers. As Iran seeks to enhance its influence in light of the many challenges that exist, regional cooperation on energy can represent a potential solution to ease tensions and achieve stability. In my opinion, the Caspian littoral states should seek effective mechanisms for cooperation in order to achieve mutual benefits that are necessary and urgent to expand investment and employment of resources, and enhance security and stability in the region.

Iran can work to improve trade relations with the Caspian Sea littoral countries by establishing joint free zones and facilitating trade flows. This includes a proposal to form a joint transportation committee to coordinate transportation and customs tariffs between the countries. Within the scope of energy cooperation, Iran can seek to develop joint projects in the oil and gas fields, such as forming refinery construction, laying oil and gas pipelines and other fuel transportation technologies, and showcasing its expertise in the field of oil and gas extraction, which will enhance its position as a regional energy hub.

By strengthening cooperation with countries such as Russia and China, Iran seeks to reduce the impact of US sanctions. Cooperation in various fields such as trade and energy can help alleviate economic pressures. Investing in developing transportation infrastructure, such as railways and ports, can facilitate the movement of goods and energy between Iran and the Caspian Sea Basin countries. Iran can play a role in protecting the marine environment by cooperating with other countries in the field of marine environment protection, which enhances positive relations and demonstrates Iran's commitment to sustainability. Strengthening security cooperation and coordination to confront common threats, such as terrorism and smuggling, can contribute to building trust among the Caspian littoral states. Through these strategies, Iran can enhance its cooperation with the Caspian Basin countries, which will contribute to achieving economic and political stability in the region.

Conclusion

The dissolution of the Soviet Union significantly altered the legal system that governed the area around the Caspian Sea. When the Soviet Union was still standing, it claimed sovereignty over the entire Caspian Sea, and its legal framework for the region was heavily influenced by Soviet-era regulations. With the breakup of the Soviet Union, previously unified oversight of the Caspian Sea gave way to disputes among the newly independent nations of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Iran regarding how authority should be divided. The collapse of the USSR had a profound effect on the Caspian Sea's legal framework and use of its resources, as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan emerged as sovereign states. This development led to competition over the sea's wealth, and in the absence of an agreed legal framework, disagreements and frictions arose among the countries bordering the sea. The growing importance of the Caspian Sea in global energy markets has further intensified the situation .

For decades, the five littoral states have debated which of them has the right to determine the sea's legal classification. Various treaties and statements have attempted to tackle this question, culminating in the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018. Although this agreement clarified numerous long-standing issues concerning the sea's legal standing, a number of matters remain unresolved. Consequently, ongoing cooperation among the bordering nations is vital for sustainably managing the Caspian Sea's resources and addressing the interests of outside stakeholders and the wider international community. Russia's stance on the Caspian Sea's legal status reflects a wide range of competing interests and concerns. Russia has been a vocal supporter of the idea that the Caspian Sea should be recognised as a shared resource, but the country has been hesitant to fully adopt the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. Russia's energy interests in the region are at the heart of its apprehension about the possibility of conflict over the Caspian Sea's resources, but Russia has also sought to strike a balance between these interests and its desire to maintain stability and cooperation in the region.

Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan all rely heavily on the Caspian Sea. The sea has been an important factor in the political, economic, and cultural growth of these nations because it connects them to the rest of the world. These nations have invested in ports and pipelines to facilitate the export of their natural resources to buyers in Europe and Asia. Future growth and innovation in these nations will be largely influenced by the Caspian Sea.

Iran's role in the Caspian Basin is pivotal to maintaining both regional and global power dynamics. This basin holds considerable strategic and economic importance, and Iran's involvement carries substantial implications for the overall security and stability of the surrounding area. Yet, the region's many challenges necessitate cooperation among the Caspian littoral states to harness its full potential as a catalyst for economic growth and development.

Notwithstanding the formal agreements defining the Caspian Sea's status, Russia has leveraged the sea as a military base against Ukraine amid the ongoing conflict. Throughout this period, none of the Caspian littoral nations, including Iran, have intervened to address Russia's actions.

Iran enjoys historical opportunities due to its unique geopolitical location. Its shores on the Caspian Sea provided it with great political benefits and important occasions for its foreign policy to maneuver with the international community after its ideological and expansionist tendencies, especially in the West, almost destroyed its hard-line political regime. Iran has sought to maximize its benefits from the Caspian Sea, but it has been hit by a grinding international conflict, this collision had a great benefit on Iranian foreign policy, which regained its realism and natural flexibility after it was imprisoned by the closed-mindedness of the mullah's clerics. Therefore, it can be said that Iran has temporarily succeeded in escaping from the crush and converting material losses into strategic benefits through negotiations. The above work allows us to formulate the following results:

1. There are more than 250 trillion cubic feet of proven natural gas reserves in the Caspian Basin region, and this is in addition to other minerals and wealth. This is the equivalent of 16 percent of the world's oil reserves. Which places it at the forefront of the world's most significant and prosperous regions. At the same time, this makes it one of the most enticing regions in which a war could break out.

2. The issue of the Caspian Sea's legal status became central to regional politics in the final decade of the twentieth century as a result of shifting geopolitical power dynamics. After the fall of the Soviet Union, Communist doctrine no longer dictated the situation surrounding the Caspian Sea, forcing everyone involved to start over and find a new legal framework based on the fundamental question: Is the Caspian a closed sea or a limited lake? It was not possible to apply international water law to the Sea Caspian, so a group of factors emerged that tried to push the process of setting major milestones to define the legal framework for the Caspian Sea forward. However, there is a problem that complicated this process represented in the absence of similar cases that can be measured.

3. There was not much distance between the pressure of Western visions of interests, whether European or American, and the interference of super majors oil and gas companies; it took the countries bordering the Caspian Sea over a quarter of a century to reach an agreement on the division of the huge benefits in the region.

4. The positions of the states during the Caspian Sea negotiations can be summarized as follows.

Russia's position: shared waters, a divided bottom: sovereign rights over the oil fields on the basis of the agreement.

- Kazakhstan's position: The Caspian is not a sea and not a lake: the exercise of all sovereign rights over the territorial waters, including the seabed.
- The position of Azerbaijan: According to the framework established by the Soviet Ministry of Petroleum Industry in 1970, the Caspian "Lake" is subject to a limited division principle around administrative boundaries. Turkmenistan's stance on this matter has changed repeatedly, but it

currently delineates 12 to 15 nautical miles as territorial waters, designates 35 nautical miles for its economic zone, and considers the remaining area to be shared waters.

- While Iran's positions are limited to: joint sovereignty, the Caspian is a closed sea, the exercise of sovereign rights for each country in coastal areas of up to 20 nautical miles, absolute sovereignty over the waters, the bottom and the air in this region of the adjacent territorial sea, or that the five riparian countries have the same rights To carry out exploration and protection of the basin, a joint operation in the middle or heart of the Caspian Sea, that is, from 40 nautical miles from the shores of the riparian states.
- Iran is a major player in this region, and its importance may increase in the future as it enjoys qualitative advantages, the most important of which are the enormous wealth and its geographical location, which makes it the best and least expensive passage for Caspian oil and gas to the rest of the world, especially as it has equipped itself well with facilities for the oil industry on the south coast of the Sea, It has the largest pipelines network in the Middle East, and it can be easily extended to any neighbouring country.
- At the Aktau conference, Tehran abandoned what it used to call its historical rights in the Caspian compelled, just as it abandoned its insistence that the Caspian is a lake and not a sea. So as not to hinder the policies and plans of its Russian ally, which wagered on the success of the Aktau conference and its exit as a dominant power, thus strengthen the influence of its president, Vladimir Putin, internally and externally. The importance of the agreement is not due to its direct results, which are almost not economically noticeable now, it is almost a legalization of a fait accompli, but the importance of the event lies in the fact that the legalization of the current situation and the liquidation of the focus of tension have transformed the situation from a point of contention to a point of convergence and conglomeration of its five countries. The Iranians are betting on the role that the common economic benefits of major countries may play in preventing any military attack on them, and the Iranians believe that the most important goals of the main players in this region (Russia, America, European Union countries, China) is to control the routes and pipelines of oil and gas exports, and thus In spite of the disagreement between Tehran, the West and even Saudi Arabia over the Iranian nuclear program, any tension in this region will affect all of these countries that border Iran, such as Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, especially on gas pipelines to Europe.

Iran faces numerous challenges, including a lacklustre economy, domestic political upheaval, the aftermath of the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the country's seemingly endless and wasteful adventures in countries like Syria and Iraq. For the time being, the stability that Tehran has enjoyed in the South Caucasus for three decades must be preserved at any costs. On September 27, 2020, military

engagements broke out along the border between Azerbaijan and Armenia, sparking a full-scale conventional war that lasted for 45 days.

Iran is a major loser in this battle for three main reasons:

First, Azeris make up Iran's second largest ethnic group. During the unrest, ethnic Azeris voiced their support for Baku through social media and street protests. The Iranian government suppressed several of these pro-Azerbaijani demonstrations despite its efforts to look neutral during the crisis. The Azeri minority in northern Iran is always lobbying for more freedom and independence. Although this has not yet manifested as a widespread call for independence, it has caused concern among certain members of Iran's ruling elite.

Second, Iran will need to realign its northern border with Azerbaijan, which will require an investment of time, resources, and possibly even troops. This may mean that Iran pays less attention to other regions, such as the Gulf or Syria. Since 1994, Armenia has occupied territory along the border between Azerbaijan and Iran. Baku has regained control of the border with Azerbaijan, establishing a new security dynamic between the two countries. Many in Tehran are also likely to be on edge due to the fact that 2,000 Russian peacekeepers are stationed within 100 km of the country's border. In spite of improved ties in recent years, Russia and Iran have historically been regional rivals. More Iranian military forces have been moved to the country's northern border. Finally, Azerbaijan has worked hard to keep amicable relations with Iran since its autonomous area of Nakhchivan, which is sandwiched between Iran, Armenia, and Turkey, is supplied through Iranian airspace and territory. Nakhchivan's natural gas supply came from Iran, which Azerbaijan relied on for both transit rights and energy. Armenia has opened a corridor through its territory to make it easier for Azerbaijan to ship commodities directly to Nakhchivan as part of the recent peace arrangement. Nakhchivan also has a fresh energy source thanks to an announcement made by Turkey earlier this year. Baku should expect a shift in the bilateral relationship's dynamics in its advantage because of Iran's declining importance.

Iran benefited from Turkey's decision to cool down and collaborate with its neighbours after tensions with US President Joe Biden's administration flared up. Middle of (November 2021) saw the announcement from multiple official sources that the first TIR intermodal operation had been completed from the United Arab Emirates to Turkey via the Iranian port of Iskendarun on the Mediterranean. The trip began in Ras al Khaimah, continued on land to Sharjah's Port of Khalid, and finally reached Iran's Port of Shaheed Bahonar via Ro-Ro ferry. After passing over the Bazargan-Gurbulak border, the truck continued on the route to Turkey, eventually reaching Iskendarun a week later. Customs clearance at every border crossing, including those between the two Emirates, was completed using a single TIR carnet.

The new intermodal trade corridor will cut travel time by around two-thirds compared to the conventional marine route via the Suez Canal, from 12 to 16 days on average. The introduction of several new trade routes in 2021, including one from Russia to the United Arab Emirates by way of Azerbaijan and Iran and another from

Pakistan to Turkey by way of Iran, has resulted in significant time savings for exporters, and so has this new TIR route.

In a geopolitical context, this project is significant since it opens up a new joint sea-land route as part of China's "Belt and Road" initiative. It could pave the path for political understandings to be established between these countries, which in turn could lead to solutions being found for the crises in Syria, Lebanon, and Yemen.

Significant economic repercussions will result from this project, particularly on the volume of commerce exchange between these countries, and the Suez Canal would suffer as a result. The greatest of these consequences is the expansion of trade between these nations without the high cost of sea travel (in terms of both time and money spent on things like ship chartering, fuel prices, and insurance). The United Arab Emirates (UAE) ranks first in the Arab world in terms of the magnitude and diversity of its investments in Turkey, which amount to roughly \$8 billion annually. The United Arab Emirates just surpassed \$7 billion in exports to Iran, making it the country's largest export market. With \$2.43 billion, Turkey is in second place. After Iraq (\$2.308 billion) and the UAE (\$2.243 billion), Turkey is the largest purchaser of Iranian products. The initiative opens up possibilities for growth and investment in Iran's transport industry.

In 2022, Iran sent suicide drones and members of the Iranian Revolutionary Guards to Crimea in support of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. Iran is using the chance to try to exert pressure on the United States, deepen what it sees as an alliance with Russia, and compete economically and geopolitically with Turkey. As far as Iran is concerned, if Russia is completely defeated in this battle, Tehran will no longer have a card to play between important actors in the international arena or to balance threats from other countries. Furthermore, the situation in Syria, the Caucasus, and Central Asia are all indirectly tied to Russia's policies, as is Tehran's regional influence. There will be consequences for Iranian hegemony in these regions if Russia is defeated. Furthermore, Iran has recently retreated in these regions in favour of Turkey, suggesting that Tehran thinks cooperation with Russia and convincing Russia of the necessity to limit the expanding Turkish influence in these regions is the best way to restrict the rising Turkish power. In the event that the United States decides to resume talks over the nuclear agreement, Iran would have more leverage with such a story.

The main challenge to the mullahs' regime in Iran will remain the internal challenge, regardless of the triumphs and failures of Iran's foreign policy approach and its determinants and factors of the ups and downs. Millions of Iranians are oppressed by a religious government that seems to have stepped out of another period and is seeking to impose a mediaeval way of life on them. This has made the government unpopular with the Iranian people and made it susceptible to internal disturbances like the recent Mahsa Amini demonstrations.

The Russian side, despite the status of the Caspian Sea as established by the agreements, uses the sea as a military foothold against Ukraine during the Ukrainian-Russian conflict. And none of the Caspian states, including Iran, do anything to stop it.

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APPLICATIONS

Table – 1 Production and Reserves of Oil and Gas in the Caspian Basin Countries in 2023
(https://www.opec.org/opec_web/en/)

Country	oil production (million meters per day)	Oil reserves (billion kilometers)	Gas production (billion meters)	Gas reserves (trillion cubic meters)
Russia	9.7	108.2	762	32.9
Kazakhstan	1.8	90	59.5	1.8
Iran	3.8	153.2	280	34.0
Azerbaijan	0.8	2.5	35	1.1
Turkmenistan	0.7	19.5	75	17.5

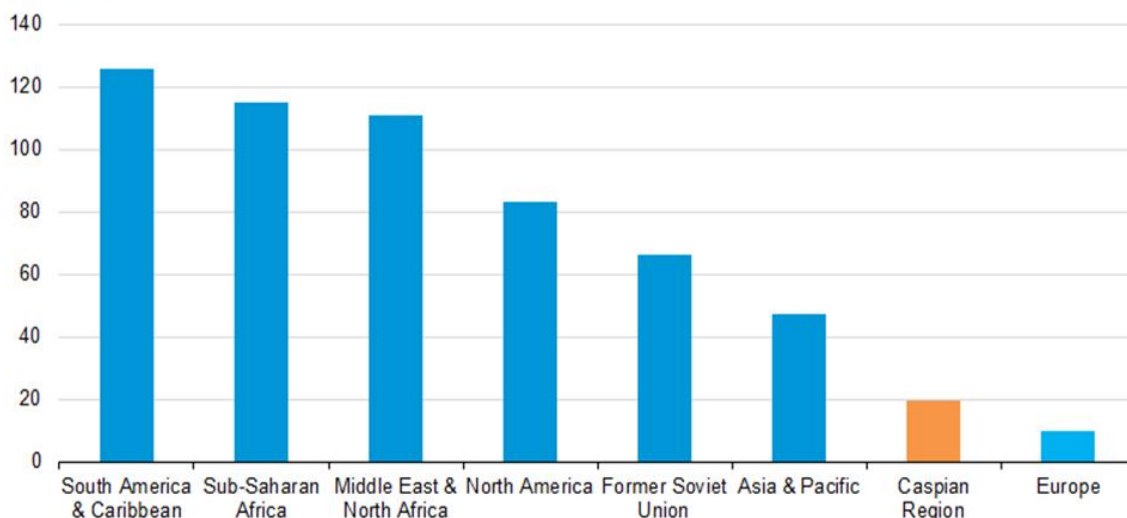
Table – 2 Caspian legal status alternatives (Sources: UNCLOS 1982, Chatham House 2005//)

Classification	Applicable regime	Effect
Sea	United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Coastal states have 'territorial sea', breadth not exceeding 12 miles, and continental shelf. - Territorial seas do not extend 'beyond the median line every point of which is equidistant from the nearest points on the baselines from which the breadth of the territorial seas of each of the two states is measured.' - Land-locked states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) can claim right of access to high seas.
Lake	Customary international law governing border lakes	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Border states regulate use of water through international agreements. - Each state has exclusive rights over resources and water surface in its national sector. - Lakes can be delimited several different ways, such as by coastal line or median line.

Table – 3 Worlds oil resources Caspian legal status alternatives (Source: https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian_Sea)

World's estimated undiscovered oil resources, 2012

billion barrels of oil



Notes: undiscovered resources are mean undiscovered technically recoverable resources.
 "Former Soviet Union" includes all Caspian Sea Area resources except in Iran.



Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, USGS World Estimate of Undiscovered Resources 2012, USGS Assessment of Undiscovered Resources of Caspian Sea Area 2010

Table – 4 Caspian basins proved and probable reserves (Source: https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian_Sea)

Country	Crude oil and lease condensate (billion bbl)	Natural gas (Tcf)
Azerbaijan	8.5	51
Offshore Caspian	6.8	46
Onshore Caspian	1.7	5
Iran	0.5	2
Offshore Caspian	0.5	1
Onshore Caspian	(s)	1
Kazakhstan	31.2	104
Offshore Caspian	15.7	36
Onshore Caspian	15.5	68
Russia	6.1	109
Offshore Caspian	1.6	14
Onshore Caspian	4.5	95
Turkmenistan	1.9	19

Country	Crude oil and lease condensate (billion bbl)	Natural gas (Tcf)
Offshore Caspian	1.1	9
Onshore Caspian	0.8	10
Uzbekistan	(s)	7
Offshore Caspian	0	0
Onshore Caspian	(s)	7
TOTAL CASPIAN	48.2	292
Offshore Caspian	19.6	106
Onshore Caspian	28.6	186
<p>Notes:</p> <p>(s) = Value is too small for the number of decimal places shown.</p> <p>"Offshore Caspian" refers to fields in the Caspian Sea.</p> <p>"Onshore Caspian" refers to fields in Caspian basins that are not offshore.</p> <p>Proved + Probable reserves exceed the value of 'proved reserves' in EIA's International Energy Statistics.</p> <p>Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, IHS EDIN, Eastern Bloc Research Energy Databook 2012</p>		

Table – 5 Crude oil production in Caspian region, 2012 thousand barrels per day (Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, IHS EDIN, Eastern Bloc Energy, Rigzone, Rystad Energy)

Country	Caspian offshore	onshore basin	Total Caspian production	Total country production	Caspian % of country total production
Azerbaijan	890	32	922	922	100%
Iran	0	0	0	3,367	0%
Kazakhstan	3	1,384	1,387	1,515	92%
Russia	6	114	120	9,922	1%
Turkmenistan	46	170	216	216	100%
Uzbekistan	0	(s)	(s)	66	<1%
Total	945	1,700	2,645	16,007	17%

Table – 6 Gross natural gas production in Caspian region, 2011 billion cubic feet per year
(Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, IHS EDIN, Eastern Bloc Energy, Rigzone, Rystad Energy)

Country	Caspian offshore	onshore basin	Total Caspian production	Total country production	Caspian % of country total production
Azerbaijan	562	183	745	745	100%
Iran	0	0	0	7,915	0%
Kazakhstan	(s)	1,025	1,025	1,390	74%
Russia	17	468	485	23,686	2%
Turkmenistan	1	283	284	2,338	12%
Uzbekistan	0	10	10	2,226	<1%
Total	580	1,969	2,549	38,300	7%

Table – 7 Caspian region major oil and natural gas projects

Country	Major project	Location	Production, 2012	Year of commissioning/production start-up	Developing companies
Azerbaijan					
	Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli (ACG)	Caspian Offshore	660,000 bbl/d oil, 110 Bcf gas	1997	AIOC (BP, Chevron, Devon Energy, StatoilHydro, TPAO, Amerada Hess, SOCAR, ExxonMobil, Itochu)
	Shah Deniz	Caspian	260 Bcf gas	2006	BP, StatoilHydro,

Country	Caspian offshore	onshore basin	Total Caspian production	Total country production	Caspian % of country total production
		Offshore			SOCAR, TPAO, Total, NICO, LUKOil
	Araz-Alov-Sharg	Caspian Offshore	developing	-	SOCAR, BP, ExxonMobil, StatoilHydro, EnCana, TPAO
Kazakhstan					
	Kashagan	Caspian Offshore	developing	2013	North Caspian Operating Company (ENI, Shell, Total, ExxonMobil, KazMunaiGaz, ConocoPhillips, Inpex)
	Tengiz	Caspian Onshore	480,000 bbl/d oil, 430 Bcf gas	1991	Tengizchevroil (Chevron, ExxonMobil, KazMunaiGaz, LUKOil)
	Karachaganak	Caspian Onshore		phase 1 - 1985, phase 2 - 2000	Karachaganak Petroleum Operating (BG Group, ENI, Chevron, LUKOil)
	Kurmangazy	Caspian Offshore	developing	-	Rosneft, KazMunaiGaz
Turkmenistan					
	South Yolotan	Onshore*	developing	2006	Turkmengaz/CNPC

Country	Caspian offshore	Onshore basin	Total Caspian production	Total country production	Caspian % of country total production
	(Galkynys h)				
	Dauletabad	Onshore*	1.4 Tcf gas	1983	Turkmengaz
	Cheleken	Caspian Offshore	74,000 bbl/d oil	1950	Dragon Oil, Turkmenneft
Russia					
	NorthCaspian block (Yury Korchagin)	Caspian Offshore	7,000 bbl/d oil, 16 Bcf gas	2010	LUKOil
Iran					

Table – 8 Caspian summits

Time	Participants	Results
I Caspian Summit April 23–24, 2002, Ashgabat, Turkmenistan.	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia	Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan defended the sharing of offshore fields along the middle line and the shared use of the sea surface. Turkmenistan – different position on division of the Caspian Sea, no one should use force in the Caspian Sea, incite conflicts or disputes, and all disputes should be resolved through negotiations.
II Caspian Summit Tehran on October 16, 2007.	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia	At the end of the Summit a Declaration was signed by the heads of the Caspian littoral states. The Declaration consisted of 25 items. The Declaration recorded that geopolitical and national developments and processes in the Caspian region" should be taken into account by Caspian littoral states. At the same time,

		the existing agreements between the five states and, therefore, the need to improve the legal regime of the Caspian Sea and to adopt the "Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea." was recorded.
III Caspian Summit November 18, 2010, in Baku.	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia	was signed an agreement on the cooperation on the security in the Caspian Sea. The document included the norms and principles of international law, independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, non-use of force. Article 1 of the agreement states that the security of the Caspian Sea is the exclusive right of the littoral states.
IV Caspian Summit Astrakhan, September 29, 2014.	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia	The Caspian littoral states discussed the legal status, security, biological resources and environmental problems of the Caspian Sea. The presidents signed agreements covering the cooperation in the field of hydro-meteorology of the Caspian Sea, and on prevention and elimination of consequences of the Caspian Sea, protection and rational use of the Caspian Sea water resources.
V Caspian Summit, Aktau in 2018.	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia	At this summit the parties signed a Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea. The document states that the waters of the Caspian littoral countries are 15 miles. The surface water is universal. However, most of the bio-resources of the Caspian Sea remain in common use. Were signed 8 documents including the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, the Protocol on Cooperation in Combating Terrorism in the Caspian Sea and other documents. These documents include cooperation on the fight against organized crime, economics and trade, transport, resolution of the conflicts, and border agencies.
VI Caspian Summit, Ashgabat on June 29, 2022.	Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia	were discussed topical issues of cooperation in the Caspian Sea in relation to various spheres, as well as the implementation of resolutions made during the previous meetings of the heads of the Caspian "five".