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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**

|                     |   |
|---------------------|---|
| <b>AIB</b>          | Asian Investment Bank                                   |
| <b>ASEAN</b>        | Association Southeast Asian Nations                     |
| <b>BRICS</b>        | Russia, China, India, Brazil and South Africa           |
| <b>CSCC</b>         | Cooperation Council for the Caspian Sea States          |
| <b>CSTO</b>         | Collective Security Treaty Organization                 |
| <b>ECO</b>          | Organization of Economic Cooperation                    |
| <b>EU</b>           | European Union  |
| <b>GCC</b>          | the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf |
| <b>IRGC (Sepah)</b> | IRGC (Sepah) - Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps        |
| <b>NSRI</b>         | New Silk Road Initiative                                |
| <b>NATO</b>         | North Atlantic Treaty Organization                      |
| <b>OIC</b>          | Organization of the Islamic Cooperation                 |
| <b>PCA</b>          | Partnership Agreement                                   |
| <b>SCO</b>          | Shanghai Cooperation Organization                       |
| <b>SEZ</b>          | Special Economic Zone                                   |
| <b>UAE</b>          | United Arab Emirates                                    |
| <b>USA</b>          | the United States of America                            |
| <b>WTO</b>          | World Trade Organization                                |

## Introduction

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea region experienced an increase in the number of bordering countries, expanding to include five nations: Iran, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Russia [1]. Previously, only Iran and the Soviet Union shared this border. As these countries commenced various activities within the Caspian Sea, questions arose concerning its legal status. Notable issues influencing the geopolitical interests of the littoral states and external parties include:

1. Hydrocarbon resources (oil and gas) that could change the world energy market situation, and become one of the major budget revenues for the national states, as well as attracting foreign direct investments to stimulate economic growth;
2. Development of transportation routes to the world markets, that was on side an opportunity but also created a number of challenges, as all the states around the Caspian except for Iran and Russia are landlocked;
3. Security on the Caspian and around, especially in the Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan);
4. Geostrategic interests of external parties to involve the littoral states into various security projects, like NATO expansion and military cooperation with western states;
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 h 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. Based on this categorization, Azerbaijan asserts that Iran's portion of the Caspian Sea constitutes approximately 13-14% exclusively encompassing the Iranian coastline. Conversely, Azerbaijan claims a more substantial allocation and a broader expanse of the Caspian Sea, encompassing areas abundant in oil or gas resources, in contrast to the Iranian region which lacks such reserves. 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;
- Iran's involvement into the Caspian Sea related projects would contribute to framing common interests and develop reasonable response mechanisms to withstand external pressure from the western states and overcome international sanctions regime;
- 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 projects has been of big value [3].

**The degree of scientific development of the problem:** The analysis of Iran's foreign policy and its influence on political dynamics in the Central Asian region has drawn significant attention from scholars, particularly within political science. Despite the abundance of scientific literature on this topic, there remains a notable lack of comprehensive scholarly works that thoroughly explore the multifaceted aspects of Iran's foreign policy development and its specific implications for the Caspian Sea region. Additionally, the important role that Iran plays in addressing various crises in the Caspian Sea, a crucial aspect of its foreign policy, is inadequately covered. In both Iranian and Central Asian academic circles, there is a clear deficiency of specialized monographs or dissertations that examine the evolution of Iran's foreign policy and its subsequent impact on political processes in the Caspian region.

Research in this area enables a deeper understanding of current affairs in world politics. The works of scholars such as Mujtahid Z.B., Nejat A., J. Adeebfar, Bayrouz M., Tamer, Farid Alloush, Fawzi Darwish, Shahi Muhammad, Tafzali V., Atai, Farhad Geranmayeh, Badawi, and Mustafa Dasuki Kasbah have significantly contributed to understanding the trends and changes in international relations within which Iran's foreign policy has developed and evolved.

Studies that focus on the historical, political, and socio-economic dimensions of Iran have also received considerable attention. The analysis of authors such as

Bazhanov E.P. and Tsygankov P.A. is highly relevant to understanding Iran's contemporary foreign policy and economic situation, particularly during transformative periods in the Middle East, South Caucasus, and Central Asia. The historical and cultural legacy of Iran, along with the evolution of its foreign policy, has been widely explored by notable Iranian scholars such as Mehdi Sanai, Gudarzi P.M., Kavom Abdul Ali, and Mashirzade Humayra.

Currently, significant focus lies on works examining the characteristics of Iran's internal political and economic growth, notably those by M. Muminov. This author addresses the challenges faced by Iran's domestic development while emphasizing the country's resource foundation. Scholarly investigations into Iran's foreign policy provide valuable insights into its engagements in the global domain. In this context, 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. analyze Iran's foreign policy actions during a challenging period of reorientation.

A significant contribution to this field is the monograph by M.K. Sadjadpour, titled "Theory and Practice of Iran's Foreign Policy." This scholarly work extensively analyzes the primary orientations and key objectives of Iran's foreign policy. The development of Iran's foreign policy has been addressed by various Iranian, Russian, and Central Asian authors, who cover numerous aspects of this subject matter. Extensive research has explored elements regarding the evolution of Iran's foreign policy system, the growth of its economy, and its resource potential. Simultaneously, many scholarly publications have focused on the complex issues related to the Caspian region as a whole.

The legal characteristics of the status of the Caspian Sea have been examined through a diverse array of scholarly works by Iranian, Kazakh, Arab, and European-American researchers. These scholars have made significant contributions to understanding the international legal status of the Caspian Sea and the associated maritime law concerns. Their research has concentrated 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 this dissertation has also referenced the works of foreign scholars, including 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.

In summary, there exists a substantial body of research on Iran's foreign policy concerning the status of the Caspian Sea. To better understand these studies, they can be categorized into distinct blocks.

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

The Caspian Sea holds significant importance for Iran due to its geographical location, economic potential, and historical background. Several books and references provide valuable insights into this topic. 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 [3]. This book offers a comprehensive analysis of the Caspian Sea's historical, cultural, and economy-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, Tuncay Babalı (Togrul), 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.

The next book "Eurasia's Ascent in Energy and Geopolitics: Rivalry or Partnership for China, Russia, and Central Asia?" edited by Robert Bedeski and Niklas Swanström explores the energy and geopolitical dimensions of Eurasia, including the Caspian Sea region [6]. It examines the rivalry and partnership dynamics between China, Russia, and Central Asia concerning energy resources. The chapters in this book provide valuable insights into the strategic importance of the Caspian Sea for Iran and its neighboring countries.

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

As previously detailed, this work provides an in-depth analysis of the political and legal dynamics governing the Caspian Sea, focusing on the positions and perspectives of the surrounding nations, including a special emphasis on Iran's viewpoint. "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 delves into historical legal regimes, potential hydrocarbon resources, and the contentious debate over whether the Caspian should be classified as a lake or a sea. Furthermore, it scrutinizes the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea (CLSCS), addressing its ramifications for sovereignty, navigation, subsoil resources, and environmental stewardship[8] .

"The Caspian Sea: A Quest for Environmental Security" by Igor S. Zonn, Aleksey N. Kosarev, and Michael H. Glantz investigates the environmental and security issues pertaining to the Caspian Sea. It discusses the existing legal frameworks designed to facilitate cooperation among the littoral states in addressing environmental challenges and ensuring regional security[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 Caspian Sea: A Quest for Environmental Security" edited by Rafis Abazov edited volume also tackles the environmental and security concerns of the Caspian Sea region. It highlights the legal aspects of resource management and the importance of international cooperation in addressing these issues [9, p. 45]. And "The Caspian Sea: Legal Framework for a Joint Exploitation of Its Resources" by Elena Kuznetsova centres 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 Neighbouring the Caspian:

The article "THE LEGAL STATUS OF THE CASPIAN SEA: AN IRANIAN PERSPECTIVE" provides a detailed examination of the Caspian Sea's strategic importance, particularly focusing on its abundant mineral resources. KINIK and ERKAN analyze the complexities of resource sharing among the Caspian littoral states, specifically Iran, Russia, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. The authors highlight the significant diplomatic and legal challenges of these countries [10, p.56]. A major focus of the article is the 2018 Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which aimed to resolve long-standing disputes over territorial and resource claims. The convention's implications for Iran are scrutinized, revealing both the benefits and limitations it imposes on Iran's strategic and economic interests. The authors argue that while the convention provides a framework for cooperation and conflict resolution, it also poses challenges for Iran in asserting its maritime rights and accessing offshore resources [10, p.15]. 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. It discusses various issues such as water bankruptcy, unsustainable agricultural growth, water pollution, deforestation, soil erosion, air pollution, and solid waste management. The article provides insights into the environmental consequences of Iran's international relationships and the need for sustainable practices [11, p.29].

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

Ahmed 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, p.32]. The analysis includes a detailed discussion of the Caspian Sea region, emphasizing its vast energy potential. For Iran, the Caspian Sea represents a critical economic asset, with substantial hydrocarbon reserves that are essential for national energy security and economic development. Mahdi explores the geopolitical ramifications of these resources, highlighting how Iran's economic interests in the

Caspian Sea are affected by broader international energy policies and the strategic maneuvers of global powers [12, p.58].

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, p.59]. 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, p.69].

"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, p.48]. 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, p.52].

**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.
- Analysing 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.

**Study Tasks:** 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 managing 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.

**Practical Value:** The field of Asian studies enjoys much 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. It is the 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 realistic level.

The practical significance of this dissertation research is highlighted by its relevance to the international legal status of the Caspian Sea. The findings can be utilized in subsequent research on this subject and can also enhance the curriculum of courses like "Foreign Policy of Iran," "International Maritime Law," and "Peaceful Means of Settling International Disputes." Additionally, the study's insights are valuable for regional practitioners involved with the Caspian Sea's legal matters, particularly for those representing Kazakhstan in international organizations and specialized groups [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 one of the key players, Iran faces challenges due to its relatively weaker position compared to major powers like Russia, China, and the United States, which have conflicting strategic interests in the region. The study explores these dynamics in terms of geopolitical control and energy security. It examines the strategic roles of each player, Iran's interactions with them, and the primary strategies Iran is attempting to implement at the political level to achieve economic benefits and circumvent U.S. sanctions. Additionally, the research considers Iran's efforts to maintain friendly relations with the European Union about oil and gas pipelines. The research is based on trying to answer the following main problem: How Iran conducted the Caspian Sea negotiations with the countries bordering the Caspian Sea and what are the most important strategies it practiced in its relationship with influential countries in the region (Russia, China, and the United States of America)? [16, p.14]

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 players on its side in front of the United States of America through the following sub-questions:

- What is the 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:

- 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 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 Iran's foreign policy has been revised, stressing less the export of Islam but emphasizing cultural and civilizational proximity.
- The 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, p.25]
- 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:

- Despite the viewpoints expressed by certain officials and the official pronouncements issued by the governments of the Caspian Sea region, the international community recognizes the Caspian Sea as an international body of water with a distinct status, being classified as a unique type of lake. This approach would offer the coastal states the opportunity to address the dispute by utilizing established principles of international law, such as those pertaining to the law of the sea and international reservoirs[18].
- The treaties between the Russian Socialist Soviet Republic and the Soviet Socialist Republic of Iran, specifically the Treaty of 1921 and the Treaty on Navigation of March 1940, about areas beyond the fishing zones of the condominium with exclusive coastal states. These treaties are relevant in the context of the formation of states from the republics within the USSR. These treaties exerted their influence, and new independent agreements emerged within the confines of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR).
- Despite the existing propositions regarding the operational dynamics of the Convention concerning maritime governance, specifically Article 122, within the Caspian region, and the use of terms like "continental shelf" and "seabed zone" in scholarly discourse and official documentation, the Convention's applicability to the Caspian Sea remains contentious due to its dissimilarity with other aquatic bodies, as it does not encompass inland lakes and rivers [19].

- Suggestions for an additional addendum addressing the implementation of the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea in the Caspian Sea appear ineffective, given the absence of a recourse mechanism akin to arbitration [20, p.220].
- The demarcation of the sea and its juridical standing may be acknowledged provided unanimous consent from all nations is obtained for any modifications. The assertion of territorial sovereignty over segments of the Caspian Sea by individual republics, such as Azerbaijan incorporating the adjacent maritime zone into its constitutional framework on November 12, 1995, is perceived as establishing a legal framework, albeit encountering significant opposition from other stakeholders due to the absence of mutual consensus.
- The presence of energy resources lends economic significance to the Caspian Sea. This, in turn, lends the Caspian Sea political significance for the main countries, and the energy reserves of the Caspian Sea could lead to confrontation between the key countries [21, p.350].
- 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, p.47].
- 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, through its foreign policy, especially during the negotiations over the Caspian Sea, tried to continue improving its relationship with Russia and China as its supporter in the face of the American sanctions imposed on it [23, p.220].
- 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, p.122].
- 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 Framework:** To attain the above-stated research objective and substantiate the hypothesis, a nuanced combination of theoretical frameworks and scientific methodologies is applied. The initial phase involves employing the historical method, followed by the sequential integration of comparative analysis, event analysis, content analysis, and discourse analysis. Notably, one of the pivotal theoretical contributions to political science is the examination of international relations, which plays a crucial role in establishing behavioral standards for political entities. Given the expansive scope of the subject matter encompassing history, geography, politics, and economics, coupled with the intricate analysis required, ranging from a global scale to regional relations and an international format, this study necessitates the adoption of diverse research methodologies. These methodologies include, but are not confined to, the historical approach for tracing the evolution of events, the descriptive approach for comprehensive detailing, the case study approach for in-depth exploration, the

inductive approach for deriving generalizations from specific observations, and the comparative study for discerning patterns and variations. This comprehensive array of research methodologies is deemed imperative due to the interdisciplinary nature of political science and the intricate interplay of its analysis variables. By employing this multifaceted approach, the study aims to holistically investigate international relations, thereby enhancing our understanding of the research objectives and substantiating the formulated hypothesis. By reviewing a number of international relations theories, it is possible to monitor and project a number of these theories into the foreign policy followed by Iran in its dealings with the Caspian Sea, which are as follows. 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]. World System Theory: This theory focuses on the factors of hegemony and balance in the international system. Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea can be analysed based on its interaction with other major powers in the region and its attempt to maintain a balance of power. The theory is based on factors of dominance and balance in the global system, as Iran seeks to maintain the balance of power in the Caspian Sea through its interaction with other major powers in the region. Iran pays great attention to relations with neighbouring countries in the Caspian Sea, such as Russia, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan, and seeks To enhance economic and security cooperation with these countries and maintain good relations with them. On the other hand, Iran's foreign policy in the Caspian Sea is affected by the regional conflicts in the region, such as the conflict in Syria and Iraq. And supporting the parties it considers its allies in these conflicts, which affects the balance of power in the region. Iran seeks to increase its regional and international influence in the Caspian Sea, using a policy of soft influence and military force to achieve its goals. It considers itself an influential regional power and seeks to enhance its role in the region considers [27]. 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 neighbouring 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 great 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 neighbouring countries in the Caspian Sea, through economic, trade, and cultural cooperation. Iran seeks to strengthen bilateral relations with neighbouring 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 neighbouring 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 by its national interests. 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 analysed 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 analysed in this theory. 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. 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. International Relations: Iran's policy in the Caspian Sea affects the international relations of neighbouring 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. 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].

**Methodological Framework:** The exploration of international relations has played a pivotal role in harmonizing the actions and interactions of various political entities around the globe. This thesis draws upon a rich tapestry of methodological frameworks, each offering valuable insights that have profoundly shaped its development and analytical depth. Through these diverse perspectives, we gained a clearer understanding of the intricate dynamics at play in the realm of global politics:

**1. Classical Political Realism**, prominently articulated by Hans Morgenthau, serves as a foundational knowledge model in the field of international relations. It provides analytical tools to discern the behavioral trends of political entities, emphasizing that power is akin to energy in physics. In this context, the type of power relevant to realism transcends conventional military force, encompassing National Power in its entirety—both material and non-material components. According to this paradigm, international politics is fundamentally a struggle for power, with national interests guiding the minimum objectives of a country's foreign policy, notably the preservation of its survival. The concept of national interest intertwines with the

preservation of a robust national structure, forming a cohesive framework for understanding state behavior. A key tenet of Classical Political Realism is the Balance of Power, which is essential for achieving global peace and security while fostering relationships that respect this principle. Morgenthau identifies three primary human motives: the motive of life, the motive of reproduction, and the motive of domination. In a world characterized by limited resources, the struggle for power—termed the Will to Power—shapes the nature of politics and warfare.

Despite its enduring relevance during the Cold War, Classical Political Realism has faced challenges in adapting to the changes that have emerged since its conclusion. Nevertheless, its analytical tools continue to inform the strategies of major powers in their international agendas. To examine and test the applicability of Classical Political Realism against the trends and behaviors of Iran's geopolitical transformation, particularly in regional and bilateral negotiations concerning the Caspian Sea, we can explore the following dimensions:

- **Power Dynamics:** Analyse how Iran utilizes its national power—encompassing military, economic, and diplomatic resources—in negotiations over the Caspian Sea. This includes assessing Iran's strategic positioning and influence vis-à-vis neighbouring countries.

- **National Interests:** Investigate how Iran defines its national interests in the context of the Caspian Sea, focusing on energy resources, maritime security, and regional stability. Understanding these interests elucidated Iran's motivations in bilateral negotiations.

- **Struggle for Influence:** Examine the extent to which Iran engages in power struggles with other Caspian Sea states, such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. This analysis considered historical tensions and contemporary dynamics affecting regional relations.

- **Balance of Power:** Assess how Iran seeks to maintain a balance of power within the region, particularly in its interactions with major powers and regional actors. This includes evaluating Iran's efforts to foster alliances and partnerships while countering rival influences.

- **Human Motives and Political Behaviour:** Explore how Morgenthau's identified motives—life, reproduction, and domination—manifest in Iran's foreign policy actions. This analysis provided insights into the underlying motivations driving Iran's geopolitical strategies.

By applying the principles of Classical Political Realism, this study aims to provide a nuanced understanding of Iran's geopolitical transformation and its approach to regional and bilateral negotiations in the Caspian Sea. This framework has facilitated a deeper comprehension of the strategic behaviors and motivations that shape Iran's position in the complex geopolitical landscape.

**2. *Structural Realism*,** an evolution of Classical Political Realism championed by Kenneth Waltz, emerged during the presidency of Jimmy Carter, who emphasized a moral approach to international relations. Waltz expanded upon traditional realist concepts by integrating various elements that define state power, including geographical location, physical and natural resources, population, economic growth,

military capacity, and political stability. The primary aim of Structural Realism is to achieve maximum security, intrinsically linked to the element of fear. In contrast to Classical Political Realism's focus on multipolarity, Structural Realism recognizes a bipolar international system, where the structure of the international environment significantly influences state behavior. The concept of Statism within Structural Realism grants states the agency to formulate their goals and interests based on their structural attributes. To analyze the extent to which Iran employs Structural Realist tools in its geopolitical transformation and regional negotiations over the Caspian Sea, we focused on the following cognitive frameworks:

- **State Power Analysis:** Evaluate how Iran's geographical location and natural resources influence its foreign policy strategy in the Caspian Sea. This includes examining the strategic importance of oil and gas reserves in shaping Iran's negotiations with neighbouring states.
- **Security Maximization:** Investigate how Iran's foreign policy decisions are driven by the pursuit of security, particularly in response to perceived threats from regional rivals and global powers. Analysing the motivations behind Iran's actions revealed its focus on enhancing national security.
- **Fear and Conflict Dynamics:** Explore how fear of external threats influences Iran's geopolitical behaviour. This includes assessing historical conflicts and current tensions in the region that inform Iran's strategic choices and its approach to bilateral negotiations.
- **Systemic Structure:** Examine the implications of the bipolar versus multipolar structure of the international system on Iran's foreign policy. Considered how Iran navigates its relationships with both regional powers and global actors to maintain its interests in the Caspian Sea.
- **Goal Formation and Interests:** Analyse how Iran formulates its national goals and interests within the context of Structural Realism. This includes understanding how structural factors such as economic growth and political stability affect Iran's strategies in regional negotiations.

By applying the cognitive frameworks of Structural Realism, this analysis provided insights into how Iranian foreign policy is shaped by its structural attributes and the dynamics of the international system. This approach helped clarify the strategies Iran employs in its geopolitical transformation and its engagement in regional and bilateral negotiations concerning the Caspian Sea.

**3. *Neoliberalism Institutionalism***, in academic discourse, neoliberalism encompasses three strands of thought—economic, social, and political—drawing equally from realism and liberalism, particularly in the realms of security, conflict, and cooperation. Central to Neoliberal Institutionalism is the inquiry into how to promote cooperation within an international system characterized by chaos and intense competition among states. Both Neoliberal Institutionalism and new realism seek to explain behavioral regularities by examining the decentralized nature of the international system. Neoliberal Institutionalism posits that the establishment of international agreements hinges on the ability of states to communicate and cooperate,

which is facilitated by institutions rooted in human interactions. In this framework, the state plays a pivotal role in interpreting international politics.

Neoliberal Institutionalism is predicated on two fundamental conditions: 1. There must be mutual interests between states and other actors. 2. Changes in the degree of institutionalization significantly influence state behavior. Robert Keohane emphasizes the potential for organizing cooperation in the global political economy when common public interests align with state orientations. Neoliberal Institutionalism suggests that cooperation is feasible despite the chaotic nature of the global system by employing concepts such as the "prisoner's dilemma" and "market news models." By employing this cognitive model through examining economic and security institutions in the context of Iran's geopolitical transformation, particularly in regional and bilateral negotiations regarding the Caspian Sea, we explored the following dimensions:

- **Institutional Frameworks:** Assess how economic and security institutions, such as the Caspian Sea states' agreements and regional cooperation mechanisms, facilitate communication and collaboration among Iran and its neighbours. This includes examining treaties and agreements that promote resource sharing and security cooperation.

- **Mutual Interests:** Investigate the mutual interests that drive Iran's engagement with other Caspian Sea countries. This analysis focused on shared goals related to energy resources, environmental concerns, and regional stability, illustrating how these interests fostered cooperative behaviour.

- **Impact of Institutionalization:** Analyse the extent to which increased institutionalization affects Iran's foreign policy strategies. Consider how formal agreements and institutions influence state behaviour, promoting stability and cooperation in a competitive environment.

- **Behavioural Regularities:** Explore the behavioural patterns of Iran in negotiating with other states, applying concepts from Neoliberal Institutionalism, such as the "prisoner's dilemma." This examination revealed how Iran navigates cooperation and competition in its regional interactions.

- **Economic and Security Interdependence:** Examine how economic interdependence through resource management and security cooperation shapes Iran's geopolitical strategies. Assess the role of institutions in mitigating conflicts and enhancing collaborative efforts in the Caspian Sea.

By employing the frameworks of Neoliberal Institutionalism, this analysis aimed to provide insights into how Iran's geopolitical transformation is informed by economic and security institutions. This approach has clarified the extent to which Iranian strategies align with the rational trends recognized by Neoliberal Institutionalism, highlighting the potential for cooperation in a competitive international landscape.

**4. Hegemony Stability Theory**, originally, the term "hegemony" described the relationship between Athens and the Greek city-states, with historical examples including Roman domination. In the modern era, the concept is often associated with American hegemony, or Pax Americana, which has been prominent since the mid-twentieth century. Hegemonic power refers to the ability of a state to impose its rules and norms on the international system, making this theory a popular framework for

understanding the United States' status as a superpower. Contributors to Hegemony Stability Theory, such as Joseph Nye, Charles P. Kindleberger, and Susan Strange, propose that hegemony plays a dual role: Power Distribution: Hegemony facilitates the distribution of power within a specific system, which encompasses not only military might but also economic and political influence. And Control of Ideas: It involves the dominance of specific ideas or assumptions at the global level, shaping the behavior of states and international institutions. To examine and test how Hegemony Stability Theory applied in the geopolitical transformation of Iran, particularly in regional and bilateral negotiations over the Caspian Sea, we focused on the following dimensions:

- Iran's Position in the Regional Balance of Power: Analyse Iran's role in the distribution of power within the Caspian region. This includes assessing how Iran navigates its relationships with neighbouring states (such as Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan) to enhance its influence and counterbalance the hegemony of external powers.

- Influence of Global Hegemony: Investigate how American hegemony affects Iran's foreign policy and its approach to negotiations in the Caspian Sea. Consider how U.S. policies and alliances with regional actors shape Iran's strategies and responses.

- Control of Ideas and Norms: Explore the extent to which Iran seeks to promote its ideas and norms in regional discussions. This includes examining Iran's efforts to establish itself as a leader in regional security and cooperation, challenging existing hegemonic narratives.

- Responses to Hegemonic Challenges: Assess how Iran responds to perceived hegemonic threats from both regional and global powers. This analysis focused on Iran's diplomatic manoeuvres, military posturing, and coalition-building efforts aimed at preserving its interests in the Caspian Sea.

- Cooperation and Conflict Dynamics: Analyse the interplay of cooperation and conflict in Iran's negotiations with other Caspian Sea states. Evaluate how hegemonic stability—or the lack thereof—shapes these dynamics and affects Iran's ability to achieve its foreign policy objectives.

By applying Hegemony Stability Theory, this analysis provided insights into how Iran's geopolitical transformation is influenced by the dynamics of regional power and the broader international system. This approach clarified the strategies Iran employs in its bilateral negotiations over the Caspian Sea and its efforts to assert its influence in a complex geopolitical landscape.

**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 was also been at the International Scientific and Practical Conference "Relation between the Central Asian Countries 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 the online magazine «edu.e-history.kz» and SCOPUS (Titolo Rivista: RIVISTA DI STUDI SULLA SOSTENIBILITA).

**Research Sections:** The research consists of three sections with a 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 throughout been known for its status as the biggest repository of water on the planet, besides being an area of unique interest hydrologically. Geographically, the region lies between the two continents of Europe and Asia, area surrounded by five littoral countries that include Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the east, Iran to the south, and Azerbaijan to the west. The Caspian Sea plays an important role, a key reservoir of water, food, and power for the countries that have made their habitat around its shores. The area is also known for its unique and diverse fauna, with a large number of plants and animal's species, which cannot be found anywhere else. This paper will look into the geography of the Caspian Sea, its location, and its importance. The Caspian Sea lies between the latitudes of 36° to 47° North and longitudes of 46° to 54° East. The country is however located directly above the border with Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the southeast, Iran to the south, and Azerbaijan to the west. The sea borders a large area covering some 143,000 square miles (370,000 square kilometers), hence able to claim the title of being the largest enclosed water body in the world. It also boasts of the greatest in terms of volume, with an approximate volume estimated at 78,200 cubic kilometers.



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 20<sup>th</sup> 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](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, p.3].

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, p.13].

The Caspian Sea is the largest enclosed body of water on Earth, located in Central Asia between Europe and Asia. Its unique geostrategic location and geological structure have made it an important region for global energy and trade.

The Caspian Sea is geographically delimited by five nations, namely Russia in the northern direction, Kazakhstan in the northeastern direction, Turkmenistan in the

eastern direction, Iran in the southern direction, and Azerbaijan in the western direction. The geographical positioning of this region at the intersection of Europe and Asia has rendered it a pivotal conduit for commerce throughout the course of several centuries, facilitating the linkage between the Silk Road and the Black Sea as well as the Mediterranean Sea.

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, p.4].

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 number of natural resources—oil and gas. This country has oil gas reserves that, in different sources, according to varied estimates, it would be among the largest in the world; under some estimates— more than 50 billion barrels of oil reserves. Political and economic significance of the Caspian Sea. Also here are found the major representatives of the global energy market—Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan—that has significant oil and gas reserves. The Caspian Sea is a matter of geopolitics because of its geological building peculiarities and geostrategic position [33, p.18].

The five countries with a border around the Caspian Sea for several decades have been in discussion related to the legal status of the Caspian Sea and its resources. The most significant issue is the definition of the Caspian Sea as a sea or a lake, while all the legal systems of resource allocation and use in it depend on this definition. In 2018—after years of debate, scheming, secrecy, and stonewalling—the five governments with borders on the Caspian Sea had reached a groundbreaking agreement on the status of the sea, which includes a full legal regime. The agreement made the Caspian Sea a "Special Legal Status" water body instead of categorizing it either as a sea or a lake. 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, p.19].

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, p.13], 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, p.14].

The Caspian Sea is surrounded by five nations, namely Russia to the north, Kazakhstan to the northeast, Turkmenistan to the southeast, Iran to the south, and

Azerbaijan to the west. The marine environment is encompassed by a heterogeneous array of terrestrial landforms, comprising arid deserts, expansive steppes, lush forests, and towering mountains. The territorial limits of the sea have been a subject of contention among the five nations that encompass it, as each nation asserts its own claims and pursues its respective interests in the water's resources and demarcations.

The determination of the legal status of the Caspian Sea has been a subject of considerable dispute following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. The five nations have engaged in protracted negotiations spanning more than twenty years to establish a legally binding framework governing the utilization and exploitation of the sea. However, a conclusive consensus has yet to be achieved. The primary points of disagreement revolve around the delimitation of maritime boundaries, the allocation of resources within the Caspian Sea, and the entitlements of non-littoral states to utilize the sea.

The climatic conditions within the Caspian Sea basin exhibit significant variability, which can be attributed to its geographical positioning between two prominent climate zones, namely the temperate zone in the northern region and the subtropical zone in the southern region. The climate of the sea is impacted by various variables, such as its proximity to the arid regions of Central Asia, the existence of elevated mountain ranges, and the direction and intensity of prevailing winds.

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, p.7].

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, p.148].

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, p.7].

The second stream, as depicted in Encyclopedia 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 16<sup>th</sup> 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 It 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, p.150].

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. 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, p.25].

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, p.45]

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, p.35].

This region contains many natural resources and is rich in mineral wealth [43, p.18] 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, p.36]

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, p.25].

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 neighbor, 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,

p.47] 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, p.166]

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, p.401]

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

#### *Middle Caspian Basin*

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, p.13].



Figure 3 – South Caspian Basin (Source: [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian\\_Sea](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 km<sup>2</sup>; 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, p.7]; 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, p.7].

#### *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 neighboring 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, p.3].

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 also played a vital role in the development of the surrounding countries. The sea is located in a region that is rich in natural resources, including oil and gas. The discovery of significant oil reserves in the region has transformed the economies of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, providing these countries with a valuable source of income and investment. The exploitation of these resources has led to significant infrastructure development, such as pipelines and refineries, to transport and process the oil and gas [38, p.25].

However, the geostrategic location and geological structure of the Caspian Sea have also created tensions and disputes between the surrounding countries. The issue of maritime borders and the ownership of the sea's resources has been a contentious issue for many years. Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Russia have all

made competing claims to the sea's resources and borders, leading to disagreements and conflicts. The complex nature of the Caspian Sea's legal status has made it difficult to resolve these disputes, with no agreement yet reached on the division of the sea's resources.

The Caspian Sea's location has also made it vulnerable to environmental challenges. Pollution from oil and gas production, shipping, and other human activities has had a significant impact on the sea's ecology, threatening the region's biodiversity and fish populations. Climate change is also expected to have a significant impact on the Caspian Sea, with rising sea levels and changing weather patterns potentially affecting the region's agriculture, infrastructure, and biodiversity.

The geostrategic importance of the Caspian Sea can be summarized through several key factors that clearly demonstrate why it has become a focus of international competition in the New Great Game and why it represents a unique and important strategic asset and attraction. As a bridge between continents, the Caspian Sea lies at the intersection of Europe and Asia and has historically been a vital conduit for trade and cultural exchange along the Silk Road and other subsequent trade routes. Its location provides the shortest land route connecting Central Asia to Europe and the Black Sea, making it a vital corridor for the transport of goods and commodities, and more recently, energy resources. As a buffer zone and sphere of influence, the Caspian Sea has long served as a buffer zone between empires and major powers, including the Russian, Persian, and Ottoman empires. In the modern era, it remains an area where the interests of the United States, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and, increasingly, China and other Western powers intersect and sometimes even compete. The coastal states themselves also wield significant regional influence.

As a gateway to landlocked Central Asia, the Caspian Sea provides external powers with direct access to the five resource-rich and strategically important Central Asian states, located at the heart of the world. This access is crucial for trade, political influence, and the development of transportation infrastructure, particularly for hydrocarbon exports. It is also a source of geopolitical rivalry, as the presence of large hydrocarbon reserves has intensified geopolitical competition in the region. Maritime border demarcation, pipeline construction, and control of energy transport routes have become key areas of conflict and cooperation between coastal states and external actor [39].

Historical maps and analyses of trade routes (such as those documented by historians such as Peter Frankopan in his book *The Silk Roads: A New History of the World*) highlight the historical geostrategic importance of the Caspian Sea region. Contemporary geopolitical analyses by organizations such as the International Crisis Group and the Council on Foreign Relations (such as reports on *Caspian Energy Politics and Regional Security*) also underscore the region's continued strategic importance in the 21st century.

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

The intertwined fate of geography and geology is embodied in forming the Caspian Sea's energy potential and global economic importance. The Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water, occupies a vital geostrategic position at the junction of Europe and Asia. This unique location, coupled with its complex geological structure, has endowed it with vast hydrocarbon resources, making it a key player in the global energy landscape. The complex relationship between the Caspian Sea's geostrategic importance and its underlying geology must be examined to clarify how these factors have shaped its energy potential and, consequently, its profound importance to the global economy. By examining preliminary geological surveys, geopolitical analyses, and energy market reports, we aim to provide a comprehensive understanding of this interconnected relationship.

Bounded by Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, the Caspian Sea represents a unique geographical and geological entity. Its landlocked nature and location at the junction of major continental landmasses have historically given it significant geostrategic importance, serving as a vital transit route and an area of competing geopolitical interests. Beneath its waters and surrounding coastal areas lies a complex geological history, characterized by vast sedimentary basins that have proven exceptionally rich in oil and natural gas. These vast energy resources have elevated the Caspian Sea region from a regional entity to a pivotal player in the global energy market, influencing international relations, economic development, and energy security strategies. By analyzing the complex interplay between the Caspian Sea's strategic location and its geological foundations, it ultimately becomes clear how this synergy has contributed to defining its energy potential and its growing importance in the global economic order.

The Caspian Basin is a complex geological structure formed through tectonic activity over millions of years. Its hydrocarbon wealth is primarily due to its extensive geological sedimentary basins. The region is characterized by several large sedimentary basins, including the North Caspian, South Caspian, and Absheron basins. These basins accumulated thick sequences of organic-rich sediments deposited in ancient marine and lagoonal environments. Over geological time, these sediments were buried under tremendous pressure and temperature, resulting in the maturation of the organic matter into oil and natural gas. The presence of high-quality source rocks, particularly from the Mesozoic and Cenozoic periods, is critical for the formation of hydrocarbons. These source rocks, rich in organic carbon, underwent thermal maturation, resulting in the expulsion of hydrocarbons that then migrated into the reservoir rocks [41, p.32].

The presence of high-quality source rocks, particularly from the Mesozoic and Cenozoic periods, is also critical for the formation of hydrocarbons. These source rocks, rich in organic carbon, underwent thermal maturation, expelling hydrocarbons that then migrated into reservoir rocks. Porous and permeable reservoir rocks, such as sandstones and carbonates, are also found within sedimentary basins, providing storage capacity for migrating hydrocarbons. These reservoirs are often covered by

impermeable layers (sealing rocks) that prevent upward seepage of oil and gas, creating hydrocarbon traps. Various geological structures, including anticlines, fault blocks, and stratigraphic traps, have been formed by tectonic movements and sedimentation patterns, creating diverse trapping mechanisms and favorable conditions for hydrocarbon accumulation. The Absheron Sill, a structural high that connects Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, is a particularly hydrocarbon-rich area due to its complex faults and folds. The Caspian Sea region is also characterized by significant mud volcanism, especially in Azerbaijan. While mud volcanoes sometimes pose drilling hazards, they also indicate underlying hydrocarbon systems and can provide insights into the composition and pressure of fluids deep beneath the surface.

Extensive geological surveys and research papers published in journals such as the AAPG Bulletin, Journal of Petroleum Geology, and Marine and Petroleum Geology (e.g., Allen et al., 2003, on the regional geology and hydrocarbon potential of the South Caspian Basin; Jones and Simmons, 1996, on petroleum systems in the Middle East and North Africa, including the Caspian Sea; and Guliyev and Fizulayev, 1997, on mud volcanoes in Azerbaijan) provide detailed insights into the geological structure and hydrocarbon systems of the Caspian region. Seismic surveys and well data, often proprietary but summarized in the academic literature, provide essential information about the subsurface.

The interaction between the Caspian Sea's strategic location and its rich geological wealth has resulted in significant energy potential. The Caspian region boasts vast proven and probable oil and natural gas reserves. Estimates vary, but major international energy agencies, such as the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) and the BP Statistical Review of World Energy, consistently rank the region as a major global energy hub. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan hold the largest reserves among the countries bordering the sea. The region currently produces millions of barrels of oil per day and significant quantities of natural gas, contributing significantly to global energy supplies. Major oil and gas fields, such as Azerbaijan-Chirag-Guneshli in Azerbaijan and Tengiz and Kashagan in Kazakhstan, are major contributors to these production levels.

The landlocked nature of the Caspian Sea requires the development of extensive, and often politically complex, transportation infrastructure to deliver energy resources to global markets. This includes pipelines, such as major oil pipelines, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), and gas pipelines, such as the South Caucasus Pipeline (SCP) and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), cross the region, connecting Caspian producers to European and Turkish markets. Oil is also transported via tankers across the Caspian Sea to ports for further transport via river networks or pipelines [39]. Although less important for the large-scale transportation of crude oil, railway and road networks play a role in the transportation of refined products and supporting infrastructure.

The Caspian Sea's energy potential has enhanced its importance in the global economy through several routes. The significant oil and gas production from the Caspian Sea region contributes to meeting global energy demand, particularly in Europe and Asia. Its role as a non-OPEC supplier also adds diversity to the global

energy market. Fluctuations in Caspian oil and gas production and transportation impact global energy prices. The development and export of hydrocarbon resources has been a major driver of economic growth in the Caspian littoral states, generating significant revenues and attracting foreign investment. This has led to the development of related industries and infrastructure. Control over Caspian energy resources and transportation routes provides littoral states, as well as external actors with vested interests, with significant geopolitical influence. This influence can impact international relations, energy security policies, and regional alliances. The Caspian region offers alternative energy supply routes that can reduce consumer countries' dependence on other, less stable regions. The development of pipelines such as BTC and TANAP aims to diversify European energy sources. The exploration, production, and transportation of hydrocarbons in the Caspian Sea have stimulated significant investments and technological developments in the energy sector, benefiting both the region and global industry [39].

World Bank and IMF reports on the economic development of the Caspian littoral states highlight the impact of hydrocarbon revenues. Analyses from think tanks such as the Brookings Institution and the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace examine the geopolitical implications of Caspian energy. Market reports from energy consulting firms such as Wood Mackenzie and IHS Markit provide insights into the economic significance of Caspian oil and gas in the global context [52, p.3]

Despite its significant energy potential, the Caspian Sea region faces numerous challenges, such as geopolitical instability and border disputes. Unresolved border disputes and geopolitical tensions between the Caspian littoral states can hamper energy development and transportation projects. Furthermore, offshore oil and gas exploration and production pose environmental risks to the Caspian Sea's unique ecosystem, including pollution and damage to biodiversity. The long-term viability of Caspian energy projects is also subject to fluctuations in global energy demand and price volatility. The global shift toward renewable energy sources may ultimately impact the long-term significance of the Caspian Sea's hydrocarbon resources.

Looking ahead, the Caspian Sea region is likely to remain a significant, albeit evolving, player in the global energy landscape. Continued investment in infrastructure, the development of new fields, and the resolution of geopolitical challenges will be crucial factors in shaping its future energy capabilities. The region's strategic location will continue to make it a focus of international attention, particularly in the context of evolving global energy dynamics and the search for diversified energy sources.

The Caspian Sea represents a prime example of how geological resources and geostrategic location converge to shape global economic importance. Its vast hydrocarbon reserves, a direct result of its complex geological history, have been exploited and transported to global markets thanks to its pivotal location at the crossroads of continents. This has not only fueled economic growth in its littoral states but has also made it a key component of the global energy system, impacting energy security, geopolitical dynamics, and international economic relations. Understanding the close relationship between the Caspian Sea's geological structure and its

geostrategic importance is essential to understanding its current role and future trajectory in the ever-evolving global economy. Continued research, international cooperation, and a focus on sustainable development will be critical to harnessing the region's energy potential while mitigating the associated challenges.

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, p.64]. 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, p.26].

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 travelers, where he said : “This material or this oil is not edible, but good as fuel” [55, p.28].

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 traveler 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 “Yaqt 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 stockiest 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 travelers 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, p.30].

When the Second World War began, the Germans realized that provide oil is a prerequisite to defeat Russia, and if they cannot secure 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, p.59] 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, p.121].

Talking about estimates of oil reserves in the Caspian Sea for the post-Cold War period in comparison with other oil-producing countries remains imprecise for academic circles specialized in the affairs of Central Asia and the Caspian Sea, and the likely thing is that the Caspian Sea has enormous energy capabilities that exceed those in the North Sea and East Asia regions. In the words of (D. Yergin) and (Thone Gustafso) from Cambridge Energy Research Associates, in the New York Times that the Caspian Sea may contain oil and gas reserves that are surpassed only by those of the Middle East, and the Caspian Sea has become the "new oil El Dorado" according to the statement of the French Foreign Minister Hervé de Charette In 1996 as the most promising site for future energy development in the world, and studies began indicating that the huge needs for the Caspian Sea may be a competitor or an alternative to the Arab Gulf, according to the US State Department report in which it announced that the Caspian Basin region contains oil wealth of up to 200 billion barrels, equivalent to 16% of the world's reserves of petroleum, perhaps the most important study questioned the accuracy of the US State's estimates in the 1998 was study issued by the International Institute for Strategic Studies that the Caspian Sea's reserves range between 25 and 35 billion barrels, [60, p.2] US Energy information administration give accurate estimates of proven reserves range between 18-31 billion barrels, and potential reserves range between 250-270 billion barrels. These reserves represent a third of the Middle East's reserves and exceed the double of North Sea oil reserves of 17 billion barrels, as well as the proven reserves of the United States of America which amounts to 22 billion barrels. With regard to natural gas, the reserve is about 170 trillion cubic feet, and the potential reserve is about 243 -248 trillion cubic feet, despite the difference in positions about the estimated reserves of oil in the Caspian Sea, but the proven natural gas reserves in Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan amount to more than 236 trillion cubic feet, or more than 60 million barrels. The expectations of oil and

gas production in each of the axial triad (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan), where we note that Kazakhstan has doubled its production to 4.1 million barrels since the year 2000, but it produced 85.7 Mt of oil and condensate in 2020, crude oil production is expected to remain stable in 2021, it is expected that there will be an increase over the next five years to reach 185 Mt. According to the trend, Kazakhstan is considered the leading energy power in Central Asia compared to its neighbors Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan [61, p.40].

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 part of the Khazar region, located on the eastern slopes of the Caucasus Mountains and the western shore of the Caspian Sea. It borders the Russian Federation to the north, Georgia to the northwest, Armenia to the west, and Iran to the south. Azerbaijan, one of the smallest independent Islamic republics, spans an area of approximately 86,600 square kilometers [61, p.41]. It possesses substantial energy resources, including around 1.2 billion barrels of crude oil and 4.4 trillion cubic feet of liquefied gas, as reported in 2002. By 2005, gas reserves had grown to about 4.8 trillion cubic meters, and by 2007, oil reserves were estimated at 28.3 billion barrels with gas at 23.93 million cubic meters. These figures highlight Azerbaijan's significant contribution to the global economy through its energy production, managed under various contracts for exploration, production, extraction, and supply.

#### *Kazakhstan*

Situated at the heart of the Asian continent, Kazakhstan lies north and east of the Caspian Sea, bordered by the Russian Federation to the north and China to the east, with Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan to the south. It boasts extensive coastlines along the Caspian Sea (1,894 km) and the Aral Sea (1,070 km), making it one of the largest republics with an area of 2,717,300 square kilometers. Kazakhstan's energy reserves are substantial, with crude oil reserves estimated at 5.4 billion barrels and gas reserves at about 65 trillion cubic meters as of 2002. By 2005, oil reserves had surged to 396 billion barrels and gas to 106 trillion cubic feet. In 2010, oil production was approximately 1.6 billion barrels, and gas reserves were at 354 billion cubic meters. By 2022, proven hydrocarbon reserves in Kazakhstan, both onshore and offshore, were around 4.8 billion tons, or over 35 billion barrels, with additional potential reserves in the Caspian Sea exceeding 17 billion tons. The country's proven gas reserves stood at 3 trillion cubic meters, with expected reserves at 5 trillion cubic meters. This robust energy sector has attracted significant foreign investment, boosting Kazakhstan's economic growth [61, p.19].

#### *Turkmenistan*

The Republic of Turkmenistan is located in Central Asia, bordered by 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. Covering an area of 488,100 square kilometers, Turkmenistan's energy reserves are noteworthy. Crude oil reserves were estimated at 600 million barrels, and natural gas reserves at about 120

trillion cubic feet in 2002. By 2005, oil reserves had grown to 0.5 trillion barrels, and natural gas reserves were at 102 trillion cubic feet. In 2010, daily oil production was estimated at 216 thousand barrels, with gas production at 4.42 billion cubic meters. Turkmenistan plays a crucial role in global gas production, holding the fourth-largest natural gas reserves in the world [62, p.45].

#### *Iran*

Iran, bordered by the Caspian Sea to the south, shares its northern and eastern borders with Russia and Kazakhstan, respectively, while Turkmenistan lies to the east and Azerbaijan to the west. The Caspian Sea is an economic treasure for Iran, with crude oil reserves estimated at 89.7 billion barrels, or 8.7% of global reserves, and gas reserves at about 812.3 trillion cubic feet as of 2002. Potential reserves could reach 15.1 billion barrels of oil and 11 trillion cubic meters of gas. Despite political and security challenges, Iran remains a key player in the global energy market, ranking second in oil reserves. In 2005, Iran's share of global oil production was about 5.1%, producing approximately 4.05 million barrels per day. By December 2017, Iran's proven natural gas reserves were estimated at 1,191 trillion cubic feet, making it the second-largest globally. Although economic sanctions have hindered the full utilization of its Caspian Sea resources, Iran's oil and gas reserves remain substantial [63, p.98].

#### *The Russian Federation*

Russia's crude oil reserves were estimated at 48.6 billion barrels, and gas reserves at about 1.7 trillion cubic feet in 2002. By 2010, Russia ranked first in proven natural gas reserves, estimated at 44.8 trillion cubic feet. While there is no confirmed data on its gas and oil reserves in the Caspian Sea, production and export figures for natural gas were 219 billion cubic feet in 1990 and 30 billion cubic feet in 2000. Security conditions, competition with Iran over the Caspian Sea, and regional conflicts, such as the war with Georgia, complicate the situation. Nonetheless, Russia remains a crucial energy hub, especially in European circles [64, p.38].

In conclusion, the energy capabilities of the Caspian Sea region are marked by instability, and reported figures from specialized energy agencies remain speculative. Proven estimates suggest that the region holds 4-10% of global oil reserves and 6.7-9.2 trillion cubic meters of liquefied natural gas, according to the International Energy Agency's 2012 report. Recoverable oil reserves are estimated at 70 billion barrels, with Kazakhstan holding over half of the oil wealth, while Iran and Russia's reserves remain unclear, posing challenges for foreign investors and complicating refining and exploration efforts [65, p.21].

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, p.120].

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, p.69].

### **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, p.41].

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, p.41].

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, p.45].

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, p.89].

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, p.71].

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, p.112]

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.113] 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, p.36]

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, p.25]

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, p.58] 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, p.63]. 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, p.12].

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 between 2006-2009 [81, p.120] 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 dollars, 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, p.79].

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, p.76].

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, p.78]. 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 neighboring countries, which creates the problem of sharing profits and creating conflict zones in the region [83, p.80].

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, p.58] , 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 mid-point 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, p.59]. 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 Organization 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 Organization 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 Organization 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, p.56].

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, p.56].

The implications for OPEC of the discovery of oil deposits in the area around the Caspian Sea are significant. In order to maximize profits for its members, the Organization 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 [88, p.40]. 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 maximize profits from oil production [89, p.80].

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 maximize profits for its members, the Organization 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.

### *Section Abstract*

The Caspian Sea is one of the most important water bodies in the world, embodying the intersection of geopolitics and natural resources. The geostrategic location of the Caspian Sea represents a meeting point between the continents of Europe and Asia, making it a vital axis of security and energy in the region. This sea has a rich geological structure that embraces vast resources of oil and gas, placing it at the heart of international competition.

The Caspian Sea is distinguished by its unique location that connects several major countries, such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iran. This geographical diversity is not just an advantage, but an important factor in the political and economic relations between these countries. These countries benefit from the location of the sea to enhance their regional and international influence, making the sea an arena for competition between major powers.

The Caspian Sea region has been a great blessing for the surrounding countries and the world because the Caspian Sea bed contains vast reserves of oil and gas, which is estimated to be one of the largest energy reserves in the world. These resources are expected to play a pivotal role in meeting the growing global energy needs. The oil fields of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are among the most prominent sites that attract global investment, contributing to the development of the local economy and enhancing the status of the sea as an energy hub. Proven oil reserves in the sea are estimated at between 15 and 40 billion barrels, while natural gas reserves are estimated at between 6.7 and 9.2 trillion cubic meters. These riches make the sea an attractive center for investment and development. The Caspian Sea's energy potential is enormous, as it contains large oil fields such as the Tengiz field in Kazakhstan. These reserves contribute significantly to local economies, with oil and gas accounting for more than 10% of the region's GDP. Energy exports from the Caspian Sea are a major source of revenue for the countries bordering it, enhancing their economic stability. This shift in energy sources enables these countries to reduce their dependence on traditional Russian energy, contributing to changing the global energy map. These countries are working to develop modern infrastructure for transporting oil and gas, such as pipelines, to facilitate exports to European and Asian markets. I believe that the future of energy will be determined for a long time by developments in the Caspian Sea.

With the increasing production of oil in the Caspian Sea, OPEC faces new challenges. Increased production from this region could affect global oil prices, putting pressure on OPEC member states to maintain market balance. In addition, these

dynamics could reshape power relations within OPEC, as some countries may seek to boost their production to counter the competitiveness of the Caspian Sea.

Ultimately, the Caspian Sea is at the heart of the new geopolitics, combining a strategic location with a rich geological structure. The sea's energy capabilities and its importance to the global economy enhance its strategic position. As the implications of oil development in the region evolve, it is important for the countries involved to remain aware of changes in the global energy market and work to enhance regional and international cooperation to ensure the sustainability of these resources.

## **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 following section will delve into the legal status of the Caspian Sea and its implications for the countries involved. It will trace the evolution of negotiations among the nations with interests in the Caspian, and highlight the legal framework of the sea prior to the collapse of the Soviet Union. Before the resolution of the sea's legal status, energy experts believed the full exploitation of its oil reserves was not feasible.

Historically, the legal framework governing the Caspian Sea was based on two key agreements: the 1921 Treaty between the Socialist Federal Republic of Russia and Iran, and the 1940 Trade and Navigation Treaty between the Soviet Union and Iran. It's important to note that the legal status of the Caspian Sea first emerged as a major issue in early 1992, a point that requires particular attention.

In 1992, to resolve the matter of the Caspian's legal status and address the exploitation of its resources, Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan met in Tehran. They agreed to issue a joint statement and move towards establishing a regional organization for cooperation.

This section will be divided into three main themes: (1) the legal framework governing the Caspian before and after the Soviet Union's dissolution, (2) the negotiations among the five states concerning the legal distribution of Caspian Sea resources, and (3) the evolution of the positions held by these states on the Caspian's legal status.

The Caspian Sea, the world's largest inland body of water, is bordered by five countries: Russia, Iran, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan. For centuries, these nations have contested its legal status, each asserting territorial claims based on a variety of interests. This paper examines the Caspian's legal framework, its historical context, legal systems, and the challenges it faces.

The region surrounding the Caspian Sea has been home to human civilizations for millennia, evidenced by ancient settlements and trade routes. Over the years, various empires have sought control over the region. During the Soviet era, Iran and Russia shared the Caspian, but following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan also became stakeholders. Since then, the sea's legal classification has remained unresolved.

Post-Soviet states struggled to establish a unified legal framework, leading to numerous disputes over maritime boundaries, fishing rights, and resource extraction, which occasionally resulted in armed conflict. Despite these challenges, significant progress has been made in recent years toward creating a legal structure.

In August 2018, the five Caspian Sea littoral states signed the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which established a unique legal regime, distinct from those governing lakes or oceans. This Convention addressed the extraction of resources, maritime boundary delineation, navigation, fishing, and environmental protection. According to the Convention, the Caspian Sea is divided into two areas:

territorial waters and the common water zone. The common waters extend beyond territorial seas and provide equal rights for all littoral states to exploit resources and protect the environment.

Despite the signing of the Convention, tensions remain, particularly over maritime boundaries between Azerbaijan and Iran, and Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. These unresolved disputes have, at times, escalated into armed conflict. Furthermore, environmental concerns, such as pollution and habitat destruction due to resource extraction, pose significant challenges. To ensure sustainable development, the littoral states must collaborate on clear environmental standards and regulations.

The legal status of the Caspian Sea continues to evolve, shaped by historical, political, and economic factors. While the signing of the 2018 Convention marked a significant step toward legal clarity, ongoing disputes over resource exploitation and boundary demarcation highlight the need for continuous dialogue and cooperation. For the Caspian Sea to achieve its full economic potential, the littoral states must commit to transparency, environmental protection, and cooperative governance.

The origins of the Caspian Sea's legal status can be traced back to historical conflicts between Iran and Russia, particularly after their violent confrontations outside the Caucasus. The dispute between Britain and Russia over the territorial division of the Caspian laid the foundation for the development of its legal framework. Early agreements, such as the Saint Petersburg and Rasht treaties, shaped the legal position of the Caspian, with Russia securing territorial advantages over parts of the Caspian coast once held by Iran. Notably, the right to maintain warships in the Caspian Sea was granted only to Russia. The Treaty of Golestan (1813), which concluded the first Russo-Iranian war, was the first to clearly define the Caspian's legal status, granting Russia full rights to operate in the region while recognizing Iran's rights to navigation for commercial purposes. This set the stage for the legal relationship between the Caspian's bordering states.

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, p.48]. 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 important to note that none of the agreements or treaties that were signed between the two countries made any reference to the positions or legal status of the Caspian Sea, either from a distance or from a close proximity. Furthermore, despite the fact that this treaty has been in effect for years, neither party has been able to reach an agreement with the other that specifically addresses the legal status of the Caspian Sea.

"The drawing of state borders – except in cases where there is a prior agreement or international treaty stipulating this – in lakes and other marine basins is done through a longitude that combines all of the maximum points of the borders of the State of the Soviet Union and the boundaries of the lake or Basin," the Soviet law on state borders stated back in 1982. It can be deduced from this that the Caspian Sea was partitioned by the Soviet Union on the grounds that it is a lake [93, p.18].

However, none of the aforementioned accords or treaties took into consideration the political shifts or anything else that came about as a direct or indirect consequence of the fall of the Soviet Union and its subsequent fragmentation.

The Caspian Sea, which had been under Soviet dominance in the past, was significantly impacted by the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991. This event had a significant impact on the sea's legal status. In the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the littoral governments of the Caspian Sea—including Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan—were given the responsibility of developing an autonomous legal framework for the body of water. In the following paragraphs, we will investigate the present legislative framework that governs the Caspian Sea, as well as the difficulties that have arisen in its execution since the fall of the Soviet Union.

Disagreement among the littoral governments as to whether the Caspian Sea should be categorized as a sea or a lake has contributed to the fact that the legal status of the Caspian Sea has continued to be a difficult issue for many years. Throughout history, the Soviet Union referred to the Caspian Sea as a lake. This designation meant that the states that bordered the sea did not have exclusive economic zones or continental shelves. However, in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the littoral governments have begun to establish their respective territorial claims, which has resulted in heightened tensions and conflicts.

The signing of the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea in November 2003 was a significant step toward the construction of a legal foundation for the Caspian Sea. This convention was one of the first international agreements of its kind. This convention provided the framework for future regional collaboration in environmental protection, which includes the prevention of pollution as well as the preservation of marine biodiversity. In addition to this, it formed in Tehran a permanent Secretariat that was given the responsibility of coordinating environmental efforts throughout the area.

In 2007, the littoral states affixed their signatures to the Declaration on the Basic Principles of the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which recognized the sea as a distinct legal entity, lying outside the categories of either a lake or a sea. This declaration furnished a framework for subsequent negotiations concerning the legal status of the Caspian Sea, along with delineating principles for the utilization and safeguarding of its resources. These principles encompassed reverence for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of each littoral state, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and the sustainable conservation of the Caspian Sea's resources [76, p.28].

Despite the signing of the Framework Convention and the Declaration on the Basic Principles, the activation of the legal framework for the Caspian Sea has been slow and challenging. One of the main obstacles has been the delimitation of maritime boundaries between the littoral states. This has been particularly contentious between Azerbaijan and Iran, as well as between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan.

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 [38, p.78].

In spite of these formidable challenges, notable strides have been taken in recent times towards formulating a comprehensive legal structure for the Caspian Sea region. In 2003, the five nations bordering the Caspian Sea endorsed the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea, an accord that laid the groundwork for cooperative initiatives aimed at addressing environmental concerns within the region. Subsequently, in 2018, the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea was ratified, culminating in the establishment of a robust legal framework for the Caspian Sea. This convention not only provided a legal framework

but also resolved longstanding disputes regarding ownership and access to the region's abundant resources [73, p.18].

The activation of this pre-existing legal framework has emerged as a pivotal factor in fostering stability and collaboration within the Caspian Sea region. Crafting this legal framework has bestowed a definitive set of guidelines and regulations governing the exploitation and utilization of the region's resources. This regulatory clarity has contributed to a reduction in tensions among the Caspian Sea nations. Furthermore, the legal framework has served as a platform for cooperative efforts encompassing environmental preservation and the enhancement of transportation infrastructure.

However, even in light of these encouraging advancements, obstacles persist in fully executing the established legal framework. The practical application of this legal structure remains largely untested, potentially leading to the emergence of disputes pertaining to resource ownership and access. Moreover, the efficacy of the legal framework might be influenced by geopolitical frictions among the Caspian Sea nations and broader global trends like climate change and the transition towards renewable energy sources.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991 had a significant impact on the Caspian Sea. Prior to the dissolution, the Caspian Sea was managed as a single entity, with strict environmental regulations in place. The Soviet Union established the Caspian Fishery Protection Agency, which was responsible for the protection of the Caspian Sea's unique biodiversity. However, after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea was divided among five independent countries, each with their own management and regulatory systems. This division created significant challenges for the management and governance of the Caspian Sea [35, p.16].

One of the major challenges facing the Caspian Sea after the Soviet Union dissolution is the complexity of legal and institutional frameworks governing the region. The Caspian Sea is a geopolitical region, with different countries having competing interests. The countries bordering the Caspian Sea have different legal and institutional frameworks for environmental management and governance, and these frameworks are often overlapping and contradictory. This complexity makes it challenging to develop a unified approach to environmental management and governance in the Caspian Sea.

The Caspian Sea Convention, signed in 2003, was a significant step towards developing a unified approach to environmental management and governance in the Caspian Sea region. The Convention establishes a legal framework for the conservation and sustainable use of the Caspian Sea's natural resources. However, the Convention has not been ratified by all the countries bordering the Caspian Sea, limiting its effectiveness [35, p.18].

In addition to the legal and institutional challenges, the Caspian Sea also faces significant environmental challenges. Pollution, overfishing, and oil spills are among the most significant environmental challenges facing the Caspian Sea. Pollution in the Caspian Sea is mainly due to agricultural runoff, industrial discharges, and domestic waste. Overfishing is a significant threat to the Caspian Sea's unique

biodiversity, with many fish species facing extinction. Oil spills are another significant environmental challenge facing the Caspian Sea, with several incidents occurring in recent years.

The environmental challenges facing the Caspian Sea are further compounded by the lack of resources and technical capacity of the countries bordering the sea. Many of the countries bordering the Caspian Sea have limited resources and technical capacity to address the environmental challenges facing the region. This lack of resources and technical capacity makes it challenging to implement and enforce environmental regulations, monitor environmental impacts, and respond effectively to environmental emergencies.

Overall, the problem of evaluating the Caspian Sea after the Soviet Union dissolution is complex and multi-faceted. The complexity of the legal and institutional frameworks, competing interests of the countries bordering the Caspian Sea, and environmental challenges facing the region create significant challenges for environmental management and governance. 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.

To address the environmental challenges facing the Caspian Sea, a number of initiatives have been undertaken by the countries bordering the sea and the international community. One such initiative is the Caspian Environmental Programme, which was launched in 2001. The programme aims to promote environmental conservation and sustainable development in the Caspian Sea region through the development and implementation of environmental projects. The programme has implemented a number of projects, including the establishment of protected areas, the development of environmental monitoring systems, and the promotion of sustainable fishing practices [5, p.12].

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 neighboring 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, p.48].

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 framework of international law, it was not possible to solve the Caspian Sea problem due to its unclear nature, and all talks and negotiations with the Soviet party were about two options: a closed sea or a limited lake, and therefore the main problem was how to divide the Caspian Sea as well as the exploitation of its wealth. This problem did not matter only the five countries, but exceed to countries interested in investing in the region, the problem of marine navigation has become a legally problem did not have a any weight compared to the main problematic.

In conclusion, the collapse of the Soviet Union had a profound effect on the evaluation of the Caspian Sea's legal status and resources. These effects are still being felt today. The establishment of new republics like as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan gave rise to disagreements regarding the ownership of the sea and the riches it contains. It is difficult to use the riches of the Caspian Sea since there is no agreed-upon legal framework for the sea, which has led to conflicts and tensions between the states that border the sea. The growing significance of the Caspian Sea in international energy markets is another factor that has contributed to the issue's already complex nature.

The status of the Caspian Sea has not been determined, despite the fact that various attempts have been made to settle the problem, including both bilateral and multinational agreements. Despite this, there have been some encouraging developments in recent years, including the littoral governments' signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018 [52, p.32]. 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.

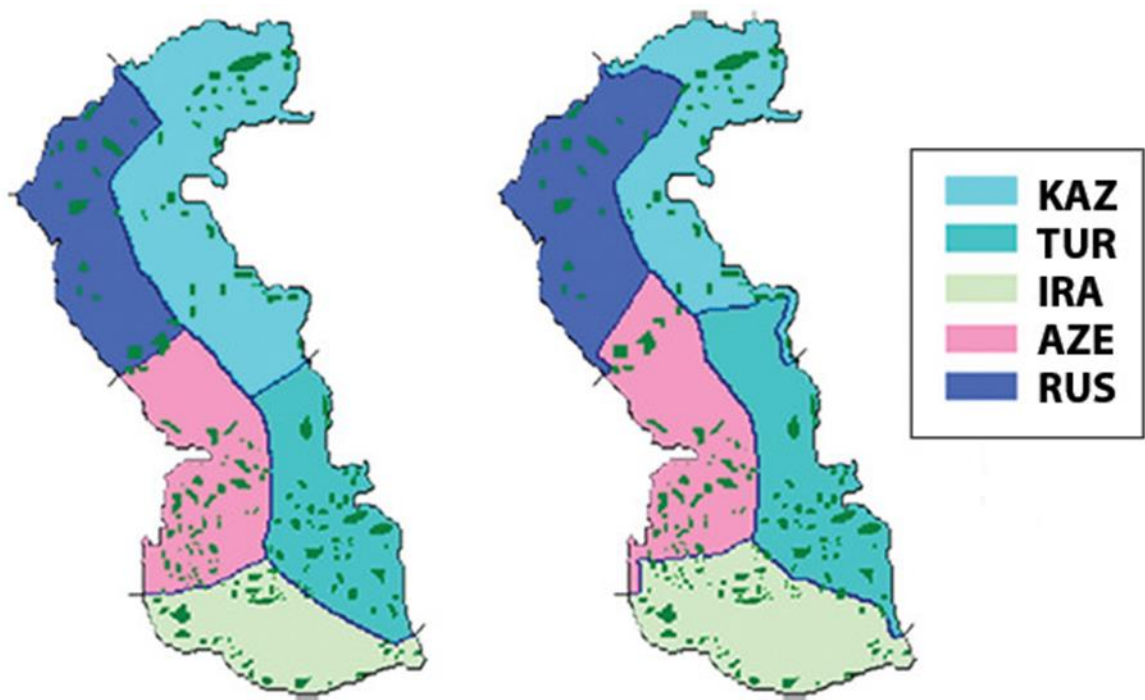


Figure 4 – Caspian Sea division (<https://www.earthmagazine.org/article/caspian-sea-negotiation-support-system/>)

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, also known as the Sea of Treasuries, is the largest enclosed body of water in the world. It is located in the Central Asian region and is bordered by five countries: Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. Due to the importance of its natural resources and strategic location, the Caspian Sea has been a source of legal controversy throughout the ages. To understand the legal status of this sea within the framework of international law, we must focus on the agreements and treaties that constituted efforts to resolve disputes related to it.

Since ancient times, there have been conflicting views regarding the nature of the Caspian Sea, with some considering it a lake rather than a sea. Hence, discussions arose about dividing its resources and water between neighboring countries. While some countries argue that the Caspian Sea should be recognized as a sea, this could lead to a different distribution of sovereignty and control of resources.

Determining the ownership of oil and gas resources in the Caspian Sea is one of the most prominent issues affecting the legal status of this sea. These resources are

considered vital to the surrounding economies, and determining their legal status represents an important challenge in economic and geographical aspects.

Throughout its history, the Caspian Sea has witnessed the signing of several treaties and agreements to resolve disputes and determine its legal status. This is because there is no international agreement that definitively defines the nature of the sea and the rights of the countries bordering it. The roots of this controversy go back to the Soviet era, when two treaties were signed between Iran and the Soviet Union in 1921 and 1940, dividing the sea into two parts and granting each country an equal share of its resources. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, challenges increased due to the emergence of new governments and the expiration of previous treaties [95].

The Caspian Sea Working Group was established in 1991 to address issues of the sea's legal status, and their efforts resulted in the Tehran Convention in 2002, which established a framework for managing and conserving its resources. However, the fundamental issue of the legal status of the sea has not been resolved by this convention.

In 2018, the five countries signed the Agreement on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which established a framework for legal status, including the division of waters and the delineation of common areas. It is particularly important that the agreement recognized the Caspian Sea as a unique body of water, reflecting its geographic and political complexities [95].

The treaty acknowledges the Caspian Sea as having its own "special legal regime," which is widely regarded as one of the most important parts of the document. This indicates that the sea is governed by its own special set of rules and regulations, which are distinct from those that govern other bodies of water. For instance, the treaty gives the countries that border the Caspian Sea the authority to place restrictions on the passage of foreign ships into the sea. This is something that is prohibited under international law for other bodies of water.

The convention also includes provisions for the negotiation and mediation of disagreements that may arise between countries that share a border with one another. In the event that these approaches are unsuccessful, the convention permits the disagreement to be referred to an ad hoc arbitration panel, which will then come to a conclusion that is legally enforceable.

In spite of the fact that the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian water was successful in resolving the majority of the lingering problems associated with the legal status of the water, there are still some worries and difficulties that persist. The topic of whether or not there is a military presence in the Caspian Sea is one of these concerns. In accordance with the convention, it is permissible for the surrounding countries to keep a military presence in their respective territorial waters; however, the presence of a foreign military is strictly prohibited. Despite this, there is still a lack of clarity regarding the manner in which this provision will be implemented and the steps that will be taken to ensure compliance.

The problem of protecting the environment is still another obstacle to overcome. The environment of the Caspian Sea is significant since it is home to a great variety of plant and animal species. It is possible that the extraction of natural resources, such as

oil and gas, will have a detrimental effect on the surrounding ecosystem. The convention does make provisions for the preservation and management of the resources of the sea; however, it is unknown how effective these provisions will be in actual operation at this time.

In addition, there are worries regarding the part that outside players play in the region surrounding the Caspian Sea. Due to its location at a strategic crossroads between Europe and Asia, the Caspian Sea attracts the attention of major countries such as the United States of America, China, and the European Union. Their engagement, despite the fact that they are not bordering countries and do not have a direct stake in the legal status of the Caspian Sea, can have an effect on the region and the resources found there [96].

In conclusion, the legal status of the Caspian Sea has been a topic of controversy for decades, and each of the five countries that border the sea has their own claims and interests to stake in the region. The matter has been discussed in a variety of treaties and declarations over the course of many years, with the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea being the most recent of these to take place in 2018. Despite the fact that many of the lingering questions concerning the legal status of the sea have been answered as a result of this agreement, there are still certain difficulties and worries that exist. It is essential for the countries that border the Caspian Sea to continue their collaboration in order to secure the sustainable management and conservation of the Caspian Sea's resources, as well as to meet the concerns of external players and the international community as a whole.

The first agreements on the legal character and state of the Caspian Sea date back to the eighteenth century, and the wars that broke out between the Iranians and the Russians in the nineteenth century helped to clarify various issues relating to the Caspian Sea system. The Caspian Sea is located in northern Iran and southeastern Russia. The accords and treaties that were reached after this time period were first favorable to the Russian Empire and later served the best interests of the Soviet Union. Most crucially, these treaties were ratified and only involved a single bilateral relationship between the two countries involved. The treaties that were signed between the Russians and the Soviets and Iran formed at one time a legal basis for the status and position of the Caspian Sea. These treaties defined the system of navigation and fishing that was to be used between the two parties. The only flaw in these treaties was that they did not indicate or specify the method that is used to determine the seabed. [95]

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, p.14].

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, p.16].

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 countries that border the Caspian Sea—Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan—have been exchanging viewpoints on the body of water for a significant amount of time. Since the beginning of the 21st century, parties involved in the dispute over the legal standing of the Caspian Sea have been engaged in ongoing negotiations, which have produced several agreements and declarations. This section will present an account of the discussions that have taken place between the five countries about the Caspian Sea. This comprehensive narrative will include the most important problems that have been discussed, the agreements that have been made, and the challenges that still need to be addressed.

The Caspian Sea, which is located between Europe and Asia, is the biggest confined body of water in the world. There are more than 200 million people living in the five nations that border the Caspian Sea, which is also rich in natural resources such as oil and gas reserves. These countries share a border with the Caspian Sea. Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, however, the status of the Caspian Sea has been a cause of contention between these countries. The Caspian Sea was seen as a strategic location for the Soviet Union prior to the country's collapse. When internal water bodies were divided in half by Iran and the Soviet Union. On the other hand, with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the five newly independent countries started asserting their sovereignty over their various areas of the Caspian Sea. This resulted in arguments regarding the status of the sea and the riches it contained.

The negotiations concerning the Caspian water have centered on a few of the most important issues, including the legal status of the Caspian Sea, the division of the water into national regions, and the utilization of the sea's resources. The political and legal standing of the Caspian Sea is one of the most important questions that must be answered. If the Caspian Sea were classified as a lake instead of a sea, then the five countries that border it would be required by international law to split it up into five equal parts. If, on the other hand, it was to be regarded as a sea, then every nation would be entitled to a territorial sea that extended a distance of 12 miles from its shore and to an exclusive economic zone that extended a distance of 200 miles from it.

Another important question is how the Caspian Sea should be divided up amongst the several countries. The delimitation of each nation's marine boundaries has been the subject of ongoing negotiations between the five countries that border the Caspian Sea. Each nation wants to lay claim to the greatest possible portion of this body of water. On the other hand, this is made more difficult by the fact that the Caspian Sea is a body of water that is completely surrounded by land, and the legal foundation for splitting it is not particularly well-defined.

The negotiations revolving around the Caspian Sea have prominently featured discussions on resource extraction. The vast oil and gas reservoirs believed to be present in the Caspian Sea have spurred deliberations among the five bordering nations on how to equitably distribute these resources. Complications arise as some reserves are located in disputed territories, leading to impasses in reaching consensus on resolution methods.

Despite the intricate nature of these deliberations, progress has been achieved by the five nations in addressing Caspian Sea matters. They laid the groundwork for environmental collaboration by ratifying the foundational Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea in 2003. This pivotal agreement aimed at safeguarding the marine ecosystem of the Caspian Sea. Subsequently, in 2018, the nations united to endorse the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, instituting a distinctive legal framework and guidelines for future utilization and management [97, p.15].

Among the significant provisions of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea was the agreement to partition the sea into state-designated sectors. As per the accord, each nation was allocated a portion of the sea proportional to the length of

its coastline. Iran secured 13%, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan each obtained 19%, Azerbaijan was granted 18%, and Russia claimed 21% of the total expanse. The remaining ten percent was designated as a shared zone, with all five countries consenting to collaborative access and stewardship for the region's development and resources [96, p.45].

Guidelines for the extraction of the sea's resources were also outlined in the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, which established the sea's legal status. The countries came to an agreement to work together in order to develop the oil and gas deposits that are located in the sea, with each nation retaining the sole right to explore and exploit the resources that are located inside its own national sector. However, if the resources are found in an area that is the subject of a dispute, the countries involved are obligated to seek a solution that is consistent with the principles of international law.

In spite of the fact that there has been some forward movement in the talks over the Caspian Sea, there are still many obstacles to overcome. Unresolved disagreements around property rights to a number of the Caspian Sea's resources constitute one of the most significant obstacles. For instance, there are ongoing conflicts between Azerbaijan and Iran regarding the ownership of the oil fields known as Araz-Alov-Sharg, and there are ongoing issues between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan regarding the ownership of the oil fields known as Kapaz and Serdar.

The inadequacy of essential infrastructure in the Caspian Sea region poses yet another hurdle. Despite significant investments in exploiting the sea's oil and gas reservoirs, the lack of transport infrastructure to convey these resources to markets remains a critical issue. This deficiency has led to a substantial escalation in development costs and has curtailed the potential economic advantages that these reservoirs could offer.

Moreover, the escalating degradation of the Caspian Sea's natural ecology is emerging as a pressing concern. The sea is heavily polluted due to various factors, including overfishing and the degradation of natural habitats, significantly exacerbating the environmental crisis. This deterioration has led to a decline in biodiversity within the sea, jeopardizing the livelihoods of local residents.

In essence, negotiations concerning the Caspian Sea have persisted for over two decades, resulting in several agreements and declarations. Despite some advancements, significant challenges persist. These include unresolved disputes over resource ownership, infrastructure deficiencies, and ecological degradation. To tackle these obstacles and ensure sustainable and equitable utilization and management of the Caspian Sea, the five nations must sustain regular collaborative efforts.

As was mentioned earlier, the treaty that was concluded between the Soviets and Iran went beyond the new economic and geopolitical realities, and the number of actors jumped from two to five, of which three did not sign or ratify existing agreements and treaties, and this opened the way for different interpretations regarding the texts of legal treaties, especially since it was felt that they were not concerned with these treaties, as every country has come to view the problem of nuclear proliferation as an issue that is primarily the responsibility of the United

Both Iran and Russia had previously determined the places and locations of wealth and therefore wanted to exploit the situation in their favor. From the beginning, Russia and Iran had the goal of achieving a situation in which the seabed would be divided among the five countries without changing its legal status.

Russia and Iran proposed a system that would be based on a "joint mandate," which would mean that they would share sovereignty and jointly control over this system. The purpose of this system was to jointly exploit wealth. However, the Russian proposals did not garner much interest because Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have made it clear that they intend to oppose the current legal status of the Caspian Sea. As a result, these three countries (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan) have proposed the repeal of two treaties that were signed by the "Persians", the Soviets, and Iran. Taking into account the new geopolitical changes, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan saw the necessity of applying the rules of the United Nations [95, p.12].

Here we point out that after the international recognition of Russia's right to exercise all of the international obligations of the former Soviet Union, the Caspian problem returned to the regional arena, and here the issue of the "legacy of the Russian state" was raised, and here some contradictory positions emerged in the Alma Ata Declaration, it was clear that the member states of the group guarantees, according to her own texts and internal laws, that all international obligations of the former Soviet Union will be met. Additionally, both international practice and the conduct of certain governments gave the impression that these states have the status or position of successor states, particularly when it came time for these states to sign international treaties.

At the same time, some documents confirm that Russia is a complementary state to the Soviet Union", such as in a resolution on December 21, 1991 called "Alma-Ata" among the countries concerned. This is due to the fact that Russia is succeeding the Soviet Union and represents it in the United Nations and the Security Council as a permanent member. In addition, Russia is a state that has been described as "complementary" to the Soviet Union [98].

In the middle of these competing points of view, an attempt was made for the first time to bring them together. In the absence of Iran, the heads of government of Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan met in Almaty on October 15, 1993, and it was agreed to solve all problems related to the Caspian Sea. On this basis, the Economic Cooperation Council was formed for the countries surrounding the Caspian, and its goal was to monitor economic activities related to the exploitation of wealth, particularly oil. Iran was not present at this meeting. Especially following the development of the interest of big multinational businesses to invest in the region in the sector of oil, which eventually led to the signing of the "Contract of the Century" on September 20th, 1994 by the government of Azerbaijan with the international oil company. Both Moscow and Tehran were angered by these measures, as they voiced their concern that oil corporations would enter the Caspian Sea and begin exploiting its resources [99, p.45].

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.46]. 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, p.45].

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, p.15].

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, p.48] 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, p.50].

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, p.44].

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 line 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, p.46].

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 15<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup> 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, p.19].

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, p.19].

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, p.21].

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, p.15].

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, p.10].

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, p.12].

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.

#### *Section Abstract*

The legal status of the Caspian Sea is a complex subject in which international law, the political and economic interests of the littoral states, and the history of international relations intersect. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the dynamics in the region changed dramatically, affecting the legal framework governing the use of the sea's resources.

Before the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Sea was considered a closed sea, which led to Soviet-Iranian participation in the management of its resources. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, five independent states emerged: Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. This shift complicated the legal situation, as each state began to claim its rights to the marine resources.

Iran has been a vocal advocate for a condominium approach, where the five littoral states would share the Caspian Sea's resources and territorial waters equally. However, this approach has been met with resistance from other states, particularly Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan, which have sought to assert their claims over the sea's resources and territorial waters.

In 1991, bilateral agreements were reached between some of these states on the division of resources, but no comprehensive agreement was reached. International law indicates that closed water bodies can be divided according to the rule of proportionality, but this has not been effectively applied in the case of the Caspian Sea. Instead, disputes over the boundaries of territorial waters and oil and gas exploration rights continue.

The legal status of the Caspian Sea in international law is complex, as it is neither a sea nor a lake. Given that the Caspian Sea is considered a closed sea, which means that the rules of international law relating to the sea do not fully apply to it. However, there are attempts to apply the principles of international law, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, which is a reference in determining the sovereign rights of states over water bodies. In 2018, a historic agreement was reached between the five countries bordering the sea, which determined how the resources should be divided. This agreement is considered an important step towards activating the legal framework, but it did not resolve all existing disputes, especially regarding the maritime area.

Regarding the economic and political interests of the five countries in the Caspian Sea, the countries bordering the Caspian Sea seek to exploit its rich oil and gas resources to boost their economies. These resources are a vital source of revenue, as oil and gas constitute more than 10% of the GDP of some of these countries. For example, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan seek to attract foreign investment in energy projects, which will enhance their role in the global energy market.

On the other hand, Iran has a strategic interest in asserting its rights in the sea, as oil and gas contribute to strengthening the Iranian economy affected by sanctions. Therefore, disputes over borders and exploration rights are not just legal issues but also concern national security and sovereignty.

Iran, in particular, has significant economic and political interests in the Caspian Sea. The country has the longest coastline along the Caspian Sea, and its northern provinces rely heavily on the sea's resources for their economic development. Iran has also sought to use the Caspian Sea as a major transportation route for its energy exports, especially to Europe and Asia.

Economic and political interests overlap in the Caspian Sea, making any attempt to resolve the disputes require a balance between legal rights and strategic interests. Regional cooperation, despite the challenges, can contribute to finding sustainable solutions. Iran views regional cooperation with the landlocked Central Asian countries as a lifeline from the international blockade and sanctions and as an opportunity to exploit its geographical location to recover part of its share that it believes can be affected in the Caspian Sea, by extending gas and oil pipelines and using its infrastructure and ports for trade with these landlocked countries. Iran also wants to accommodate Russia's national interests and desires in an attempt to win it over in its regional conflicts on the one hand, and on the other hand to challenge US sanctions, but this has always been at the expense of its share of the Caspian Sea's resources.

In conclusion, the legal status of the Caspian Sea represents a complex dilemma that requires coordination among the littoral states. While some progress has been made in the legal framework after the collapse of the Soviet Union, there is still a long way to go towards a comprehensive solution that guarantees the rights of all states. Economic and political interests play a pivotal role in shaping these dynamics, requiring a balanced approach that takes into account legal, political, and economic aspects.

### **3 Geopolitical balance of Power in the Region and Iran**

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

The traditional idea that increased economic prosperity leads to reduced military tensions does not hold true in the Caspian Sea region; here, economic growth may paradoxically trigger renewed hostilities. All states bordering the Caspian have significant stakes, both economic and political, to gain and lose. The region around the Caspian Sea features a highly intricate and sophisticated security structure. Notably, the number of Azerbaijanis living in Iran surpasses the entire population of Azerbaijan. Currently, Azerbaijan serves as a crucial partner of the United States in the region. Despite religious differences, Iran maintains strong diplomatic ties with both Russia and Armenia. The Armenian diaspora exerts significant political influence in the United States regarding issues related to this region. Consequently, conventional political alliances may have limited applicability in the Caspian region. Russia's interests in this region are diverse and extensive. As the dominant power, Moscow aims to prevent the region from descending into conflict.

Russia's shifting stance on the Caspian region's status is driven by the complex interplay of political and economic interests. The region's complexity arises from various factors, including abundant resources, intricate commerce networks, sophisticated transit operations, the sea's condition, and unresolved issues related to military dominance. Russia's military presence in the Caspian region is part of its broader strategic approach in the adjacent Caucasus area, where Russian forces have been engaged in efforts to suppress uprisings for about twenty years. Although some North Caucasus republics do not share direct borders with the Caspian Sea, the Republic of Dagestan, which is near the sea, acts as a strategic base for separatist insurgents.

The United States has a significant interest in Azerbaijan, particularly due to its crucial role in facilitating the departure of American soldiers from Central Asia in the post-Soviet context. Positioned between Iran and Russia, Azerbaijan is strategically vital for monitoring and regulating the movement of terrorist groups in and out of the North Caucasus region. The U.S.-Azerbaijani partnership aims to promote regional stability and counter global terrorism, with the United States actively involved in training Azerbaijani armed forces. This training focuses on specialized tactics to protect offshore oil platforms in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea [116].

Azerbaijan advocates for the demilitarization of the Caspian Sea, emphasizing its use solely for peaceful purposes. Alternatively, Azerbaijan proposes specific regulations governing military facilities in the region. However, this proposal receives minimal support from other coastal states. The perception exists that the United States' strategy towards Azerbaijan is aimed at diminishing Russia's influence in a country of significant importance to Moscow, a perspective supported by certain American politicians.

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Turkmenistan became the recipient of the most extensive aviation group in the Central Asian region. According to reports,

Turkmen military helicopters are said to be conducting patrols in contested regions. However, the efficacy of the nation's capacity to assert its territorial claims in its national sea sector through military means is uncertain, particularly in light of the current stalemate in Iranian-Azerbaijani ties arising from territorial disputes. Despite historical conflicts, particularly with Azerbaijan, it seems unlikely that Turkmenistan will resort to armed actions in this matter.

Kazakhstan, ranked ninth in the world by land area with a relatively sparse population, benefits from its strategic geographical location neighboring Russia and China. This position makes it conducive for the establishment of oil and gas pipelines. However, pipelines also bring vulnerabilities due to external influences. Kazakhstan boasts significant reserves, including the Tengiz gas field and the Kashagan oil field, positioning itself as a major player in the global energy industry. Consequently, Kazakhstan's role extends beyond regional energy security to potentially influencing stability in neighboring regions [112].

In the Caspian region, defense spending is on the rise due to various factors such as ongoing conflicts in Afghanistan, Russia's North Caucasus, and the Armenia-Azerbaijan dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh. Additionally, territorial disputes within the Caspian Sea basin have led to a slight escalation in arms acquisitions. For instance, in the late 1990s, a dispute arose between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan over oil fields, including the Azeri-Chirag-Guneshli field, resulting in tensions and military actions.

External countries have contributed to bolstering the military capabilities of the Caspian Sea bordering states. The United States has supported Azerbaijan, while Ukraine has aided Turkmenistan. Participation in international security agreements further enhances their military capabilities but also intensifies regional tensions. Russia perceives increased U.S. influence in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan as a challenge to its interests, fearing encirclement from the west and south. This challenges Moscow's control and threatens its authority over crucial export routes in the region. Enhanced U.S. involvement could potentially grant Washington access from Turkey and the Black Sea to the Caspian region [117, p.8].

The assistance provided by the US and NATO to this remote region, particularly in terms of arms supply, remains notably modest compared to the substantial Russian aid. Nonetheless, Western military support contributes to the augmentation of regional countries' military capacities. Simultaneously, its increasing role in regional dynamics cannot be disregarded. This elevated international involvement harbors the potential for both cooperation and confrontation, particularly in the interplay between external forces, notably Russia and the Western bloc. Moreover, emergent threats to regional stability and security persist, with little expectation of an imminent shift in this trajectory.

Based on current trends, it is highly likely that the region will experience a gradual increase in military influence or presence from both domestic and international entities. Moreover, the enduring lack of well-defined boundaries, along with persistent disagreements regarding energy resources, has the potential to incite intermittent episodes of violence between nations. These incidents are more likely to be expressed

as restrained episodes rather than large-scale conflict. The absence of clear territorial boundaries may hinder the advancement of offshore energy projects.

Within this context, the region holds the capacity to produce ships ranging between 500 to 1,000 tons, designed to secure the deeper waters of the Caspian. Both Russia and Iran possess the capability for such production, while Azerbaijan has also acquired this capacity in the past five years. This underscores how Russia could either accelerate or curtail the broader militarization process within the Caspian Sea [118].

Conversely, due to its dimensions, naval aviation, including squadrons armed with anti-ship missiles, holds applicability within the Caspian due to the relatively contained size of the sea. Given the predominantly smaller scale of ships in the Caspian, meaningful anti-air capabilities are often limited. Consequently, adept aircrew trained in anti-ship operations can yield considerable impact. While a few patrol vessels suffice for coastal security and safeguarding oil platforms, the trajectory of naval development and aviation plans within each nation will undeniably play a pivotal role in shaping the future military equilibrium in the Caspian region [118].

As said earlier, the Caspian area holds strategic importance as it serves as a sphere of influence for two prominent actors, namely Russia and Iran. Additionally, it attracts the attention of four external parties, namely the United States, the European Union, China, and Turkey. These nations are motivated by aspirations to strengthen their political influence and ensure their access to important energy resources. The extraction and export of resources within this particular area, as well as efforts to ensure energy security, are vulnerable to the influences of all these states, when viewed from an energy standpoint. Russia stands out as a nation that is particularly motivated to impede these endeavors. The underlying reasons for this assumption will be further upon in the following discussion.

The Caspian region presents a significant obstacle for Russia in maintaining its position as the primary provider of oil supplies to the European Union, thereby potentially undermining its political influence throughout Europe. If European nations are able to effectively bypass Russian influence, it is possible that they may achieve this objective by actively engaging with the Caspian region. Furthermore, Azerbaijan, as well as the western Central Asian republics like Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan, play a crucial role in Russia's buffer zone strategy by effectively delineating it from significant regional countries situated to the south and east. Considering that a significant portion of these nations express a desire to disentangle themselves from Russian influence, aiming to achieve greater political and economic independence (or, more pragmatically, to seek support from other influential nations), this collective trend weakens Russia's standing, making it increasingly vulnerable [119].

Therefore, it is crucial from the perspective of Moscow to obstruct energy measures that aim to bypass Russia. This geopolitical maneuver would allow Russia to maintain its control over Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, thereby protecting them from the potential impact of foreign forces.

The Caspian Sea serves as a means for Azerbaijan to further enhance its oil and natural gas production and exports, thereby bolstering its position as a significant

energy producer and transit country. Concurrently, this potential also entails inherent hazards. As Azerbaijan's prominence as a producer of energy and a transit hub continues to expand, it inevitably encroaches into the interests of Moscow, thereby marginalizing Russia. In light of Russia's substantial military influence in the area and its proximity to Armenia, which is a neighboring country of Azerbaijan, Baku demonstrates caution and attentiveness by taking into careful consideration these geopolitical circumstances.

In the next ten years, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, together with Uzbekistan, will have the opportunity, thanks to the Caspian Sea, to access not only the European market but also the rapidly expanding Chinese market. However, the problems associated with diversification that are similar to those faced by Azerbaijan are significantly exacerbated for the nations of Central Asia. These countries' political, economic, and security systems are intricately intertwined with Russia's, and as a result, they display a heightened opposition to the impact of the West. As a result of this, their acts are likely to be carried out with a greater degree of prudence than Azerbaijan's [118].

Iran's geopolitical influence has been on the rise in recent years, and this trend is certain to accelerate if the United States maintains its current troop pullout from Iraq. Iran's position has been strengthened further as a result of the continuous unrest in the Middle East, notably in the Gulf area. Iran aims to avoid clashes with its Caspian neighbors, notably Russia, despite the fact that it maintains a powerful military presence in the region.

In spite of this, Iran does not place a high priority on the Caspian Sea. The Persian Gulf continues to dominate Tehran's attention, and the possibility of the Iranian capital taking part in energy projects based in the West is now remote. On the other hand, taking into account Iran's growing power in the Middle East and the Persian Gulf, a similar trajectory may arise in the Caspian, especially in regard to its complex relationship with Azerbaijan. Although it is not expected that Tehran will play a vital role in this area, the counterbalancing powers of Russia and Turkey are positioned to impede Tehran's growing dominance [85].

The quest for new energy supplies is not the primary focus of the United States' involvement in the Caspian area. Rather, Washington is more concerned with ensuring its success in the larger geopolitical game it is playing with Moscow by providing financial backing to initiatives that assist diversify the region's energy resources.

The European Union's primary concern is the availability of energy supplies; nevertheless, there is also a geopolitical element at play. Since energy supplies from Russia are contributing to its revival and energy supplies from North Africa include dangers to Europe's politics and security, the Caspian Sea is the most probable method to secure Europe's continued access to a reliable supply of energy.

Turkey's capital city of Ankara shares many of Europe's objectives in the Caspian area, including the pursuit of alternative energy supply routes that circumvent Russia. However, Turkey's goal is to play a significant role in any such future energy initiative, which would make it an essential transit state.

There is a lesser degree of congruence between China's interests in the area and those of Europe. To satisfy its ever-increasing demand for energy, China wants the energy resources of the Caspian area to be transported eastward rather than westward, as is the desire of the European Union and Turkey.

In addition to the aforementioned considerations, there is one more critical aspect that needs our attention. Russia now has the potential to revitalize its influence in the post-Soviet area as the United States' attention has been refocused on the Middle East. The United States was the most significant external force interested in the affairs of the Caspian Sea. However, if the United States follows through on its intentions to withdraw the majority of its armed personnel from Iraq and Afghanistan, it will improve the United States' capability to compete with Russia's presence in the Caspian area.

In addition, China's gradual expansion into Central Asia in order to safeguard its energy sources and satisfy its ever-increasing energy requirements may allow it to emerge as a significantly more influential actor in the area over the next few years. In the meantime, Europe has the opportunity to settle the inconsistencies that exist between competing projects to assure the supply of Caspian hydrocarbons and select one or two of those projects for implementation in order to diversify its supplies outside Russia.

When figuring out their strategy, the Russians will, of course, have to take these possibilities into consideration. In 2020, there will be a greater involvement in the affairs of the Caspian area from a greater number of actors than in 2011. It is currently unknown which energy projects will be approved, which gas pipelines will be constructed, or how the problem of the sea's ambiguous legal position will be handled. On the other hand, the growth of the Caspian area over the course of the next ten years might take any number of different forms [120].

The possibility exists that Russia will persevere in strengthening its dominant position in the area and will continue to preserve its position as the most important actor there. If things continue along this path, Russia will continue to increase the influence it has over Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Moscow would hinder or stop key European efforts aimed at diversifying energy sources to the EU by capitalizing on conflict in Europe and using it as an opportunity to further its own agenda. Despite the fact that Russia is unable to stop every energy project, it will surely continue to be the most influential player in terms of both energy and political power. With this approach, Russia would have an edge over external competitors like the United States, the European Union, and China. This course of action would, in the end, have the same effect as maintaining the status quo.

A second potential outcome sees Russia's position significantly deteriorating as a result of political and security losses, as well as economic difficulties (such as a financial crisis). It is possible that the political landscape of the Middle East area will undergo tectonic transformations at the same time as the United States will take a more forceful posture as a result of the withdrawal of American military from the region. This can include more financial and political assistance from the United States for countries like Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, along with measures that are

effective in diversifying energy sources. This course of action would strengthen the stature of less powerful nations by reducing the influence of Russia and Iran, but it would also potentially increase the likelihood of confrontation between different states.

The third possibility involves significant political or regime shifts taking place inside of Iran. Should such a revolution take place, in which Iran's foreign policy shifts from hostile postures towards collaborative engagement with the West, the whole regional energy landscape may be subject to significant change as a result. This might result in Iran being more receptive to and participating in energy initiatives being undertaken by western nations, such as the Nabucco pipeline. A development of this nature would also allow for the possibility of coordination between Iran and the United States, either overtly or secretly, with the goal of eroding Russia's grip in the area [121].

The fourth option is the chance that China would suffer through a big economic and financial crisis, which will limit its influence in Central Asia while Beijing is attempting to deal with issues that are occurring within its own borders. This scenario has the potential to increase the region's dependency on Russia for energy imports and transportation, which would ultimately result in Russia's position being strengthened. On the other hand, it may motivate powerful nations like the United States and Europe to take more measures to protect their plans for expanding the variety of energy pathways available in Central Asia.

Because there are so many governments competing for influence in the Caspian area, the political, energy, and military landscape of the region may change very fast. Because of this, it is extremely impossible to forecast what the Caspian region will look like in one year, much less in ten years' time. Since the establishment of three new governments on the Caspian Sea 20 years ago, there is no denying the remarkable transformation that has taken place in the surrounding area. With the inclusion of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, the Caspian area has become one of the most strategically vital in the globe. These countries all have access to major resources and are situated in ideal places on the mainland.

Because of these circumstances, the interests of the key geopolitical powers will converge in the Caspian area over the course of the next decade as well as over the course of the long term.

Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan all had their heads of state sign the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in 2018. Whereas the five nations emphasized that they would not let the existence of a foreign base at sea, noting that the agreement specifies the sole right and duty of the five countries for the destiny of the Caspian Sea, as well as establishing clear regulations for their common use of the water, the five countries also emphasized that they would not accept the installation of a foreign base on land.

The significance of the agreement is not based on its immediate effects, which are almost completely inconsequential to the economy at this point; rather, it is almost a legalization of a scenario that existed previously. The current liquidation and the focus of tension have transformed the situation from a point of disagreement into a gathering point for the five countries. Over the past four years, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have worked together to exploit the sea resources, albeit in a limited

way according to inter-agency agreements. However, the significance of the event lies in the legitimization of the situation.

As was mentioned on the same day by both the Russian and Kazakh presidents, this also paves the door for the growth of economic and military cooperation models, which is a positive step. They thought, rather, that "This agreement is a constitution for the Caspian Sea, as it is determined to solve all issues related to the rights and obligations of coastal states, as well as become the guarantor of security, stability, and prosperity in the region" [110].

The issue of the Caspian Sea has been a source of contention between the five countries that border it, Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, ever since the fall of the Soviet Union. This is due to the fact that the legal status of the closed water body has remained ambiguous for the past 27 years, as well as the consequences of determining its legal status (whether it is a sea or a lake) from the distribution of the Caspian Sea's wealth of gas.

At the beginning of the Aktau conference, there was a debate about whether or not the Caspian Sea is a lake or a sea. This is because the name itself can entail certain legal situations according to the international law of the sea. If the Caspian Sea is described as a lake, then all of the countries that border it are able to share their wealth with one another regardless of where they are located. On the other hand, if it is described as a sea, then each country will only.

Then, after that, there were, of course, serious negotiations about how to use the resources of the sea, the rights of each party in navigation and fishing, the delineation of the sea floor, and security problems such as preventing all powers that are not located on the Caspian Sea from utilizing it for military reasons and other things along those lines.

In the end, the participants at the meeting were able to come to an agreement on a number of issues. These issues included: not using the land of any country that borders the Caspian to harm the security of other partner countries; reaching an understanding on the joint use of the surface of the Caspian waters; dividing the lower and sub-layers of the water into equal adjacent sections in accordance with international law; and finishing shipping and fishing operations. When launching significant maritime projects, consideration should be given to environmental concerns, and activities such as scientific study and the building of pipelines in accordance with agreed-upon norms are encouraged.

In spite of these initial understandings, which were significant at the time, there was uncertainty regarding the implementation of the terms of the agreement and the parties' ability to overcome the profound differences that existed between them, particularly between Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, which are the countries that are located to the south of the Caspian Sea basin and dispute the ownership of significant oil fields. On the other hand, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Kazakhstan have come to an agreement to split the wealth of the northern half of the Caspian Sea. The statement made by Iranian President Hassan Rouhani, in which he said, "The countries bordering the Caspian Sea have been able to reach solutions to the issues related to this sea by 30 percent after conducting negotiations of more than 20 years and still are," is

perhaps the most compelling evidence that the "Aktau Agreement" has accomplished very little. Rouhani made this statement in response to a question about whether or not the "Aktau Agreement" has been effective. There are still other concerns that need to be resolved, and the best way to do so would be via discussion and negotiation [122, p.139].

Regarding the dispute over the Caspian Sea, Iran took a hard-line stance. According to recent understandings, their share could be reduced to 13 percent, and it could also lead to an intensification of competition between Iran and other countries over the extension of gas and oil pipelines in the bottom of the Caspian Sea. At one time, they demanded that it be divided equally between Iran and the rest of the countries bordering it. They then retreated and demanded a fifth of the sea. At the meeting in Aktau, Tehran renounced what it used to refer to as its "historical rights" in the Caspian Sea, just as it renounced its claim that the Caspian is a lake and not a sea. To put it another way: Tehran gave up its demand that the Caspian Sea is a lake. 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, p.3].

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, p.150].

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 utilized 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, p.151].

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, p.3]. 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, p.60].

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, p.61]. 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 meters 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 favorable 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 capitalizing on a crucial source of oil and gas in the region's future and slowing the expansion of Chinese influence in the area [126, p.18].

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 [126, p.19].

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, p.45].

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**

Because of its singular geological characteristics, the Caspian Sea has, for many centuries, served as the focal point of political and economic interests. The Caspian Sea is an essential source of energy and economic prosperity for the surrounding region due to its advantageous location and extensive resource potential. Iran, as one of the five coastal states of the Caspian Sea, has a substantial interest in the region's politics and economy due to the fact that Iran is one of the littoral states. Iran's economic growth has been significantly hindered as a direct result of the sanctions imposed by the United

States, and the Iranian government has been working hard to identify potential avenues for escaping the current impasse. This literature review investigates the role that the Caspian Sea played in Iran's escape from the crisis brought on by the United States' sanctions and provides an outline of the existing research on the topic.

The Caspian Sea, situated between Europe and Asia, holds the title of the largest enclosed body of water in the world. It is bordered by five countries: Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. Due to its vast oil and gas reserves, the Caspian Sea is a crucial energy source for the surrounding nations. Its strategic location further enhances its importance as a key transit route for transporting oil and gas to both Europe and Asia. However, the legal status of the Caspian Sea has remained a contentious issue, with the five littoral states engaged in prolonged discussions to establish a legal framework for the region's utilization [128].

Iran's economic situation has been notably impacted by the sanctions imposed by the United States, which have had a profound effect on its oil exports, a vital component of the nation's GDP. In response, Iran has explored various strategies to navigate the economic challenges posed by these sanctions, including engaging in negotiations with the United States and its European partners.

A significant aspect of Iran's strategy to overcome the crisis has been its efforts to tap into the resources of the Caspian Sea. In an attempt to reduce its reliance on oil revenue, Iran has been focusing on developing the region's energy resources. The Caspian Sea's vast potential, particularly for energy exports to Europe, represents a critical opportunity for Iran. Consequently, Iran has been negotiating with its Caspian Sea neighbors to establish a legal framework that facilitates the exploitation of these resources, an endeavor that has been ongoing for several years.

Existing research on the Caspian Sea and Iran's efforts to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions provides a comprehensive analysis of the region's political and economic dynamics. This body of work underscores the pivotal role the Caspian Sea plays in regional energy security, while also highlighting the challenges faced by the littoral states in developing and utilizing its resources.

For instance, a 2021 study by Mohseni and Haji Ali Akbari examines the influence of the Caspian Sea on Iran's energy security and economic growth. Their report emphasizes the potential of the Caspian Sea for enhancing Iran's energy exports and stresses the need to expand the region's resources to reduce the country's dependence on oil exports. The study highlights the significant energy export potential of the Caspian Sea for Iran [129, p.12].

Another study by Zarifi and Mohammadi delves into the legal status of the Caspian Sea, exploring its implications for Iran's economic development. Their work underscores the necessity for a clear legal framework to govern the exploitation of the Caspian's resources and the difficulties the littoral governments face in negotiating such an agreement [130].

Further research by Foroozan and Mahmoudi (2021) examines Iran's efforts to enhance its Caspian Sea resources as part of its strategy to reduce oil dependency. The study highlights both the political and economic challenges Iran faces in the process of resource development in the region [131].

In sum, Iran's strategy to overcome the challenges posed by U.S. sanctions heavily relies on the Caspian Sea, which plays a central role in the country's efforts to diversify its energy exports and reduce oil dependency. However, substantial obstacles remain, particularly due to the complex legal status of the Caspian Sea. These challenges have led the littoral states to engage in extensive negotiations to establish a unified legal framework for the exploitation of the sea's resources. The scholarly literature underscores the Caspian Sea's crucial role in regional energy security and economic development while also addressing the legal complexities that hinder its full utilization. The Caspian Sea, located in Eurasia, continues to be a focal point for geopolitical and economic strategies in the region.

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 capitalizing 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 realize 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 emphasized again and again [132, p.65]

Because it had enormous consequences on Iranian-Russian ties on the political, military, and economic levels and because it limited the interference of landlocked nations in the Caspian region, the agreement on the Caspian Sea represented a change in the state of relations between Iran and Russia. Iran has suddenly signed the Convention on the Caspian Sea, despite the fact that there have been community discussions about the historical rights of Iran, in the Sea of the Caspian ever since the fall of the Soviet Union adopted then a position based on the claim by 20% from the Caspian Sea. As a result, the signature of the agreement has placed the Iranian government in a historical crisis. This discreet atmosphere on the terms of the agreement and not to parliament a vote suggest that the agreement harm interests of Iran, and that the government of Iran proceeded to this decision approach not to raise the Iranian street. It violated the Iranian Constitution because it failed to pass agreement on the Iranian parliament to ratify it, and it did not disclose the terms of the agreement, which raised many questions. However, the Iranian people were not fooled by Rouhani's speech, which went out and talked about security perks that Iran gained in exchange for signing the agreement. Rouhani spoke of Iran thwarting United States plans aiming to deploy its soldiers in the Caspian Sea or create military bases there. However, the Iranian people were not fooled by Rouhani's speech. The fact that the United States has not previously announced any intention to build military bases in one

of the Caspian Sea countries, nor can any US naval forces have access to the largest closed sea in the world, led the Iranians to believe that their government had undertaken to sell a portion of its share to Russia. The fact that the United States has not previously announced any intention to build military bases in one of the Caspian Sea countries. Iran signed the agreement without solving the problem of its share with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, while Russia was able to determine its share of the Caspian Sea area, which is estimated to be 17%. This is the reason that a number of protesters gathered in front of the Iranian parliament to express their discontent with the agreement. The reason for popular discontent is that Iran signed the agreement without solving the problem of its share with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. In the past, Iran has been demanding the right from the sea and its resources by 20%, and with the signing of With this agreement, it is expected that Iran's share will not exceed 11% of the total area of wealth, and thus Russia got bigger privileges than obtained by Iran, as Russia is today able to start investing in the Caspian Sea, while Iran is still a dispute with the states of the South Caspian Sea to share, which does not allow Tehran to begin any investment business [132, p.65.]

This suggests that the efforts taken by the United States in 2018 against Iran's destabilizing 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 maneuvering 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 maneuvering 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, p.55].

China and Russia, followed by the European Union, are key partners of the Iranian government due to their publicly expressed opposition to the U.S. sanctions imposed on Iran [134, p.39]. The Iranian government is particularly eager to collaborate with nations that have opposed these penalties. The second phase of this cooperation is expected to involve non-European countries. Several nations that import Iranian oil have indicated their intention to use this system to facilitate payments for Iranian oil, though the mechanism was not activated until the end of 2020, and no countries have participated in it as of yet. The European countries confirmed their commitment to remaining in the nuclear agreement and announced the establishment of special financial mechanisms to enable transactions between Europe and Iran without resorting to the U.S. dollar.

On the other hand, China and Russia managed to maintain positive relations with Iran during the previous round of sanctions, which predated the nuclear agreement. Specifically, China, having facilitated private banking channels for Iran during the prior sanctions period, has pledged to continue doing so. As part of this effort, Iran has set up private bilateral financial mechanisms with China, Russia, and India to counter the financial sanctions imposed by the United States. This initiative resulted in increased economic cooperation between these countries and Iran, along with substantial assistance provided to Iran [135, p.12].

In September 2018, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif warned of a potential escalation in Iran's uranium enrichment if Europe responded negatively following the U.S. withdrawal from the nuclear deal [133, p.46]. This statement followed Iran's signals regarding the possibility of resuming uranium enrichment if the nuclear agreement collapsed.

Iran's strategy to mitigate the impact of U.S. sanctions involves intensifying cooperation with neighboring countries, particularly those in Iraq, Afghanistan, Turkey, the Caspian Sea region, and certain Arab Gulf nations [136]. Iran aims to counter the American efforts to reduce its oil exports by focusing on strengthening regional alliances.

Moreover, Iran leverages its role as a stabilizing force in the region and emphasizes its influence on the global oil market. As a result, Iran has threatened to halt oil exports from the region if it is unable to sell its oil due to U.S. sanctions related to its nuclear program.

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 favored 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 favored 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 favors these roads, and they are distinguished by their commercial and economic efficiency. This is because they are more cost-effective in terms of construction costs, generally pass through safe areas, and do not pose major environmental challenges. Additionally, basic installations of pipelines and ports are available along these roads, and a gas pipeline runs through this region from Turkmenistan to Iran. Work to extend to Turkey through a new pipeline monitored by a SHELL firm to complete, but there is a worldwide worry on the part of oil companies and governments that the southern highways will enhance the world's link with the Strait of Hormuz. This fear is preventing the work from being completed.

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 favorite of China. China has an increasing need for energy and needs to search for new markets [139, p.12].

**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 materializing 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 rumors 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.

In addition, the two nations have signed a large number of agreements with the intention of extending their economic cooperation. A currency swap agreement was concluded between China and Turkey in 2018, which paves the way for the two nations to conduct trade in their own national currencies rather than in US dollars. The purpose of the agreement was to lessen the reliance that both nations had on the US dollar while simultaneously increasing the volume of trade that took place between them.

Additionally, China has made significant investments in Turkey's infrastructure, particularly in the country's energy industry. In 2015, China's state-owned CMEC inked an agreement with Turkey to develop a nuclear power station in the nation, and in 2018, China's TBEA signed an agreement to invest in 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, p.230].

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, p.121].

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, p.96].

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.

Thus, the agreement appears to complement the role of the Shanghai Organization, which is based on developing cooperation between the majority of these countries, as Russia, Kazakhstan, and China are founding members of the Organization, Azerbaijan is an observer member of the Organization, and Tehran applied to join years ago, but the sanctions imposed on it prevented it from completing the membership procedures [135, p.21].

China has strategic and diplomatic goals in the Caspian Sea that fall within its overall foreign policy goals and is looking for preserving the security and stability of borders negotiated after the fall of the Soviet Union, to prevent any influence foreign interference in the affairs of its western region. Energy falls within the four principles of China's strategic and diplomatic interests in the Caspian Sea, which determine and define its activities there. These principles are: China has started. 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, p.43].

The Iranian site is of geopolitical importance to China because of its location in the southwest of the continent of Asia, and it's 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, p.47].

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, p.15] 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, p.15].

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].

Countries such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan can be found along the coast of the Caspian Sea, which is the largest lake in the world. The Caspian Sea, which these countries share a border with, has been significant in the nations' political, economic, and cultural growth. These countries share a border with the Caspian Sea. In the following paragraphs, we will discuss the significance of the Caspian Sea as well as its influence on the countries surrounding it.

Kazakhstan is the largest country in Central Asia and has land borders with Russia, China, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan and Turkmenistan share a border with Kazakhstan. Oil, natural gas, and minerals are just some of the natural riches that abound in this landlocked nation, which is located on the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea. The economy of Kazakhstan is primarily reliant on these resources, and the country has made significant strides in the oil and gas business, positioning it as one of the most competitive producers in the world.

Because it acts as a land bridge between Kazakhstan and the rest of the globe, the Caspian Sea has been an important factor in the development of Kazakhstan's economy. The nation has built its port infrastructure along the shore of the Caspian Sea in order to make it easier for it to do trade with the other nations in the region. Additionally, Kazakhstan's oil and gas deposits are shipped to markets in Europe and Asia via pipelines that traverse the Caspian Sea. These pipelines are located in Kazakhstan.

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.

Turkmenistan is the least populous of the countries that border the Caspian Sea, and its location on the sea's eastern coast makes it the least accessible. Turkmenistan is well-known for its enormous natural gas deposits, and the Caspian Sea has been an important contributor to the development of the country's gas industry. Pipelines are used to bring the country's natural gas deposits to markets in Europe and Asia, which are located on the other side of the Caspian Sea.

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. In the future, the Caspian Sea will continue to serve as a vital source of ideas and advancement for these countries.

Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan appear to be the most fortunate countries in the region in terms of what they possess in terms of oil and gas reserves. This is due to the alignment of the major sedimentary basins on the eastern side of the Caspian Sea that are richer in oil and gas. The other countries in the region vary in what they have in terms of oil and gas reserves. The remaining nations, those that do not have significant oil reserves, are significant in their own right and for a different reason. Its significance lies in the fact that it is strategically located for the transportation of oil and gas to the markets in East and Southeast Asia.

Kazakhstan has the greatest landmass of any of the countries in the region, the highest national income, which is equivalent to more than fifty percent of the total national revenue of the Central Asian republics combined, and the most oil resources of any of the countries in the region. During the 1990s, there was a significant growth in oil output as a result of the bringing into service of new fields, the drilling of new wells and the rehabilitation of old wells, and the implementation of new and more modern technologies in exploratory activities.

It is ranked eleventh globally between Nigeria and the United States of America, which is the eighth global producer of oil, and most of its oil fields are in the west near the Caspian Sea basin, with the "Karashkanag" field being the exception because it is located in the northwest, close to 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 their 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 .

As for Turkmenistan, it is the leader in gas production in the region, with its reserves of approximately 2.1 trillion cubic meters, which is equivalent to 2.1% of global reserves, and what places it as the owner of the thirteenth largest gas reserves in the world. 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 meters [76, p.14] of gas. However, Turkmen citizens and Turkmen industries only consumed 15 billion cubic meters, 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 characterized by modesty, in accordance with the standards of the world; however, it is a candidate for high touch 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 tons of oil. Crude is in Turkmenistan's share of the Caspian Sea basin, and this 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 symbolized 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, p.78]. Iran's national security concerns and the fact that Azerbaijan has the largest economy among the countries of the South Caucasus.

It strengthens the development potential of economic cooperation that Iran and Azerbaijan, both of which border the Caspian Sea, and the membership of both countries in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), as well as other participants calling for regional cooperation, particularly in the fields of energy, trade, transportation and communications, and capacity building to strengthen cooperation [77, p.16].

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 monopolies the transportation of Azerbaijani oil via a line from Baku to the Russian port of Novorossiysk overlooking the Black Sea. However, the line was not designed to absorb and transport large quantities of oil, which would have allowed Russia to play the role it had hoped to play.

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 Sheraf Gunsli 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 and excluding Iran from initiatives to enhance energy security, including what some countries have started TAG The three (Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia) since 2006, from maneuvers and military training under the umbrella of NATO, [77, p.7] 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. 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.15].

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, p.71] 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, p.112]

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.

In the previous part of this article, we talked about Iran's relationships with the major players in the Caucasus region. This included nations that are physically located on the Caspian Sea as well as countries who are interested in capitalizing on the energy resources of the Caspian Sea.

In this section, we will talk about the relationship between cooperation and conflict that appears in the regional and international arena with regard to Iran about the Caspian Sea, and we will focus on how these dynamics play out in relation 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, p.27]

The fact that Iran has access to a variety of significant energy resources contributes to the region's already considerable geopolitical importance. There are considerable oil and gas deposits in Iran, in addition to huge quantities located in the Caspian Basin, which is home to some of the world's greatest oil and gas reserves. Iran's position as a major player on the international energy market and its substantial influence over both regional and global politics are both directly attributable to its access to the aforementioned resources.

Because of its location in the Caspian Basin, Iran has emerged as a significant figure in the politics of the surrounding region. Iran has been actively involved in the politics of the region for quite some time, and it has been instrumental in the formation

of the legal framework that governs the Caspian Sea. Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union in 1991, the five coastal republics of the Caspian Sea all came together to sign the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation. 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 favorable 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 neighbors. It would also assist to stabilize 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 recognized 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 epicenter 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 Organizations 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 Organizations that have carried out operations in Iran and other nations in the region. The Caspian region is home to a number of other terrorist Organizations 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, p.41].

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 neighbors 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].

The significance of Iran's position in the Caspian Basin for both local and international politics cannot be overstated. The Caspian Basin is a region that is extremely important economically and strategically, and the position that Iran has in the region has huge ramifications for the stability and safety of the surrounding area. Caspian Basin has the potential to be a major source of economic growth and development; however, in order to realize this potential, the countries of the region will need to cooperate with one another. This is despite the fact that the region is currently confronted with a variety of obstacles [86, p.69].

### **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, p.96].

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 resulted in tensions with neighboring Arab countries, which viewed Iran as a threat to their own security and stability and considered Iran as a potential aggressor in regional conflicts. 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 element, 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 analyzing 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, p.96].

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 neighbors, 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 neighborhood 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, p.96].

The third level of Iran's regional policy focuses on eliminating difficulties and divisions, which is perhaps most clearly demonstrated in its approach to the Palestinian Authority and the new Afghan government. This regional policy reflects Iran's flexibility in addressing needs and interests, often guided by pragmatic considerations. It occasionally contradicts the ideological and political slogans it officially promotes. To understand this, one can link Iran's regional policy to its "soft power" approach, which utilizes various tools for analyzing Iranian foreign policy, particularly at the regional level. One of the primary instruments of this approach is the media, with Iran's media empires being among the largest in Asia and the world. These media outlets play a vital role in Iran's diplomatic strategy. Iran also seeks to influence foreign policy by leveraging political Shiism and promoting anti-American and anti-Western rhetoric. However, some critics argue that Iran's soft power lacks significant impact. Iranian researcher Dr. Mohammad Reza Bajuh points out that Iran has not effectively utilized its soft power capabilities, which, if employed correctly in its foreign and diplomatic policies, could have a far greater influence in both regional and international systems. This raises the question of whether Iran can harness its international tools to expand its regional influence, particularly with countries in the Caspian region [146, p.58].

Iran attaches great strategic importance to the Caspian Sea region, especially after the Soviet Union's collapse in 1991, which led to the independence of several countries in the region. These nations, now partners in the sea's wealth, have altered the geopolitical dynamics surrounding the Caspian Sea. Prior to this, only Iran and the Soviet Union had access to its resources. As previously discussed, Iran's perspective on the Caspian Sea is shaped by three main factors:

First, the Caspian Sea holds significant economic value for Iran and is seen as a source of national pride for the country's future. Despite the substantial technical challenges involved in extracting oil and gas from the region, Iran views it as one of the richest oil basins in both Central Asia and the world. These challenges, however, do not diminish its importance in the Iranian perspective.

Second, there is a legal issue, as we have analyzed earlier regarding the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Iran seeks to establish an agreement that would facilitate joint exploitation of the sea's resources, particularly since Iran's sector of the Caspian Sea contains valuable deposits that are located at considerable depths, making extraction difficult. This poses a significant challenge, as the wealth in the Iranian sector is harder to access.

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, p.98]. 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 has more than one other location strategically privileged, can benefit from the Caspian Sea resources present and future, where Iran's geopolitical characterized in that its northern border up to the Sea of the Caspian and constitute the best crossing oil to the Arabian Gulf in the south, strategic aspirations of the current Iranian ambition to become the main carrier of Caspian oil through its lands to the Arabian Gulf, and achieving this goal would give Iran strategic importance and almost complete control over the Arabian Gulf, as it has a geographically network of roads and ports along the southern coast of Caspian Sea, and thus it will be a link to the rest of the countries that It has no sea ports, as Iran and Russia remain the two countries that have land and sea transport routes with 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, p.58].

- 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 neighbors 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 neighbors, 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, p.45].

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 kilometers 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 emphasized 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 prioritizing 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 recognizes 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 neighboring 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 endeavored to capitalize 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 neighboring 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 endeavor to attract the northern countries of Iran towards the Persian Gulf by utilizing 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 harbors 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 military bases. 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, p.96]. 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 Nakhichevan-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, characterized by many challenges, is a significant security concern for the countries within the European Union [155].

The importance of Iran's role, compared to Azerbaijan's, lies in the subtle but crucial influence of energy dynamics in shaping their bilateral relations. In 2001, Iran claimed its association with the "Alborz" region and asserted ownership over an oil field located within it, which Azerbaijan has been exploiting. The primary issue between the two nations centers on the exploitation of oil resources in the Caspian Sea. In response, Ali Akhaneh, the Assistant Minister of Iranian Foreign Affairs, summoned the Azerbaijani Chargé d'Affaires to Tehran, where he communicated Iran's position that it would not tolerate any harm to its interests. Moreover, the Iranian Ministry of Oil issued an official statement clarifying that any contract signed by foreign companies to engage in activities within the Iranian sector without proper authorization would be considered null and void. The statement further emphasized that Iranian authorities would take appropriate action against foreign companies involved in unauthorized oil extraction activities in this sector. Additionally, the Ministry declared its intention not to enter into contracts with companies that engage in such activities.

This ongoing tension between Iran and Azerbaijan is compounded by the issue of the Trans-Caspian pipeline. Since the late 1990s, the European Union has maintained that linking Turkmenistan's gas fields to Europe would bolster the continent's energy security, particularly in light of the growing threat from Russia. Negotiations to extend a pipeline from Turkmenistan through the Caspian Sea to Azerbaijan, and eventually to Turkey, began in the early 1990s, with the aim of reaching Europe. One key objective of the pipeline was to bypass Iran, thereby enhancing Azerbaijan's strategic position, both economically and militarily, in the Caspian Sea.

If the pipeline were to be redirected to pass through Iran, it would contribute to creating a more balanced regional dynamic. Such a shift would not only support Iranian-Turkish relations but also address the underlying tensions between Turkey and Azerbaijan, both of which are crucial to the success of the project. As a result, it is imperative to actively involve Iranian energy diplomacy within the broader context of President Hassan Rouhani's initiatives. By doing so, there is a potential to resolve the existing disputes between Iran and Azerbaijan. While economic considerations are central to fostering cooperation, it is unlikely that this will develop into a full-fledged partnership in the medium term, particularly given Azerbaijan's alignment with Western powers, which plays a significant role in the gradual easing of tensions between the two countries.

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 defenseless infant girl who was just three months old. He questioned the logic behind such a terrible loss and emphasized 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, p.30].

One of the earliest deaths to occur beyond the bounds of a battlefield was a somber 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 kilometers 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 defenses 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 utilizing 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 Defense declared that the missile strikes that were carried out on military installations and electrical systems were successful.

A agreement that outlined the legal status of the Caspian Sea was adopted by the heads of state of the Caspian coastline states, including Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan, four years earlier. The ratification of this convention came after 22 years of discussions. This historic Convention created principles that govern the rights and obligations of the parties for the utilization of the Caspian Sea, which

encompasses the sea's waters, seabed, resources, and the airspace above the sea. A consensus among the parties to use the sea only for nonviolent activities was assumed to be understood as having been expressed explicitly in the document [155].

Former Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev hailed the success of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea, saying that they had succeeded in turning the Caspian Sea into a sea of friendliness, at a meeting of the heads of state of the Caspian states that took place in Aktau four years ago. "We succeeded in turning the Caspian Sea into a sea of friendship," he said. A similar commitment can be found in Article 3 of the same convention, where the parties agree to "use the sea for peaceful purposes, turn it into a zone of peace, good neighborliness, friendship, and cooperation" [156]. Nazarbayev called this "sea of friendship" the basis for his comments.

During this gathering, the heads of state from various countries voiced their approval of the convention. Hassan Rouhani, the current president of Iran, was quoted as saying that it is essential to not only sign the treaty but also to effectively put it into practice. The pact was referred to as a "historical document" by the President of Azerbaijan, Ilham Aliyev, who also referred to the sea as a "zone of stability and security." Vladimir Putin, the President of Russia, referred to the agreement as a "epoch-making event" when he made the following statement: the convention "guarantees that the Caspian Sea will be used only for peaceful purposes" [157, p.78].

The Caspian Sea became a hotbed of international tensions as Russia made good on Putin's threat four years later by firing missiles into Ukraine. However, the coastal republics bordering the Caspian Sea reacted surprisingly unconcernedly to the events that took place.

Ukraine's foreign ministry issued a passionate plea after Russia launched a missile at the end of June, urging Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan to "exert every effort to compel Russia to uphold its international legal obligations, particularly under the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea." Russia is obligated by international law to fulfil the terms of this convention regarding the Caspian Sea.

The sixth Caspian Summit was held in Ashgabat, bringing together heads of state from Azerbaijan, Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan in anticipation of this announcement. The essential idea of reserving the use of the Caspian Sea exclusively for peaceful pursuits was reaffirmed in the official declaration that was issued following the summit. However, it is noteworthy that not a single one of the participating leaders brought up the subject of Russia's military presence in the Caspian.

"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, p.20]. 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 emphasizes 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, p.54]. 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. Caspian states are duty-bound to defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty of one another, abstain from deploying force against fellow members, and refrain from engaging in domestic matters, as described in the preceding paragraph. Remarkably, the Convention has only one clause on interactions with countries outside the region, highlighting how vital it is that armed forces from nations who are not members of the Caspian Treaty Organization remain away from the region [158, p.20].

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 emphasizes 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 emphasized 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, p.21]. 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 utilize 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, p.22].

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 Organizations that are governed by Russia. Kazakhstan's membership in the Collective Security Treaty Organization 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, p.23].

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 paralyzed with fear. Sometimes the interests of particular governments are prioritized 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, p.24].

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 neighbor Russia and its aspiring counterpart Azerbaijan.

At the same time, the powerful public criticism within Iran against the 2018 Aktau Agreement, which was signed in the city of Aktau in Kazakhstan, is considered as a catalyst prompting Tehran's heightened engagement in Caspian problems. Aktau was the location of the signing ceremony. In the past, beginning in 1920 and continuing all the way through 1991, Russia and Iran divided the Caspian Sea between themselves as a shared territory. Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, three new nations emerged along the Caspian Sea's coast: Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. These countries have all staked a claim to at least twenty percent of the water in the Caspian Sea. On the other hand, both Moscow and Tehran remained staunch in their adherence to the solutions that were developed during the time of the Soviet Union [164, p.15].

The difficulty of effectively identifying territorial boundaries among the coastal states was efficiently handled by the Aktau Agreement. The agreement, which was finally reached after about 22 years of discussion, participation from 52 dedicated working groups, and participation in 5 summits, allotted a span of 15 nautical miles as territorial waters for each of the states that are located along the Caspian shore. In addition to this, a unique fishing zone consisting of 10 nautical miles was allotted to each coastline nation. The remaining breadth of the sea was set aside as a public resource that can be utilized by all of the countries that have a coastline.

In spite of significant progress made in defining the boundaries of the Caspian Sea, the signatory parties were unable to come to an agreement on how to divide up the immense subterranean resources that lie beneath the seabed. Instead, they built a unique legal framework that was tailored to the Caspian Sea, which will make it easier to find a solution to this problem in the future through the ongoing conversations that are taking place. Due to the fact that the Caspian Sea does not conform to the typical delineations of either a sea or a lake, conventional international rules that are normally applicable to seas and lakes do not apply to the Caspian Sea. As a result, the Caspian Sea is not governed by these laws.

Iran and Russia demanded, for the sake of maintaining consensus, that any measures concerning an underground pipeline need the agreement of all five coastal governments, regardless of whether or not those nations were directly involved in the project. This strategic attitude allowed Iran and Russia to block the attempts of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan to develop pipelines, effectively allowing them a more major stake in the European energy market. 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 kilometers 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 practiced 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 maneuver in the 20% of the Caspian Sea that it claims as its own [166, p.123]. The maneuver took place only a few days later.

Moscow and Tehran's military ties have been particularly active in the Caspian region in recent years. Defense 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, p.25].

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. The former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan were under intense pressure from Iran and Russia in the years immediately following the collapse of the Soviet Union to fulfil commitments made while they were still a part of the USSR. Russia and Iran both made references to the 1991 Almaty Declaration. In this declaration, the aforementioned three countries, along with other countries that had survived the Soviet Union's collapse, committed to fulfilling the international obligations that had been left over from the Soviet era.

Moscow abandoned its initial strategy and instead prioritized bilateral deals with coastal nations after some time had passed. The change in Russian policy actually started long before the Aktau incident. Despite Iran's objections, in 2003, Russia, the Republic of Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan signed a tripartite agreement recognizing shared use of Caspian Sea waters and allocating 19%, 18%, and 27% of the seabed to each country [158, p.25]. 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 criticized 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, p.51].

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, p.280].

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.

An interview with Mohammad Javad Zarif, Iran's foreign minister at the time, was leaked in April 2021. Some long-held, closely guarded secrets between Moscow and Tehran were spilled in this explosive interview. He claims that Russia has done everything in its power to prevent the thawing of relations between Iran and the West, going so far as to try to sabotage the nuclear accord between Iran and the West. In addition, the interview disclosed that Vladimir Putin had urged General Qasem Soleimani to increase Iran's involvement in the Syrian war, despite the fact that doing so would benefit Russia more than Iran. This was the case even though it benefited Russia more than Iran [158, p.23].

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 criticize 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 neighbors [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, p.98].

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 meters. 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, p.65].

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 attracted<sup>1</sup>. 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, p.68].

The country has a total of about 10715 kilometers 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. One of the issues that arises with the domestic market is that the majority of the reserves and the majority of the oil production are concentrated in the west, whereas the majority of the market's users (big cities and industrial centers) are located in the industrial north and the industrial southeast. Because of the legacy left behind by the economic structure of the Soviet Union, oil that is produced in the West is shipped to global markets via Russia, while oil that is imported from Siberia is used to satisfy domestic demand in the East. However, the current pipelines were constructed decades ago and are meant to fulfil the goals of the old Soviet Union rather than the interests of Kazakhstan as an independent 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 project<sup>4</sup> 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, p.48].

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 tons per year, then it steadily rose up to a maximum of 67 million tones 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, p.85]. 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 Oman<sup>6</sup> each own 50% of the remaining shares [76, p.29]. 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, p.35].

There is a capacity of 200,000 barrels of oil per day and the pipeline stretches for 2,228 kilometers (1,384 miles). It starts in the Kazakh city of Atyrau and ends in the Chinese city of Alashankov in Xinjiang [76, p.45].

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, p.12].

In 2019, more than 10.88 million tons of crude oil were transported from Kazakhstan to China via the Kazakh-Chinese oil pipeline. The Gokalt Empire received over 130 million tons 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 tons of Caspian Sea-sourced petroleum hydrocarbons. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline will use three million tons, with the remaining one million being stored at the Kulevi terminal on Georgia's Black Sea [137, p.56].

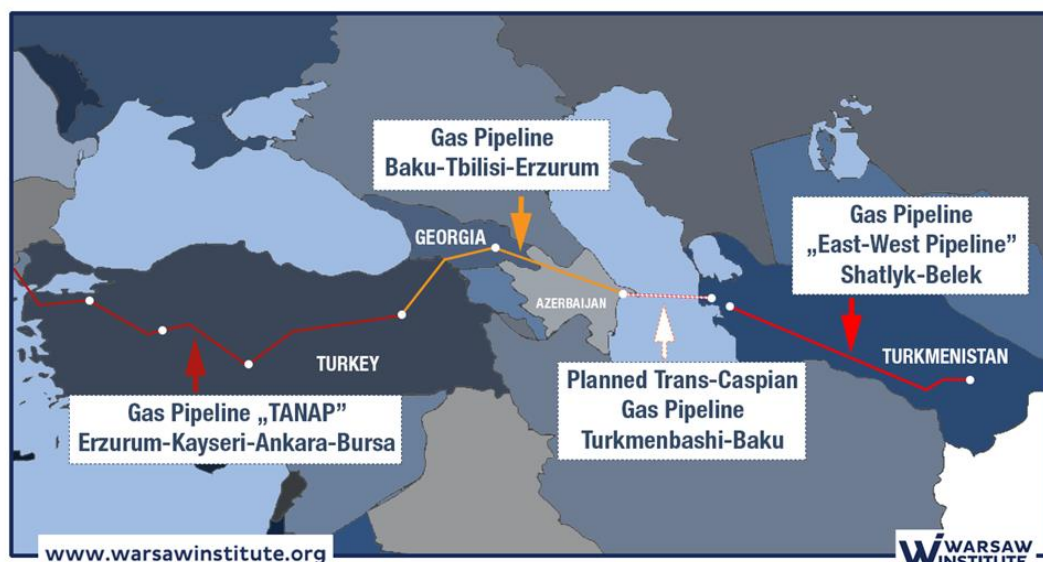


Figure 5 – Schemes of pipelines (Source: <https://warsawinstitute.org/caspian-summit-consequences-region/>)

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, p.61].

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, p.51].

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, p.31].

From January to July of this year, the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline transported 18,181.4 metric tons 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, p.21].

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 United States and the United Kingdom are directly involved in the construction of the first oil pipeline to cross Russia in the CIS. There was a major shift in the geopolitical standing of the various nations in the vast region encompassing Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea when these studies first got underway. If this doesn't happen, a significant amount of oil destined for delivery through Russia via the Baku-Novorossiysk pipeline will instead be transferred through Russia in an indirect fashion, reducing Russia's influence in the area. As a result of its actions in the Persian Gulf, the United States will gain access to a new source of oil and expand 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 Ceyhan<sup>13</sup> 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, p.32].

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, p.33].

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 tons 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 tons 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 tons of oil per year will be transported from Kazakhstan via the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route, beginning in January 2022 [137, p.49].

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-ton capacity of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium's pipeline system will be put to good use in the building of this endeavor. 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, p.51].

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 Kenkïyak 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, p.28].

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 tons 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 tons. This is 52% more or 1.5 times more than what was pumped via the pipeline the previous year. Kazakhstan transports 4 million tons of oil through Azerbaijan [157, p.29].

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 [175].

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 market<sup>20</sup>. 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, p.23].

The forecasts made by experts regarding the impact of sanctions on Russia were proven incorrect by the sanctions imposed by the Russian Federation on individuals and organizations involved in recognizing the independence of the Donetsk People's Republic (DNR) and Luhansk People's Republic (LNR), as well as Russia's occupation of Ukraine on February 24, 2022. During the Russo-Ukrainian war, Russian troops were deployed to Ukraine, leading to extensive sanctions targeting Russia's financial system, including the Central Bank and major banks, along with restrictions on the import and export of goods and services [156].

The sanctions stipulate that goods not originating from Russia, even if they transit through or are exported from Russia, will not be banned, as evidenced by the reprimanding of the Kazakh Pipeline Consortium. Shortly thereafter, the United States halted the import of oil and oil products from Russia, with the U.S. Treasury Department imposing restrictions on specific goods imported from Russia.

Moreover, on March 20, a severe storm in the Black Sea caused significant damage to the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) terminals in the Russian port of Novorossiysk, which resulted in an immediate reduction in the oil flow through the pipeline. There is also speculation that Russia, facing challenges in fully exporting its oil due to the sanctions imposed after its declaration of war on Ukraine, may have engaged in acts of sabotage against international oil operations originating from Kazakhstan.

Nikolay Gorban, the CEO of the Caspian Pipeline Consortium, confirmed that two oil wells in the port had malfunctioned, and the third unit would remain non-operational until it underwent inspection by divers. He stated that repairing the facilities would take at least two months, adding that the greatest difficulty was the inability of foreign companies to provide the necessary equipment due to the sanctions imposed on Russia. Despite a down payment made in December, the consortium had written to European manufacturers requesting the delivery of equipment for repairs; however, these manufacturers refused to provide the equipment, as previously indicated by the consortium [176].

Kazakh officials, however, have downplayed the situation, asserting that the damage to the infrastructure will not significantly affect oil shipments and that the damaged equipment would be restored more quickly than the consortium's executives had originally claimed. One of the previously inoperable pipes of the consortium has already resumed normal operations, according to Kazakhstan's Minister of Energy.

Analysts interviewed by the British Financial Times are skeptical 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, p.5]. 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 tons 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 centers, 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, p.18].

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 tons of oil via TBM and 12 million tons 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, utilize 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.

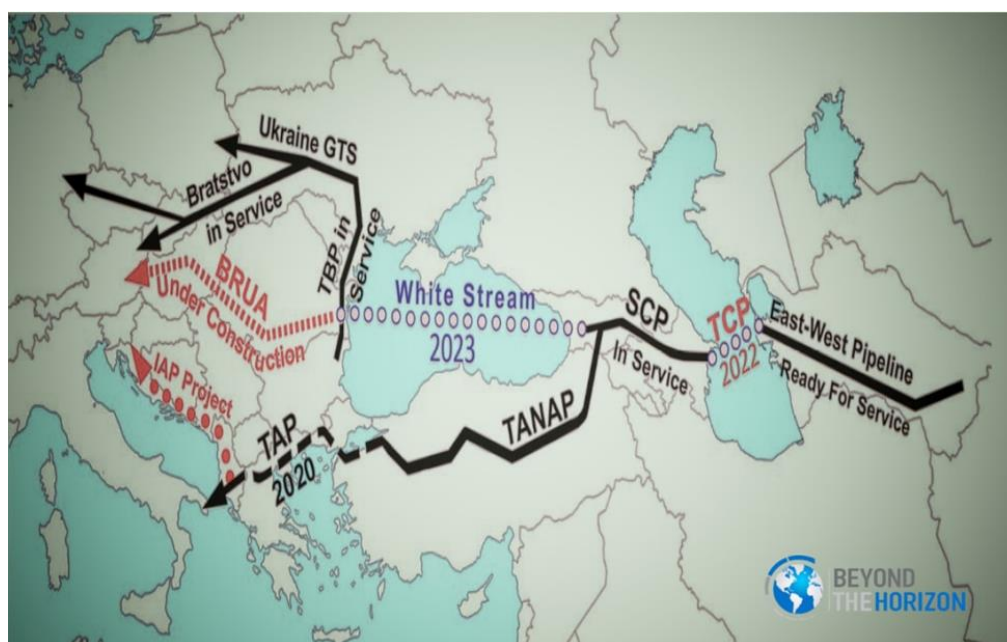


Figure 6 – Hydrocarbon routes from Central Asia (Source: <https://warsawinstitute.org/caspian-summit-consequences-region/>)

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 synchronization 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 (HBK), 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 is a strategically and economically significant region, and Iran's presence there has serious consequences for the safety and stability of the entire region. Caspian Basin has the potential to be a significant driver of regional economic growth and development despite numerous obstacles; however, regional countries will need to cooperate to realize this potential. Iran's presence in the Caspian Basin has far-reaching implications for both local and international politics.

### *Section Abstract*

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. However, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, disputes and disagreements arose among the newly independent states of Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Iran over the Caspian Sea's jurisdiction.

The legal status and resources of the Caspian Sea were heavily influenced by the collapse of the Soviet Union. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan all emerged as independent states, and this resulted in competition for the sea and its resources. Conflicts and tensions have arisen between the littoral states of the Caspian Sea because of the absence of an agreed legal framework for exploiting its resources. The situation has become even more complicated because of the Caspian Sea's rising significance in international energy markets.

For decades, the five countries bordering the Caspian Sea have argued over who has the rightful authority to determine the sea's legal status. Several treaties and declarations have dealt with this problem over the years, and in 2018 the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea was signed. While many of the lingering questions and concerns about the sea's legal status have been addressed by this convention, others remain. In order to address the concerns of external actors and the international community as a whole, it is crucial that the countries bordering the Caspian Sea continue to work together to ensure the sustainable management and conservation of the sea's resources.

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 recognized 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 presence in the Caspian Basin is crucial to the balance of power in the region and the world. The Caspian Basin is a strategically and economically significant region, and Iran's presence there has serious consequences for the safety and stability of the entire region. The countries of the Caspian Basin will need to cooperate in order

to fully realize the Caspian Basin's potential as a driver of economic growth and development, despite the region's many difficulties.

Despite the status of the Caspian Sea determined by the agreements, during the Ukrainian-Russian conflict, the Russian side actively uses the sea as a military foothold against Ukraine. And the Caspian countries, including Iran, do not intervene in this violation.

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: the Caspian Lake is limited: the application of the principle of division around the administrative regions, which was approved by the Soviet

Ministry of Petroleum Industry in 1970 AD) The position of Turkmenistan: constant change: defining the following areas: the regional from 12 to 15 nautical miles, the economic zone is 35 nautical miles, and the rest are 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 neighboring 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 lackluster 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 neighbors 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 Iskenderun 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 Iskenderun 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 favor 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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## APPLICATION A

President Aliyev, Rouhani, Nazarbayev, Putin, and Berdimuhamedow of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan respectively (L to R) attend the signing of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea in Aktau, Kazakhstan, August 12, 2018. (Sources: ALEXEI NIKOLSKY / Getty Images)



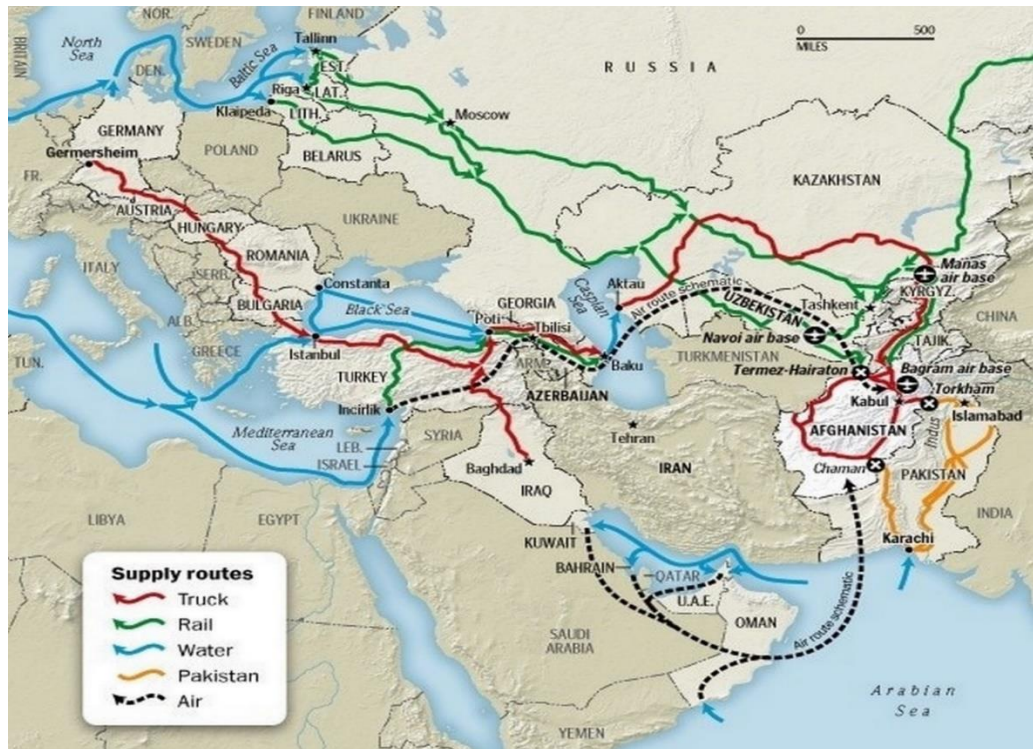
## APPLICATION B

President Aliyev, Rouhani, Nazarbayev, Putin, and Berdimuhamedow of Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan attend Caspian Sea Summit in Aktau, Kazakhstan, August 12, 2018.



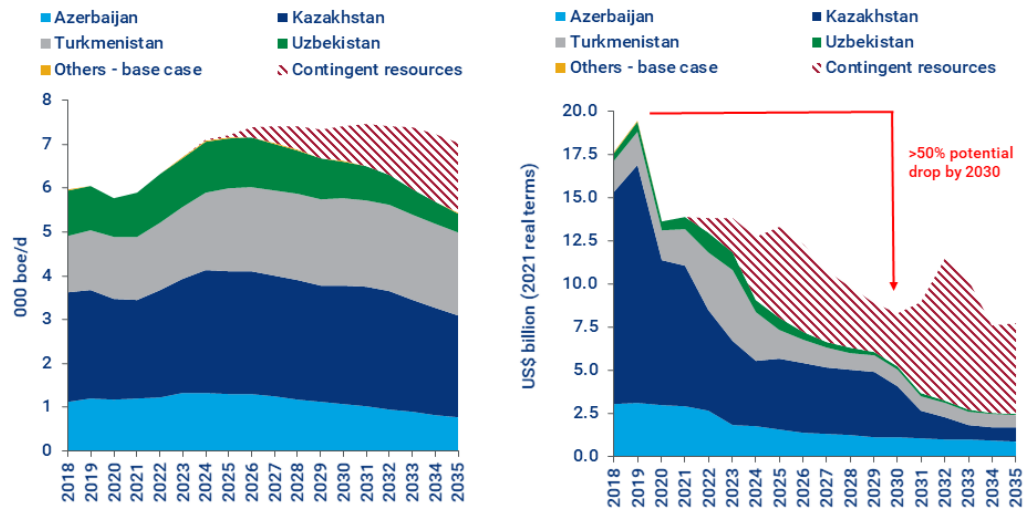
## APPLICATION C

Supply roads (Source: The Washington Post, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/a-logistics-miracle/2011/07/02/AGZDwnvH\\_graphic.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/national-security/a-logistics-miracle/2011/07/02/AGZDwnvH_graphic.html).)



## APPLICATION D

### Caspian region: liquids and gas production (LHS) and upstream development capex

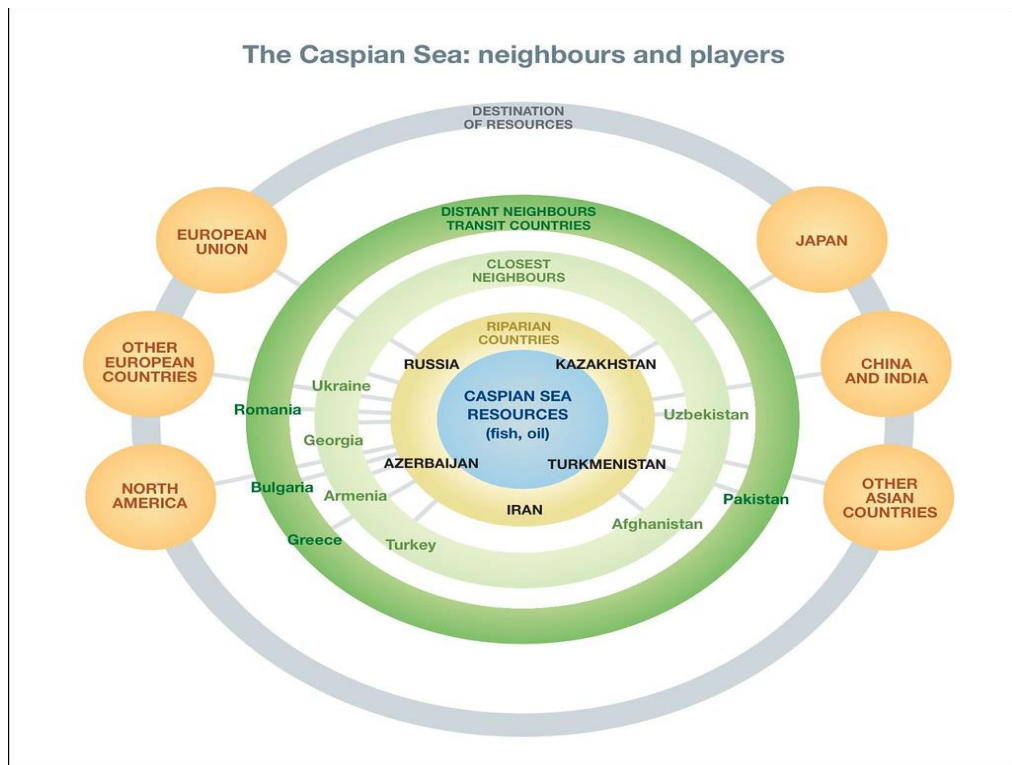


Source: Wood Mackenzie Lens Upstream. Upstream development capital expenditure excludes exploration, abandonment costs and midstream.

### Reports of Clashes as of May 13, 2021

## APPLICATION E

The Caspian Sea: neighbors and players (Source: le Monde Diplomatique  
<https://www.monde-diplomatique.fr/diplo/int/#Iran>)



## APPLICATION F

Caspian legal status alternatives (Sources: UNCLOS 1982, Chatham House 2005//)

| Cuntry              | oil<br>production<br>(million<br>meters per<br>day) | Oil<br>reserves<br>(billion<br>kilometers) | Gas<br>production<br>(billion<br>meters) | Gas<br>reserves<br>(trillion<br>cubic meters) |
|---------------------|---|--|--|---|
| <b>Russia</b>       | 9.7   | 108.2                                      | 762                                      | 32.9  |
| <b>Kazakhstan</b>   | 1.8   | 90   | 59.5                                     | 1.8   |
| <b>Iran</b>         | 3.8   | 153.2                                      | 280                                      | 34.0  |
| <b>Azerbaijan</b>   | 0.8   | 2.5  | 35                                       | 1.1   |
| <b>Turkmenistan</b> | 0.7   | 19.5                                       | 75                                       | 17.5  |

## APPLICATION G

Worlds oil resources Caspian legal status alternatives (Source: [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian\\_Sea](https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian_Sea))

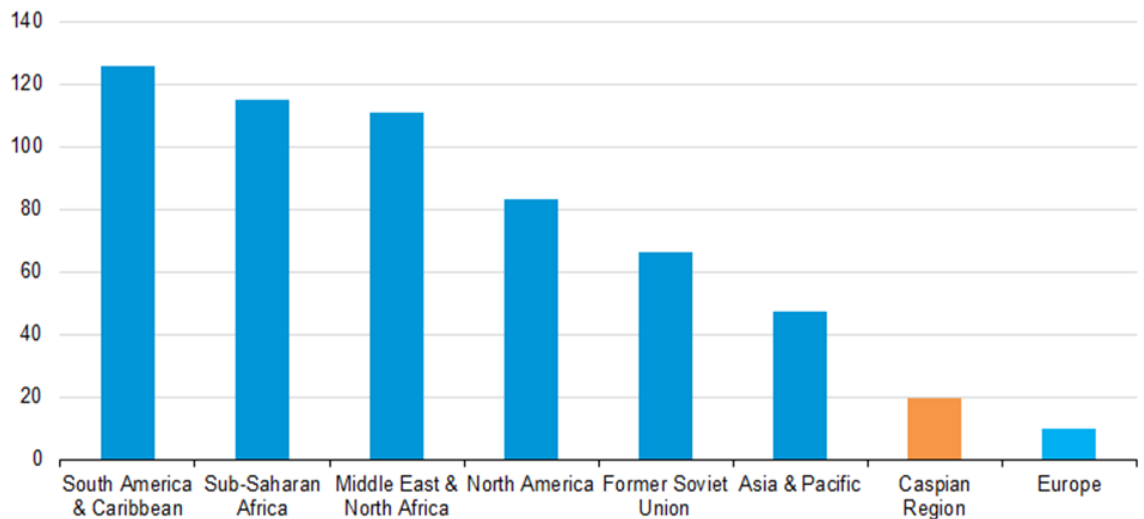
| Classification | Applicable regime  | Effect   |
|----------------|--|--|
| Sea            | United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982) | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coastal states have 'territorial sea', breadth not exceeding 12 miles, and continental shelf.</li> <li>- 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.'</li> <li>- Land-locked states (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) can claim right of access to high seas.</li> </ul> |
| Lake           | Customary international law governing border lakes         | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Border states regulate use of water through international agreements.</li> <li>- Each state has exclusive rights over resources and water surface in its national sector.</li> <li>- Lakes can be delimited several different ways, such as by coastal line or median line.</li> </ul>  |

## APPLICATION H

Caspian basins proved and probable reserves (Source: [https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/regions-of-interest/Caspian\\_Sea](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

## APPLICATION J

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  | Crude oil and lease condensate (billion bbl) | Natural gas (Tcf) |
|--|--|-------------------|
| <b>Azerbaijan</b>  | <b>8.5</b>                                   | <b>51</b>         |
| Offshore Caspian   | 6.8  | 46                |
| Onshore Caspian  | 1.7  | 5                 |
| <b>Iran</b>  | <b>0.5</b>                                   | <b>2</b>          |
| Offshore Caspian   | 0.5  | 1                 |
| Onshore Caspian  | (s)  | 1                 |
| <b>Kazakhstan</b>  | <b>31.2</b>                                  | <b>104</b>        |
| Offshore Caspian   | 15.7   | 36                |
| Onshore Caspian  | 15.5   | 68                |
| <b>Russia</b>  | <b>6.1</b>                                   | <b>109</b>        |
| Offshore Caspian   | 1.6  | 14                |
| Onshore Caspian  | 4.5  | 95                |
| <b>Turkmenistan</b>  | <b>1.9</b>                                   | <b>19</b>         |
| Offshore Caspian   | 1.1  | 9                 |
| Onshore Caspian  | 0.8  | 10                |
| <b>Uzbekistan</b>  | <b>(s)</b>                                   | <b>7</b>          |
| Offshore Caspian   | 0  | 0                 |
| Onshore Caspian  | (s)  | 7                 |
| <b>TOTAL CASPIAN</b>   | <b>48.2</b>                                  | <b>292</b>        |
| 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> |  |                   |

## APPLICATION K

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)

| <b>Country</b> | <b>Caspian offshore</b> | <b>onshore basin</b> | <b>Total Caspian production</b> | <b>Total country production</b> | <b>Caspian % of country total production</b> |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 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%  |

**APPLICATION L**  
Caspian summits

| <b>Country</b> | <b>Caspian offshore</b> | <b>onshore basin</b> | <b>Total Caspian production</b> | <b>Total country production</b> | <b>Caspian % of country total production</b> |
|----------------|-------------------------|----------------------|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| 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%   |

## APPLICATION M

Caspian Sea Region's major natural gas pipelines (Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: Türkiye, 2023.)

| Time   | Participants  | Results  |
|--|---|--|
| I Caspian Summit<br>April 23–24, 2002,<br>Ashgabat,<br>Turkmenistan. | Azerbaijan,<br>Turkmenistan, Iran,<br>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<br>Tehran on October<br>16, 2007.                  | Azerbaijan,<br>Turkmenistan, Iran,<br>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<br>November 18,<br>2010, in Baku.                 | Azerbaijan,<br>Turkmenistan, Iran,<br>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<br>Astrakhan,<br>September 29, 2014.               | Azerbaijan,<br>Turkmenistan, Iran,<br>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,<br>Aktau in 2018.                                  | Azerbaijan,<br>Turkmenistan, Iran,<br>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.   |

|  |  |  |
|--|--|--|
|  |  | <p>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.</p> |
| <p>VI Caspian Summit, Ashgabat on June 29, 2022.</p> | <p>Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Kazakhstan and Russia</p> | <p>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”.</p>  |

## APPLICATION N

Caspian Sea Region's major crude oil and condensate pipelines (Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, Country Analysis Brief: Türkiye, 2023)

| Facility<br>(status)   | Capacity<br>(Tcf/y)                  | Total<br>length<br>(miles)                          | Supply<br>regions                  | Destination  | Details   |
|--|--------------------------------------|---|------------------------------------|--|---|
| Central Asia-<br>Center/China<br>Pipeline (CAC)-<br>2,4,5, and 3<br>(Operating since<br>1969; CAC-1<br>retired)                  | 2: 2.1<br>3: 0.2<br>4: 2.1<br>5: 2.1 | 2:<br>1,650<br>3:<br>2,240<br>4:<br>2,300<br>5: N/A | Russia                             | Kazakhstan<br>and China via<br>Uzbekistan and<br>Turkmenistan            | Originally used to connect Turkmenistan to Russia. Now, relatively important in supplying China with natural gas. Notably, CAC flow reversed on two lines in October 2023 to supply Russia's natural gas to Uzbekistan from Kazakhstan. <sup>70</sup>             |
| Center Asia Gas<br>Pipeline<br>(CAGP) Line<br>A–C<br>(Operating since<br>2009; Line D<br>planned)                                | A and B:<br>0.5<br>C: 0.9<br>D: 1.1  | 1,140<br>each                                       | Turkmenistan                       | China via<br>Kazakhstan,<br>Tajikistan,<br>Kyrgyzstan,<br>and Uzbekistan | China helped finance the pipelines, including the latest Line 4, to gain access to Turkmenistan's natural gas. The Line D, one of China's main energy projects, will connect China to the Galkynysh natural gas field to China's Kyrgyzstan border. <sup>71</sup> |
| South Caucasus<br>Pipeline<br>(SCP)/Baku-<br>Tbilisi-Erzurum<br>Pipeline (BTE)<br>(Operating since<br>2007; expanded<br>in 2018) | 0.9<br>(originally<br>0.3)           | 430   | Shah Deniz<br>field,<br>Azerbaijan | Türkiye via<br>Georgia<br>(TANAP)  | It follows the route of the BTC oil pipeline from Azerbaijan through Georgia to the TANAP.  |
| Trans-Anatolian<br>Pipeline<br>(TANAP)<br>(Operating since<br>2019)  | 0.6                                  | 1,150   | Azerbaijan<br>(SCP)                | Türkiye and<br>Europe via<br>Greece (TAP)                                | It is Türkiye's longest pipeline. It will be a key entry point to Europe for the rest of the Caspian Basin countries on the   |

|   |     |     |                                |   |  |
|---|-----|-----|--------------------------------|---|--|
|   |     |     |                                |   | other side of the Caspian from Baku if the Trans Caspian pipeline is completed.  |
| Trans Adriatic Pipeline (TAP)<br>(Operating since 2020)         | 0.4 | 540 | Azerbaijan via TANAP and SCP   | Italy, Bulgaria (via IGB), and Southeast Europe | Construction is underway to expand to 0.7 Tcf capacity; it was built mainly to carry natural gas from Azerbaijan via the SCP expansion and TANAP. The Greece-Bulgaria bridge (IGB) was recently completed. <sup>72</sup> |
| Interconnector Türkiye-Bulgaria (ITB)<br>(Operating since 2022) | 0.1 | –   | Azerbaijan (via TAP and TANAP) | Bulgaria  | Bulgaria has been importing more natural gas from Azerbaijan instead of from Russia, which was previously its nearly sole source. <sup>73</sup>  |
| East-West Pipeline<br>(Operating since 2015)                    | 1.1 | 480 | Mary Province, Turkmenistan    | Balkan Province near Türkmenbaşy, Turkmenistan  | Connects all the major natural gas fields in Turkmenistan also supplying natural gas to the central and Caspian regions, and potentially connects a Trans-Caspian Pipeline to Azerbaijan for access to greater Europe.   |
| Trans-Caspian Pipeline (TCGP)<br>(Proposed)                     | 1.1 | 190 | Türkmenbaşy, Turkmenistan      | Baku, Azerbaijan                                | The estimated \$5 billion pipeline would connect Turkmenistan's large natural gas reserves to Europe.  |
| Note: Tcf/y=trillion cubic feet per year; (–) = not applicable  |     |     |                                |   |  |

## APPLICATION P

| Facility (status)   | Capacity (Tcf/y) | Total length (miles) | Supply regions  | Destination                               | Details   |
|---|------------------|----------------------|---|---|---|
| Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC)   | 1.4              | 940                  | Tengiz, Kashagan, and Karachaganak fields, Kazakhstan | Novorossiysk, on Russia's Black Sea coast | A less favored trade route since sanctions were imposed on Russia following Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine. <sup>74,75</sup>                             |
| Kazakhstan-China Pipeline   | 0.4              | 1,380                | Kumkol oil field, Kazakhstan                          | China                                     | Preliminary plans exist to expand the Kenkiyak-Kiumkol section of the pipeline. <sup>76</sup>   |
| Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) (Operating since 2006)  | 1.2              | 1,100                | Baku, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan                       | Türkiye to Ceyhan oil port                | It currently primarily carries ACG crude oil and Shah Deniz condensate. <sup>77</sup> It is used as an alternative for Russia's oil and infrastructure to Europe. |
| Baku-Novorossiysk Pipeline (Northern Route Export Pipeline) (Operating since 1996)  | 0.1              | 825                  | Sangachal terminal, near Baku, Azerbaijan             | Novorossiysk, on Russia's Black Sea coast | A less favored trade route since sanctions were imposed on Russia.  |
| <p>Note: b/d=barrels per day</p> <p><sup>a</sup>Flows to the Ceyhan port were disrupted in 2023 because of earthquake damage and weather disruptions.</p> |                  |                      |   |   |   |