

Theoretical and Conceptual Basis of The Geostrategic Relationship Between Central Asia And the South Caucasus In the Context of Global Geopolitical Transformations

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Abstract: This article examines the theoretical and conceptual foundations of the geostrategic interconnectedness between Central Asia and the South Caucasus amid ongoing global geopolitical transformations. The transition from a unipolar to a multipolar international system, increasing geo-economic competition, the restructuring of transport corridors, and growing concerns over energy security have significantly strengthened functional interdependence between these two regions.

Keywords: Central Asia, South Caucasus, geopolitics, geostrategy, geo-economics, regional security, Middle Corridor, connectivity.

Introduction: By the third decade of the twenty-first century, the international system has entered a period of profound geopolitical transformation. The transition from a unipolar to an increasingly multipolar international order, the intensification of geoeconomic competition, the reconfiguration of global supply chains, and the growing strategic significance of transport and communication corridors have substantially reshaped the geopolitical landscape of Eurasia. Within this evolving context, Central Asia and the South Caucasus have emerged not merely as distinct regional entities but as an interconnected geostrategic space.

In recent years, the development of trans-Caspian transport corridors linking East and West, the diversification of energy infrastructure, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the European Union's Global Gateway strategy, Türkiye's transport diplomacy, and Uzbekistan's open and pragmatic foreign policy have collectively elevated the strategic interdependence between these two regions to a qualitatively new level. Nevertheless, the existing body of scholarly literature continues to examine Central Asia and the South

Caucasus primarily as separate geopolitical spaces. Such an approach fails to fully capture the complex and networked nature of contemporary international relations. Under current conditions, expanding cooperation in transport, energy, security, digital infrastructure, and geoeconomic connectivity is transforming these regions into a single functional geostrategic system.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Establishing the geostrategic interconnectedness of Central Asia and the South Caucasus requires, first and foremost, an examination of the evolution of both classical and contemporary geopolitical theories. The position of these two regions within the international system has been interpreted through diverse conceptual frameworks that have evolved over time.

Among the founders of classical geopolitics, Halford Mackinder conceptualized Eurasia as the pivotal geopolitical space of world politics through his Heartland Theory [1]. According to Mackinder, the power that controls Eastern Europe commands the Heartland, while the power that controls the Heartland gains the ability to dominate the World Island. Within

this framework, Central Asia is regarded as the geopolitical core, whereas the South Caucasus is primarily viewed as a transit zone linking the Heartland with the Rimland.

However, Mackinder's model exhibits certain limitations in the context of the twenty-first century. Contemporary geostrategic influence is no longer determined solely by territorial control but increasingly by transport corridors, logistics networks, energy routes, digital infrastructure, and patterns of geoeconomic interdependence. Consequently, there is a growing need to conceptualize Central Asia and the South Caucasus as a unified functional geostrategic system rather than as separate geopolitical entities.

In contrast, Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory identifies the coastal belt surrounding Eurasia as the principal arena of global geopolitics [2]. From this perspective, the South Caucasus is positioned closer to the Rimland, whereas Central Asia remains part of the continental interior. Nevertheless, the emergence of trans-Caspian transport networks and expanding East–West connectivity has significantly altered this classical geopolitical division under contemporary geoeconomic conditions.

Saul Cohen's theory of geostrategic regions provides a more flexible analytical framework by conceptualizing Eurasia as a system of interconnected geostrategic regions rather than as a collection of rigid geographical units [3]. Cohen's approach offers an important methodological foundation for the present study because it interprets geopolitical regions as functional rather than strictly territorial spaces.

Despite their enduring significance, classical geopolitical theories remain predominantly grounded in the logic of territorial control and therefore inadequately explain the functional interconnectedness that characterizes the contemporary era of globalization and transregional integration.

By the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, the scope of geopolitical analysis had expanded considerably. Increasing complexity within the international system shifted scholarly attention toward geoeconomics, energy networks, logistics, and institutional cooperation as key determinants of interstate relations.

The theory of Complex Interdependence, developed by Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, argues that relations among states are shaped not only by military capabilities but also by economic, technological, and institutional interdependence [4]. This theoretical perspective provides an important methodological foundation for understanding the relationship between

Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Nevertheless, while the model effectively explains global interdependence, it offers only limited insight into the specific mechanisms underpinning transregional geostrategic integration.

Another influential framework for interpreting the relationship between Central Asia and the South Caucasus is the Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT) developed by Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver [5]. According to this theory, security threats emerge and evolve within geographically proximate regions, creating patterns of mutual dependence among neighboring states. Consequently, the security policies of states within a region exert a direct influence on one another. However, Buzan and Wæver classify Central Asia and the South Caucasus as two distinct regional security complexes, thereby overlooking the growing functional interdependence that has emerged between them in the contemporary geopolitical environment.

In twenty-first-century geopolitics, economic instruments have increasingly acquired a strategic dimension. Edward Luttwak conceptualizes geoeconomics as a strategy through which states employ economic instruments to achieve geopolitical objectives [6]. Today, Central Asia and the South Caucasus are becoming progressively integrated through such initiatives as the Middle Corridor, TRACECA, the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), the Southern Gas Corridor, and the China–Europe multimodal transport network. Consequently, these regions should be examined not only from political and military perspectives but also as an integrated geoeconomic system.

Alexander Wendt emphasizes the role of identity and ideational factors in shaping international relations [7]. According to his constructivist approach, state interests are not fixed but are socially constructed through interaction and shared norms. Recent developments—including the activities of the Organization of Turkic States, multilateral cooperation in the Caspian region, the Consultative Meetings of the Heads of State of Central Asia, and the Azerbaijan–Central Asia Summits—indicate the gradual emergence of a shared interregional strategic identity. This suggests that the geostrategic interconnectedness of Central Asia and the South Caucasus rests not only on material factors but also on institutional and ideational foundations.

A critical assessment of the existing literature leads to several conclusions.

First, classical geopolitical theories primarily emphasize territorial control as the principal determinant of geopolitical power.

Second, the theory of Complex Interdependence

effectively explains economic and institutional linkages but does not fully account for the broader dynamics of contemporary geostrategic transformation.

Third, the Regional Security Complex Theory continues to conceptualize Central Asia and the South Caucasus as separate regional systems.

Fourth, although geoeconomic studies extensively examine transport corridors and connectivity initiatives, they have yet to develop a comprehensive theoretical framework for explaining the ongoing process of geostrategic integration.

Against the backdrop of contemporary global geopolitical transformations, Central Asia and the South Caucasus should no longer be viewed as separate geopolitical regions. Rather, they are evolving into a unified transregional geostrategic space, functionally interconnected through security cooperation, geoeconomic integration, transport and logistics networks, energy connectivity, digital infrastructure, and expanding institutional cooperation.

METHODOLOGY

The methodological framework of this study is grounded in the systemic, multidisciplinary, and multi-level analytical approaches widely employed in contemporary political science, international relations, and geopolitical research. Explaining the evolving geostrategic interconnectedness between Central Asia and the South Caucasus under conditions of ongoing global geopolitical transformation cannot be adequately achieved through a single theoretical perspective. Accordingly, this study adopts an integrated analytical framework that combines several complementary theoretical approaches, including neorealism, Complex Interdependence Theory, Regional Security Complex Theory (RSCT), geoeconomic analysis, and constructivism. This theoretical synthesis enables a more comprehensive examination of the political, economic, security, and ideational dimensions of the emerging transregional geostrategic space.

RESULTS

A review of the existing literature indicates that scholarly research has predominantly examined relations between Central Asia and the South Caucasus through the lenses of transport corridors, energy policy, or great-power competition. While these approaches have provided valuable insights into specific dimensions of interregional interaction, they have not produced a comprehensive theoretical framework capable of conceptualizing the two regions as a single geostrategic system. Against the backdrop of ongoing global geopolitical transformations, however,

the nature of relations between Central Asia and the South Caucasus has entered a qualitatively new stage. Consequently, these regions should no longer be analyzed merely as geographically adjacent areas or transit spaces, but rather as an integrated geostrategic space characterized by multidimensional functional interdependence.

Building upon this premise, the present study proposes the Concept of Transregional Geostrategic Interdependence.

Transregional geostrategic interdependence refers to the stable functional interconnectedness that emerges between two or more geographically adjacent regions—or regions linked through transport and communication networks—on the basis of shared security dynamics, geoeconomic relations, energy connectivity, logistics systems, digital infrastructure, political institutions, and converging strategic interests within the context of global geopolitical transformation.

The geostrategic interconnectedness between Central Asia and the South Caucasus comprises six principal dimensions:

1. Security interdependence;
2. Geoeconomic interdependence;
3. Transport and communication interdependence;
4. Energy interdependence;
5. Institutional interdependence; and
6. Strategic identity interdependence.

The principal contribution of this conceptual framework lies in its interpretation of Central Asia and the South Caucasus not as two separate geopolitical regions, but as an interconnected geostrategic macrosystem. Unlike classical geopolitical theories, this approach integrates geoeconomic processes, institutional cooperation, and networked security into a unified analytical model, thereby providing a more comprehensive framework for understanding the evolving dynamics of transregional geostrategic integration.

Since the second decade of the twenty-first century, geopolitical developments within the international system have accelerated the fundamental reconfiguration of the global political order. The relative decline of the unipolar international order, the growing prominence of multipolarity, and the intensification of geoeconomic competition have redefined the strategic significance of regions within the evolving architecture of international relations.

As a consequence of these transformations, geostrategic advantage is no longer determined solely

by military capabilities or territorial control. Instead, it increasingly depends on the capacity to develop and control transport and communication infrastructure, logistics networks, energy resources, digital technologies, and the degree of integration into international economic networks.

Within this changing geopolitical environment, Central Asia and the South Caucasus are gradually evolving from two separate geopolitical regions into a single functional geostrategic space.

The principal driver of this transformation is not merely geographical proximity but the new logic of global political and economic processes. In the contemporary international system, strategic influence is increasingly derived from the ability to shape and control transport flows, energy corridors, and global supply chains.

Accordingly, the relationship between Central Asia and the South Caucasus is more appropriately understood through the framework of functional geostrategic integration rather than the conventional model of geographical neighborhood. From this perspective, ongoing global geopolitical transformations are elevating the geostrategic status of Central Asia and the South Caucasus from that of separate regional entities to an interconnected transregional system.

The continued expansion of the global economy has transformed international transport corridors into one of the principal arenas of geopolitical competition. Today, a state's strategic influence increasingly depends on the extent of its integration into international logistics networks and transcontinental connectivity systems.

One of the principal drivers of the geostrategic interconnectedness between Central Asia and the South Caucasus is the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (TITR), commonly referred to as the Middle Corridor. This corridor provides a strategic overland connection between China and European markets through Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Türkiye.

The Middle Corridor performs several critical strategic functions simultaneously. It:

- diversifies international freight transport routes;
- enhances the resilience of global supply chains;
- reduces dependence on traditional maritime shipping routes;
- accelerates the economic integration of the Eurasian interior; and
- expands Central Asia's access to international markets despite its landlocked geography.

In addition, the TRACECA initiative, the Baku–Tbilisi–

Kars Railway, and multimodal logistics networks across the Caspian Sea have further strengthened the geostrategic convergence of Central Asia and the South Caucasus.

In the contemporary international system, transport corridors should no longer be regarded merely as logistical infrastructure projects but as strategic instruments of geopolitical influence [8]. The ability to shape and manage major transport flows provides states with significant leverage over regional economic processes and patterns of connectivity. From this perspective, the development of transport and communication infrastructure linking Central Asia and the South Caucasus constitutes the material foundation of their functional geostrategic integration. Rather than being simply an outcome of geostrategic interdependence, transport and communication corridors represent one of its principal driving forces.

CONCLUSION

Ongoing global geopolitical transformations are fundamentally reshaping the structural and functional foundations of the international system. The emergence of a multipolar international order, the intensification of geoeconomic competition, the diversification of transport and communication corridors, growing concerns over energy security, and rapid digital transformation are collectively generating a new geostrategic configuration across Eurasia. Within this evolving environment, the international position of Central Asia and the South Caucasus is being redefined, with both regions increasingly emerging as an interconnected transregional geostrategic space.

This study comparatively examined major classical and contemporary geopolitical theories in order to assess their explanatory capacity with respect to the evolving geostrategic relationship between Central Asia and the South Caucasus. The analysis demonstrates that Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Nicholas Spykman's Rimland Theory, Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye's Complex Interdependence Theory, Barry Buzan and Ole Wæver's Regional Security Complex Theory, and contemporary geoeconomic approaches each illuminate important aspects of this process. However, none of these theoretical perspectives provides a comprehensive conceptual framework capable of explaining Central Asia and the South Caucasus as a unified geostrategic system.

To address this conceptual gap, the article advances the Concept of Transregional Geostrategic Interdependence. According to this framework, the geostrategic interconnectedness of Central Asia and the South Caucasus extends beyond geographical proximity and is constituted through multidimensional

linkages in security, geoeconomics, transport and communication, energy connectivity, institutional cooperation, and digital infrastructure. This conceptualization shifts geopolitical analysis from the traditional paradigm of territoriality toward a functional paradigm centered on interdependence and connectivity.

The findings further indicate that transport and communication corridors—particularly the Trans-Caspian International Transport Route (Middle Corridor)—together with geoeconomic integration, energy cooperation, and digital infrastructure constitute the principal determinants of geostrategic interdependence between Central Asia and the South Caucasus. The interaction of these factors contributes to strengthening regional stability, diversifying international supply chains, and fostering new patterns of economic connectivity across the Eurasian space.

In conclusion, the findings confirm that Central Asia and the South Caucasus should no longer be regarded as separate geopolitical regions but rather as an integrated transregional geostrategic system emerging under the influence of contemporary global geopolitical transformations. Beyond contributing to the theoretical development of political science and international relations, the proposed conceptual framework offers a valuable methodological foundation for assessing the long-term strategic priorities of Uzbekistan's foreign policy within the evolving geopolitical landscape of Eurasia.

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