

SECURITY STRATEGIES AND THE ROLE OF EXTERNAL ACTORS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF GEORGIA, ARMENIA, AND AZERBAIJAN

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Abstract. This study examines the South Caucasus within the context of the strategic interests of global and regional powers, assessing how the agreement signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the United States in 2025, along with the evolving interdependence among external actors, creates a new strategic reality in the region. The relevance of the research is determined by the radical transformation of the regional security environment, the weakening of the Russia–Armenia strategic partnership, Azerbaijan’s growing independence, challenges associated with energy and transit interests, and the increasing involvement of the United States, the European Union, Turkey, Iran, and China. These factors generate a multidimensional spectrum of challenges that significantly affect the security policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The aim of the study is to analyze security strategies in the South Caucasus and to assess how the shifting interdependence of external actors, in the aftermath of the 2025 Armenia–Azerbaijan agreement signed in the United States, influences national security policies and the regional security architecture of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The theoretical framework is grounded in the theory of global interdependence, which explains how the interests and interactions of external actors shape the security policies and strategic decisions of regional states. The methodology combines qualitative analysis, document review, comparative assessment of data from international organizations, and an analysis of the dynamics of regional developments.

The novelty of the research lies in the systematic analysis of the new patterns of interdependence among external actors in the post-2025 period and the evaluation of their impact on the regional security structure. The findings demonstrate that multidimensional external competition is generating a new strategic reality, shaping the direction of future policies, and providing a more comprehensive and holistic understanding of the security dynamics in the South Caucasus.

Keywords: South Caucasus; security strategies; external actors; Georgia; Armenia; Azerbaijan; Turkey; European Union; Russia; regional security.

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Introduction. The South Caucasus historically and geopolitically has represented one of the most strategic regions, where the interests of global and regional powers—Russia, Turkey, the European Union, the

United States, Iran, and China-constantly intersect (Shengelia, 2022). The security policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are closely linked to multiple factors, including occupied territories, the transit significance of energy resources, geostrategic location, institutional characteristics of governance, and shifts in the balance of power within the international system. The agreement signed between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the United States in 2025 generated significant regional dynamics and revealed changes in the interdependence of external actors. These transformations are reshaping the regional strategic balance, influencing the security policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, and necessitating a reconsideration of security structures. U.S. engagement, the strategic interests of the European Union and Turkey, Iran's regional influence, and China's economic and infrastructural initiatives together create a multidimensional environment that determines future political and security decisions. The United States aims to strengthen the linkage between the South Caucasus and Central Asia, seeking to establish a distinct sphere of influence that effectively excludes Russia and Iran (Carafano, 2025). At the same time, the primary objective of U.S. involvement should be the creation of a multipolar and balanced regional environment in which no single external power holds dominance. (Mammadov, 2024, January 30).

Iran perceives the South Caucasus as a strategic buffer, the stability of which directly affects its own security (Rashidi, 2023). China's interests in the South Caucasus are multifaceted, encompassing economic, political, and strategic dimensions. Its growing engagement in the region contributes to the implementation of the *Belt and Road Initiative*, while at the same time intensifying geopolitical competition and influence, which significantly affect regional dynamics and security issues (Chinese, 2020).

The three South Caucasus states-Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia-are striving to position themselves strategically within the new dynamics, safeguard their national interests, and enhance their independence (Huseynov, 2024). These changes are creating a new strategic reality in the region, where the security strategies of the countries respond in different ways to the interests of external actors and the geopolitical positions of neighboring states.

The aim of this study is to examine security strategies in the South Caucasus and to assess how shifts in the interdependence of external actors in the post-2025 period influence the national security policies and regional security architecture of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, with a primary focus on the states' strategies and the role of external actors.

The research questions are as follows:

1. How has the interdependence among external actors (the United States, the European Union, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and China) evolved in the South Caucasus in the contemporary period?
2. What strategic reality emerges in the region against the backdrop of the new dynamics of external actors?
3. How can the South Caucasus states enhance the systemic resilience of their national security under the new conditions?

This study represents an effort to strengthen sustainable strategic perspectives in the field of security in the South Caucasus and to develop an integrated geostrategic analysis that provides a comprehensive and holistic understanding of the ongoing processes in the region.

Literature Review

The security architecture of the South Caucasus is characterized by the diversity and competition of external actors' interests, which is extensively highlighted in existing studies. Shengelia (Shengelia, 2022) notes that the region is largely defined by the confrontation between Russia and the West, which significantly influences Georgia's strategic choices. Cornell (Cornell, 2021) and Fontaine (Fontaine, 2023) emphasize Armenia's efforts to reduce its dependence on Russia and to develop relations with the European Union,

despite the process being fraught with challenges. Neset et al. (Neset, 2023) highlight Azerbaijan's "balancing policy," which is based on a strategic alliance with Turkey while maintaining cooperative relations with both the West and Russia.

Several authors also note China's growing role in the South Caucasus, particularly in the context of the Karabakh conflict, where it actively promotes economic and infrastructural projects, thereby strengthening its influence in the region (Chinese, 2020). According to Avdaliani (Avdaliani, 2025) following the resolution of the Karabakh conflict, a power vacuum emerged in the South Caucasus, providing China with the opportunity to enhance its political and trade relations in the region.

At the same time, Iran's role gains particular significance in the context of transport and energy projects. As Rashidi (Rashidi, 2023) notes, the development of the *Middle Corridor* represents a dual phenomenon for Iran: on one hand, it creates economic opportunities to deepen regional integration, while on the other hand, it introduces geopolitical risks by increasing competition with Turkey and Azerbaijan. The author also emphasizes that Iran takes a strongly negative stance toward the Zangezur Corridor, perceiving it as a direct threat to its national security. This position aligns with assessments by other researchers who view Iran's role in the region as simultaneously a balancing factor and a source of instability (Kouhi-Esfahani, 2019; Huseynov, 2024).

According to Akhvlediani (Akhvlediani, 2024) the onset of Russia's war against Ukraine (2022) not only altered Europe's security architecture but also transformed the relations between the European Union and the South Caucasus. Security has become a key determinant in the economic and foreign policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The main contribution of this study lies in its aim to examine how the changes in the interdependence of external actors in the post-2025 period create a new strategic reality in the South Caucasus and to analyze how the multifaceted interests of external actors impact the security policies and regional strategies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Theoretical Framework

This study employs the theory of global interdependence, which explains how the interests and interrelations of external actors shape the security policies and strategic decisions of regional states (Keohane, 1977). The theory emphasizes that the strategic choices of regional states are directly linked to the parallel and sometimes conflicting dynamics of the multifaceted interests of major powers—the United States, the European Union, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and China. This approach provides an analytical framework for assessing how shifts in the interdependence of external actors generate a new strategic reality in the South Caucasus and how this, in turn, influences the national security policies and regional structures of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

Research Methodology

This study employs a qualitative comparative approach to assess the influence and interrelations of external actors on the security policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan in the post-2025 period. Document analysis enables the examination of external actors' policies, strategic initiatives, and formal relations within the region. Expert interviews, conducted with researchers, policymakers, and representatives of international organizations working in the field of regional security, provide a real and in-depth perspective on the strategies of external actors and regional developments. The collected data are utilized in comparative analysis to investigate the differing responses of the countries to external influences. Triangulation (integration of multiple data sources) enhances the reliability and validity of the research findings.

Main Discussion

The Role of External Actors and the Nuances of "Dependence" in Security Strategies

The South Caucasus region geopolitically represents a significant intersection of major powers' interests. The national security strategies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan are closely linked to external actors, with varying degrees of dependence on each. Regional analysts note that the countries' differing responses to external influences often prove decisive for the effectiveness of their security strategies. Such dependence should not be interpreted solely as a threat or challenge; it can also be viewed as an opportunity, enabling regional states to advance their security interests through the resources and support of external partners. At the same time, the conflicting interests of external powers create complex strategic dilemmas, limiting the freedom of foreign and security policy choices for South Caucasus states and introducing additional risks to the protection of their sovereignty.

The security strategies of the South Caucasus states are largely shaped by the interests of external actors and the interdependence among them. According to experts, the strategic initiatives of external actors directly influence the political and security decisions of the three countries. The United States, the European Union, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and China not only exert economic and military influence but also directly shape institutional and strategic decisions in regional policy. For example, increased U.S. engagement in the South Caucasus could contribute to stability, regional cooperation, and the reinforcement of the strategic balance (Carafano, 2025; Mammadov, 2024, January 30). The European Union's role is particularly evident in conflict management and strengthening state resilience (Deen, 2023), while its strategic objectives in the region include the South Caucasus energy and transport corridors connecting Europe and Asia (Akhvlediani, 2024; Placzek, 2017).

China perceives the South Caucasus as a continuation of Central Asia and seeks to develop its economic and infrastructural ties in the region. At the same time, Beijing aims to fill the vacuum left by Russia in the context of the war in Ukraine (Avdaliani, 2025; Chinese, 2020). China's engagement encompasses not only economic projects but also the security sector, including counterterrorism efforts and intelligence gathering (Agency, 2019). Iran's strategy in the region is more oriented toward balancing and flexible alliances, aiming to avoid overdependence on any single power while maintaining its own influence (Rashidi, 2023).

In this context, the foreign policies of the South Caucasus states can be characterized as multi-vector, with each country seeking to balance the interests of the United States, Russia, China, and other regional actors (Avdaliani, 2025). The concept of "dependence" in this study reflects how national security policies are linked to the initiatives, constraints, and support of external powers. This dependence can take multiple forms—military, economic, diplomatic, or institutional. For example, Georgia's security policy largely relies on NATO and U.S. engagement, whereas the strategic choices of Armenia and Azerbaijan depend on agreements with the European Union and the United States, as well as on regional projects.

Dependence on external powers does not merely constitute mechanical adaptation. It encompasses strategic creativity, whereby states seek to optimally leverage the interests of external actors to strengthen their security, mitigate threats, and enhance strategic autonomy. At the same time, competition among different external actors creates a multi-layered and dynamic strategic environment, in which elements of cooperation and confrontation coexist.

Ultimately, the post-2025 Armenia–Azerbaijan agreement clearly demonstrates that changes in the interdependence of external actors directly impact regional security and shape the strategic choices of the South Caucasus states. Accordingly, the concept of "dependence" in national security strategies entails not only responding to external pressures but also engaging in multi-front strategic planning that ensures the protection of national interests, effective management of external influence, and the enhancement of regional resilience.

The Influence of External Actors on South Caucasus Security Strategies

The role of external actors in the security policies of South Caucasus states is multifaceted, encompassing both positive and negative dimensions. The involvement of external powers in the region shapes security guarantees, as well as economic and diplomatic frameworks, while simultaneously creating strategic dependencies and conflict dynamics that pose challenges for the regional states (Shengelia, 2022).

The Russian Federation remains one of the main strategic actors in the South Caucasus. Its influence manifests negatively through efforts to maintain control and exert influence, including the occupation of Georgian territories, the retention of military bases in Armenia, and the use of hybrid methods such as cyberattacks and disinformation, which pose a continuous threat to the sovereignty of all three countries. Russia also leverages Armenia's dependence on energy and economic resources as a political pressure tool.

However, Russia's role is not solely destructive. For Armenia, Russia has traditionally served as a military and political guarantor in the context of confrontation with Azerbaijan, ensuring military balance and security stability (Hovannisian, 2010). Azerbaijan also seeks to maintain a balance with Russia in its security policy, which constitutes one of the factors for preserving regional stability (Cornell, 2021).

Western actors, particularly the United States and the European Union, play a significant positive role in the South Caucasus by supporting security, diplomatic engagement, and institutional reforms. EU initiatives, such as the European Union Monitoring Mission in Armenia (EUMA), contribute to conflict de-escalation and political stability (Fontaine, 2023). In addition, the European Union promotes European values in the region, including democracy, human rights, and good governance (Deen, 2023).

The United States and the European Union view the South Caucasus as a key arena for countering Russian and Iranian influence. Western actors seek to draw regional countries into their orbit, particularly Armenia, which has experienced disillusionment in its relations with Russia. Western powers (the U.S. and the EU) anticipate that initiatives undertaken by Turkey in the South Caucasus will not only constitute regional actions in themselves but also support Western interests in the region (TULUN, 2025).

In the case of Georgia, the EU Association Agreement and NATO's Essential Package strengthen military, political, and economic security. The European Union also invests economically in energy and trade infrastructure, particularly in the *Middle Corridor*, contributing to the enhancement of energy security (Deen, 2023).

Following the 2020 Karabakh war, there is an opportunity for the United States to develop a new, more pragmatic strategy in the South Caucasus to preserve its interests and strengthen its regional position (Rubin, 2024). U.S. engagement is expected to support a multipolar model of involvement in the region, in which external powers interact constructively while limiting the dominance of one or two regional actors (Mammadov, 2024, January 30).

Nevertheless, the South Caucasus does not constitute a significant interest for the United States in Eurasia from either an economic or military perspective. At the same time, maintaining influence over Russia and China remains a strategic goal, despite limited instruments (Avdaliani, 2025). The European Union, in turn, seeks to reduce Russian influence in the region, particularly in Georgia and Armenia (Deen, 2023).

All three South Caucasus states—Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan—maintain relationships with the European Union of varying intensity, shaped by their domestic political and geopolitical realities (Placzek, 2017). At the same time, dependence on Western integration entails strict political and institutional requirements, which can at times generate domestic political tensions and risks of instability in democratic processes (Placzek, 2017).

Turkey perceives the South Caucasus as a space that supports political and economic stability, regional cooperation, and integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. The region also holds geostrategic significance for Turkey—based on historical and cultural ties, it functions as a bridge between Turkey and Central Asia. As

Tulun (TULUN, 2025) notes, the South Caucasus serves as a “gateway” to the East for Turkey, linking Ankara to the Asia-Pacific region through Central Asia, and connecting it to the world’s emerging economic centers.

As noted in the document by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye regarding its relations with Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan, “The main elements of Turkey’s policy in the South Caucasus are maintaining political and economic stability, strengthening regional cooperation, and supporting integration into Euro-Atlantic institutions. Particularly following the signing of the Shusha Declaration with Azerbaijan, relations have reached an alliance level, while the normalization process with Armenia opens a new window of opportunity” (Bakanlığı, 2025). For Turkey, Armenia represents a deficit element within this network of cooperation. Maintaining peace and stability in the region enables Turkey to secure trade and energy corridors (TULUN, 2025). Turkey supports the Azerbaijan–Armenia peace agreement and the protection of Georgia’s territorial integrity in the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia. This indicates that Ankara’s primary priority is to establish a solid foundation for peace and stability in the region.

Turkey is clearly a crucial military ally for Azerbaijan. Military cooperation, the provision of modern weaponry, the use of drones, and the “one nation, two states” doctrine played a significant role in the 2020 Karabakh war. According to experts, Turkey’s influence over Azerbaijan has remained particularly strong, reflecting the robustness of its geostrategic initiatives in the region. For Georgia, Turkey is also considered an important economic and energy partner. Some scholars emphasize that Turkey’s influence is perceived as a threat by Armenia, increasing the strategic complexity in the region (Hovannisian, 2010). However, as noted in the official document by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Türkiye, following the Second Karabakh war, Armenia adopted a more constructive position, while Turkey expressed readiness to initiate a gradual normalization process with Armenia, which is seen as an important factor in promoting long-term stability and cooperation in the region (Bakanlığı, 2025). Turkey’s foreign policy approach in the South Caucasus aims to consider regional opportunities and challenges, maintaining a neutral and strategic position, which contrasts with Western countries’ prioritization of merely competitive interests (TULUN, 2025).

Iran plays a significant role in the region both economically and strategically. Tehran’s initiatives in developing transport and energy infrastructure contribute to the South Caucasus countries’ efforts to deepen regional integration (Huseynov, 2024). By participating in regional transport and energy projects, Iran seeks to avoid isolation (Rashidi, 2023). At the same time, Iran emerges as a key actor in shaping a multipolar geopolitical environment, allowing regional states to maintain strategic flexibility and maneuvering space.

However, Iran’s policy is closely linked to both domestic and international security considerations. Tehran views the Zangezur transport corridors and other regional projects, promoted under American, Azerbaijani, and Turkish initiatives, very negatively. It strongly opposes the Zangezur corridor project, perceiving it as a geopolitical threat (Rashidi, 2023). This stance reflects Iran’s national security interests and simultaneously increases instability in the region, particularly in the context of ethno-political tensions with Azerbaijan (Kouhi-Esfahani, 2019).

Iran’s approach creates an ambiguous balance in the region: on one hand, its economic and infrastructure projects support cooperation and regional integration; on the other hand, geopolitical ambitions and strategic conflicts with initiatives by the United States, Turkey, and Azerbaijan heighten political and security risks. Iran’s strategy can thus be characterized as a “balancing policy” (Rashidi, 2023).

China is primarily focused on economic influence, particularly through projects under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). In this context, China is actively engaged in the South Caucasus to strengthen its position within the BRI framework. Significant infrastructure projects in the region, such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Kars railway and Caspian Sea ports, allow China to enhance trade routes between Europe and Asia, which is particularly important in the context of diminishing Russian influence. The opening of the railway from

Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia’s Black Sea ports facilitates the transport of Chinese goods to Europe (Chinese, 2020).

China’s investments in transport and energy infrastructure generate economic incentives in the region, which indirectly strengthen security structures (Neset, 2023).

Positive aspects of China’s engagement in the South Caucasus include the enhancement of infrastructure connectivity and the promotion of economic development. However, a negative dimension of this engagement is that China’s economic expansion may create strategic dependencies, compelling regional states to make additional strategic decisions. At the same time, it may provoke dissatisfaction among other external actors.

Thus, the involvement of external actors in the South Caucasus represents not only a source of opportunities and support but also a complex geopolitical game. Each state must navigate the positive prospects while simultaneously mitigating strategic risks in order to safeguard national interests and ensure the reinforcement of security and stability (Ohanyan, 2023).

Intersection of External Actors’ Interests and Conflicts in Regional Strategies

The South Caucasus region is characterized by the intensive intersection of geopolitical interests, creating a strategically complex environment. The objectives of the main external actors—Russia, the United States, the European Union, Turkey, Iran, and China—often conflict with one another, directly affecting the security policies of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan (Shengelia, 2022). The competition among global powers, particularly the redistribution of influence resulting from the Russia–Ukraine war, further increases the instability of regional strategic dynamics (Huseynov, 2024).

Russia–West (United States and European Union) Confrontation: The tension between Georgia’s pro-Western integration and Russia’s influence is most pronounced. Efforts to integrate Georgia into NATO and the European Union directly conflict with Russia’s strategic interests, a dynamic that intensified following the 2008 war and the partial loss of Georgia’s territorial integrity. U.S. involvement in the region provides military support, joint exercises, and strategic agreements, offering Georgia additional leverage to strengthen its sovereignty. For Armenia, the strategic alliance with Russia remains the primary choice; however, Yerevan seeks to diversify its partnerships with external actors.

Table 2. Main External Actors’ Influence in the South Caucasus: Positive and Negative Aspects

External Actor	Positive Aspects	Negative Aspects
United States (USA)	Military support and training; strategic agreements enhancing Georgia’s sovereignty; promotion of regional stability; support for conflict resolution initiatives.	Limited direct economic and security interests; primarily focused on balancing Russia and China, not deep regional integration.
European Union (EU)	Supports democratic reforms, good governance, and conflict de-escalation; invests in energy and transport infrastructure; strengthens regional resilience.	Strict political and institutional requirements may induce domestic political tensions; limited leverage over Russia and Iran.
Russia	Provides military security and strategic guarantees to Armenia; maintains regional influence that can stabilize certain conflict balances.	Supports occupation of territories in Georgia; maintains military bases in Armenia; employs hybrid methods (cyberattacks, disinformation); exerts economic and political pressure.

Turkey	Enhances regional stability and cooperation; economic and energy partnership with Georgia; military and strategic support to Azerbaijan; promotes gradual normalization with Armenia.	Strong influence on Azerbaijan can increase regional strategic complexity; perceived as a threat by Armenia.
Iran	Promotes regional integration through transportation and energy projects; provides economic opportunities.	Opposes Zangezur corridor and certain Azerbaijan-Turkey initiatives; regional ambitions create strategic and political risks; contributes to instability.
China	Invests in infrastructure (Belt and Road Initiative); strengthens trade routes connecting Europe and Asia; indirectly supports regional economic security.	Economic expansion may create strategic dependencies; competition with other actors can heighten tensions; limited direct political influence.

Source: Author’s compilation based on research analysis (2025)

Russia-Turkey Competition and Cooperation: The Karabakh conflict clearly highlighted the intersection of Russian and Turkish interests, while also revealing potential areas for cooperation. Turkey actively supported Azerbaijan, reinforcing its influence in the region, whereas Russia sought to maintain its primary peacekeeping role and control over energy projects. Azerbaijan strives to maintain balanced relations with both powers to safeguard its political autonomy.

Within the context of the Azerbaijan-Turkey strategic alliance, Western actors leverage Turkey as a favorable partner to advance their strategic objectives, such as limiting Russian and Iranian influence in the South Caucasus, aligning regional states (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan) with the Western orbit, and managing economic and energy corridors to benefit Western interests (e.g., the EU energy system). However, regional analysts emphasize that the strategic interests of both powers may, in the long term, manifest as a combination of cooperation and competition, inevitably affecting the formation of the security architecture in the South Caucasus.

Thus, for the West, the primary criterion regarding the appropriateness of Turkey’s actions in the region is not solely Turkey’s own interests, but also the alignment with Western global objectives. Against this backdrop, Turkey operates in the region to safeguard its national interests, maintain economic and security stability, and simultaneously balance its transatlantic commitments with Western partners.

Iran and China: Iran plays a significant role in the region through the development of economic ties and transportation infrastructure, while China provides economic incentives indirectly strengthening security structures via investment and infrastructure projects, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative (Huseynov, 2024; Neset, 2023). Both countries contribute to regional diversity and balance; however, their geopolitical interests also create potential risks for strategic dependence.

Table 1. Key Characteristics and External Dependencies of South Caucasus Countries

Country	Key Characteristics	External Dependency
Georgia	Pro-Western orientation; integration with NATO and the EU; economic relations with Russia; strong anti-Russian political stance	High dependency on the US and EU; strong Western involvement in security sector

Armenia	Historically pro-Russian; recent critical stance toward Russian security guarantees; attempts to diversify foreign and security policy; officially growing anti-Russian position	Security still partially dependent on Russia, though EU and US roles are increasing; seeks multivector cooperation
Azerbaijan	Balanced foreign policy; economy based on energy resources; active regional politics; growing anti-Russian orientation	Strategic alliance with Turkey; influenced significantly by Turkey's regional initiatives

Source: Author's compilation based on research analysis (2025).

The intersection of external actors' interests creates a dualistic environment for the South Caucasus, encompassing both strategic opportunities (partnerships, military assistance, economic resources) and risks (territorial occupation, political pressure, hybrid warfare). National security strategies in the regional countries must constantly adapt to the parameters set by external powers, which provides opportunities for the development of multilateral diplomacy and cooperation, while simultaneously increasing the complexity of strategic decision-making (Ohanyan, 2023).

Post-2025 Perspectives and Potential Scenarios in the South Caucasus

From the perspective of the global interdependence theory (Keohane, 1977), the strategic choices of regional states and their national security policies are directly shaped by the complex and multidimensional interests and interdependencies of external actors – the United States, the European Union, Russia, Turkey, Iran, and China. In the post-2025 period, the South Caucasus is expected to experience an environment where external actors' interests intersect more intensely, especially in energy and transport corridors.

The first potential scenario envisions a multi-balanced and stable regional environment. In this scenario, states strategically manage their interdependence with external powers: Georgia maintains NATO and EU support, Armenia develops diversified partnerships with both the West and Russia, and Azerbaijan continues pragmatic balancing with Turkey and other actors. Such strategic management of interdependence reduces the risk of conflict, strengthens economic and energy connectivity, and enhances the flexibility of national policies.

The second scenario involves intensified geopolitical confrontation, where clashes of external actors' interests exacerbate regional strategic challenges. For instance, Russia's energy and military influence may collide with Western support, Iranian or Turkish initiatives may conflict, and China's economic projects may create strategic dependence. This environment requires heightened adaptive capacities from regional states, multi-layered diplomatic maneuvering, and reinforced domestic institutional resilience.

In the post-2025 national security strategies of South Caucasus states, the concept of interdependence encompasses not only reactive measures to external pressures but also multi-dimensional strategic planning that leverages external opportunities while mitigating associated risks. Therefore, the global interdependence theory provides a useful analytical framework for evaluating potential future scenarios and defining pathways for sustainable regional security development.

Conclusion. The security strategies of the South Caucasus countries differ markedly, shaped not only by historical and political experiences but also by the asymmetric and often conflicting involvement of external actors. The region represents a geopolitical crossroads where the interests of Russia, the West (the U.S., the European Union, NATO), Turkey, Iran, and increasingly China intersect, creating a constantly evolving and dynamic security architecture.

Georgia firmly pursues a pro-Western trajectory, grounded in the restoration of territorial integrity and the need to counter Russian occupation. Cooperation with NATO and association with the European Union serve not only as instruments of security but also as mechanisms of political legitimacy. At the same time, an

extreme pro-Western orientation limits the country's strategic flexibility and increases the risks associated with external dependence.

Armenia has historically been closely tied to Russia, both militarily and politically. However, following the Second Karabakh War and the diminishing security guarantees from Russia, Yerevan seeks strategic diversification. Growing interest in the European Union and the United States, support for democratic reforms, and a critical assessment of Russia's role within Armenian society place Armenia's security strategy in a transitional phase, where old and new vectors coexist simultaneously.

Azerbaijan pursues a "balancing policy" based on economic leverage derived from energy resources and the ability to maneuver geopolitically. Baku actively cooperates with Turkey while maintaining pragmatic ties with Russia, the West, and even China, particularly in infrastructure and transport projects. These multifaceted vectors enable Azerbaijan to strengthen its sovereign position and navigate the regional balance of power with flexibility.

Thus, the diversity of external actors' roles and the domestic political-strategic differences among the South Caucasus countries contribute to the region's dynamic and heterogeneous security environment. Each state seeks an optimal balance among international powers; however, this balance is often temporary, compromise-based, and contingent on shifts in the global agendas of external actors.

In conclusion, the South Caucasus is a region where the security architecture is not static. It continuously evolves amid the complex interaction of external and internal factors. This context compels the countries of the region to simultaneously reinforce domestic institutional resilience and develop adaptive, flexible foreign policies that safeguard national interests amid the changing dynamics of global power.

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