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UNITED STATES – AZERBAIJAN RELATIONS (1991-2020)

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of the paper is to thoroughly investigate the intricate relationship between the United States and Azerbaijan from 1991 to 2020, considering diplomatic, political, economic, and security dimensions. Emphasizing the pivotal role of Russian Federation in the South Caucasus, the research seeks to provide a holistic understanding of the factors influencing U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, offering valuable insights into evolving geopolitical dynamics over the three crucial decades.

The novelty of the paper lies in its in-depth exploration of three decades of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, the study provides unique insights into the evolving dynamics, contributing a comprehensive analysis of the multifaceted relationship.

Conclusions. The author identifies 4 periods of US-Azerbaijan relations in 1991-2020: 1) 1991-2001, 2) 2001-2007, 3) 2007-2015, and 4) 2015-2020.

From 1991 to 2001, the United States underwent a transformative phase in its policy towards Azerbaijan, marked by an increased focus on regional stability and economic partnerships through energy initiatives like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Security concerns in the South Caucasus also influenced policy decisions, while considerations of democracy and human rights were weighed against broader strategic imperatives. This period set the foundation for subsequent shifts in U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan.

In 2001-2007, U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan underwent significant changes, prioritizing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and intensifying efforts in combatting international terrorism. The Global War on Terror played a crucial role, leading to strengthened U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, though democracy promotion took a back seat to energy and security interests.

The period from 2007 to 2015 saw a nuanced shift, with decreased U.S. focus on energy and security, increased attention to democracy and human rights, and challenges arising from Azerbaijan's opposition to the Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement. Azerbaijan's strategic concerns regarding Nagorno-Karabakh intensified, and U.S. engagement faced limitations in influencing regional outcomes.

Between 2015 and 2020, U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan further disengaged across energy, security, and democracy promotion dimensions, influenced by factors like the unconventional oil and gas revolution, decreasing Central Asia significance, rising isolationism, and the Trump administration's priorities. The U.S. response to regional dynamics, notably the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, showcased a trend of reduced involvement.

Keywords: USA, Azerbaijan, Russia, Caspian Sea, Diplomatic Relations, Energy

АМЕРИКАНСЬКО-АЗЕРБАЙДЖАНСЬКІ ВІДНОСИНИ У 1991-2020 РР.

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АНОТАЦІЯ

Метою статті є ретельне дослідження складних відносин між Сполученими Штатами та Азербайджаном з 1991 по 2020 роки, враховуючи дипломатичні, політичні, економічні та безпекові аспекти. Підкреслюючи ключову роль Російської Федерації на Південному Кавказі, дослідження прагне забезпечити цілісне розуміння факторів, що впливають на американсько-азербайджанські відносини, пропонуючи уявлення про зміну геополітичної динаміки протягом трьох вирішальних десятиліть.

Новизна статті полягає у поглибленому дослідженні трьох десятиліть американо-азербайджанських відносин, що дає загальне уявлення про динаміку їх розвитку, сприяючи всебічному аналізу багатогранних відносин.

Висновки. Автор виділяє 4 періоди американсько-азербайджанських відносин у 1991-2020 рр.: 1) 1991-2001 рр., 2) 2001-2007 рр., 3) 2007-2015 рр. і 4) 2015-2020 рр.

У 1991-2001 рр. Сполучені Штати пройшли трансформаційний етап у своїй політиці щодо Азербайджану, відзначений посиленням уваги до регіональної стабільності та економічного партнерства через енергетичні ініціативи, такі як трубопровід Баку-Тбілісі-Джейхан. Занепокоєння безпекою на Південному Кавказі також вплинуло на політичні рішення, тоді як міркування щодо демократії та прав людини зважувалися проти ширших стратегічних імперативів. Цей період заклав основу для наступних змін у політиці США щодо Азербайджану.

У 2001-2007 рр. політика США щодо Азербайджану зазнала суттєвих змін, що проявилось у пріоритетності нафтопроводу Баку-Тбілісі-Джейхан та активізації зусиль у боротьбі з міжнародним тероризмом. Глобальна війна з терором відіграла вирішальну роль, призвівши до зміцнення американо-азербайджанських відносин, хоча просування демократії, у порівнянні з енергетичними та безпековими інтересами, відійшло на другий план.

У період 2007-2015 рр. відбулися нюанси, пов'язані зі зменшенням уваги США до енергетики та безпеки, збільшенням уваги до демократії та прав людини та викликами, пов'язаними з протидією Азербайджану турецько-вірменському зближенню. Стратегічне занепокоєння Азербайджану щодо Нагірного Карабаху посилювалося, а роль США у впливі на регіон знизилася.

Між 2015 і 2020 рр. політика США щодо Азербайджану ще більше розмежувалася в сферах енергетики, безпеки та сприяння демократії під впливом таких факторів, як нетрадиційна нафтова та газова революція, зменшення значення Центральної Азії, зростання ізоляціонізму та пріоритети адміністрації Трампа. Реакція США на регіональні відносини, зокрема конфлікт у Нагірному Карабасі, продемонструвала тенденцію до зменшення їх участі у його вирішенні.

Ключові слова: США, Азербайджан, Росія, Каспійське море, дипломатичні відносини, енергетика

INTRODUCTION

This comprehensive study delves into the intricate tapestry of diplomatic relations between the United States and Azerbaijan from the year of the latter's independence in

1991 to the transformative events of the Second Karabakh war in 2020. The period under scrutiny encapsulates a crucial epoch in Azerbaijani history, marked by the nation's emergence as an independent entity on the global stage. The article meticulously navigates through the multifaceted dimensions of this bilateral relationship, exploring the intricate threads that have woven the fabric of diplomacy between the two nations. It is essential to note that the study intentionally concludes its analysis at the onset of the second Karabakh war, recognizing the seismic shift in the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus that ensued. This pivotal conflict, while deserving of its independent exploration, stands as a watershed moment that significantly altered the geopolitical dynamics in the region, warranting a distinct and focused examination beyond the scope of this analysis. Thus, the narrative within this article is dedicated to unraveling the complexities and nuances that characterized U.S.-Azerbaijan relations during the formative three decades of the nation's post-Soviet independence.

The *primary objective* of this comprehensive study is to meticulously examine the multifaceted relationship between the United States and Azerbaijan over a span of three crucial decades, ranging from 1991 to 2020. Against the backdrop of Azerbaijan's declaration of independence in 1991, this historical analysis aims to unravel the intricacies of diplomatic engagements, political dynamics, economic ties, and security considerations that have defined the bilateral relationship. Crucially, the study incorporates an exploration of Russia's position, recognizing its influential role in the geopolitical landscape of the South Caucasus.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The dynamic landscape of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations has attracted scholarly attention, with a focus on dimensions such as energy, security, and democracy. G. Bashirov's examination of U.S. policy in Azerbaijan sheds light on the complex interplay between energy interests, security considerations, and democratic principles, revealing the evolving nature of U.S. engagement in Azerbaijan¹.

S. Cornell's comprehensive exploration of Azerbaijan since independence serves as a fundamental resource, providing insights into the historical context and political developments that have shaped the country's relationship with the United States². J. Nichol's analyses³ offer detailed perspectives on political developments in the Transcaucasus, offering crucial insights into their implications for U.S. interests during a pivotal period of transition in Azerbaijan and neighboring states.

A. Priego's examination of NATO cooperation in the South Caucasus provides a valuable perspective for understanding the broader strategic considerations influencing U.S. involvement in Azerbaijan, delving into the intricacies of regional security dynamics⁴.

¹ *Bashirov G.* Energy, security and democracy: the shifting US policy in Azerbaijan. *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*. 2019. Vol. 32, Issue 6. P. 771-798. DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1624689

² *Cornell S.* Azerbaijan since independence. New York: Routledge, 2011.

³ *Nichol J.* Transcaucasus newly independent states: political developments and implications for US interests. Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, 1995; *Nichol J.* Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia: Political developments and implications for U.S. interests. Darby: DIANE Publishing, 2002. URL: <https://bit.ly/48DuZZI>

⁴ *Priego A.* NATO cooperation towards South Caucasus. *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*. 2008. Vol. 2 (1). P. 50-57.

B. Shaffer's exploration of Caspian energy developments post-2005 contributes significantly to understanding the economic dimensions of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, offering insights into energy policies shaping the geopolitical landscape⁵.

Considering the broader regional context, N. Jackson's theoretical perspective on Russian foreign policy and its impact on the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) becomes vital, providing insights into the complexities of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations in the context of Russia's historical influence⁶.

In summary, these works collectively enrich our understanding of U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, presenting nuanced perspectives on historical, political, economic, and security dimensions, offering a robust foundation for ongoing research in this dynamic geopolitical landscape.

UNITED STATES' STRATEGIC APPROACH TOWARDS AZERBAIJAN: AN IN-DEPTH EXAMINATION OF POLICY DYNAMICS

In the immediate aftermath of the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the United States exhibited minimal attention toward Azerbaijan⁷. Predominantly engrossed in the transfer of nuclear capabilities from Kazakhstan, Ukraine, and Belarus to Russia, as well as fostering economic liberalization in the latter, the U.S. largely neglected engagements with Azerbaijani affairs. Despite opportunities to advocate for democratic reforms following Abulfaz Elchibey's presidency in 1992 and to bolster security cooperation post the withdrawal of Russian troops in 1993, the United States remained largely detached from Azerbaijani issues. Furthermore, during this period, the U.S. failed to adopt a neutral stance in the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia, adopting a prejudiced position that unjustly attributed blame to Azerbaijan for the conflict⁸. The pervasive influence of the Armenian Lobby during the years 1991-1994 significantly shaped Congress's perception of events in the NK region, leading to the enactment of Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act (FSA). This section prohibited any U.S. aid to the Azerbaijani government until the President affirmed, reporting to Congress, that Azerbaijan had taken demonstrable steps to cease blockades and offensive uses of force against Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh⁹.

Substantial shifts began with the advent of the energy dimension, particularly after Azerbaijan entered into a substantial oil exploration agreement with 11 transnational oil corporations in late 1994. This transformative development prompted a recalibration of U.S. policy, as the Clinton Administration prioritized the exploration and export of Azerbaijani oil in its foreign policy objectives. To expedite the development and shipment of oil from the Caspian region to the United States and other Western markets¹⁰, the Clinton Administration actively sought cooperation with

⁵ Shaffer B. Caspian energy phase II: Beyond 2005. *Energy Policy*. 2010. Vol. 38, Issue 11. P. 7209-7215. DOI: 10.1016/j.enpol.2010.07.051

⁶ Jackson N. *Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions*. London; NY: Routledge, 2003. DOI: 10.4324/9780203716229

⁷ Bashirov G. US Foreign Policy toward Azerbaijan, 1991-2015. *FIU Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 2017. DOI: 10.25148/etd.FIDC001782. URL: <https://digitalcommons.fiu.edu/etd/3191>

⁸ Maresca J. Lost Opportunities in Negotiating the Conflict over Nagorno Karabakh. *International Negotiation*. 1996. Vol 1 (3). P. 471-499.

⁹ Freedom Support Act, Section 907, P.L. 102-511, 24 October 1992. Washington: GPO, 1992.

¹⁰ Caspian Region Energy Development Group Report, 1997. *US Department of State*. URL: https://1997-2001.state.gov/policy/remarks/971023_eizen_caspian.html

Azerbaijan, urging Congress to repeal Section 907, which it deemed obstructive to advancing America's national interests in Azerbaijan¹¹. In 1995, Congress granted exemptions to Section 907 for humanitarian aid, and in 1997, exemptions were extended to democracy, non-proliferation, and trade and investment aid. The White House further courted Azerbaijani cooperation through increased high-level meetings with Azerbaijani officials, culminating in President Heydar Aliyev's visit to the White House in 1997, during which the U.S.-Azerbaijan Bilateral Investment Treaty (BIT) was signed alongside a series of investment agreements with U.S. oil corporations¹².

While the United States initially overlooked opportunities for early security cooperation, a significant shift in its security policy emerged in the mid-1990s, reflecting a newfound commitment to fostering collaboration. The U.S. sought to integrate Azerbaijan into its security framework, notably within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Azerbaijan's inclusion in NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program in 1995, followed by participation in the PfP Planning and Review Process in 1997, underscored this strategic reorientation. The signing of the U.S.-Azerbaijan Bilateral Security Treaty in 1997 further solidified this evolving security partnership.

Simultaneously, the U.S. recalibrated its approach to the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict during the mid-1990s. Departing from punitive measures such as sanctions against Azerbaijan, the U.S. transitioned its objective toward assuming a neutral role as a facilitator in conflict resolution. In 1997, the U.S. assumed a new co-chair position alongside Russia and France in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe's (OSCE) Minsk Group, dedicated to achieving a peaceful resolution to the NK conflict. Intensive involvement by the White House and the State Department led to sixteen bilateral meetings between Azerbaijani and Armenian presidents. The culmination of these efforts materialized in the April 2001 Key West Summit, convened during the nascent Bush Administration, marking a pinnacle in U.S. engagement in NK peace negotiations¹³.

The U.S. democracy promotion policy in Azerbaijan underwent a substantive transformation until 1997, characterized by ineffectiveness and weakness. Initially emphasizing government-to-government democracy assistance, hindered by the restrictive Section 907, this approach underwent a significant shift in 1997 with the introduction of the Partnership for Freedom (Pff). In contrast to the earlier policy, Pff not only substantially augmented the democracy promotion budget but also redirected its focus toward supporting civil society and private organizations, as opposed to government-centric aid. By late 1997, prominent U.S. non-governmental organizations (NGOs) such as the National Democratic Institute (NDI), International Republican Institute (IRI), IREX, IFES, and the Soros Foundation established offices in Azerbaijan¹⁴.

¹¹ Albright M. Statement before the Senate Appropriations Committee on Foreign Operations. *US Department of State. Archive.* 1999. URL: <http://1997-2001.state.gov/www/statements/1999/990520.html>

¹² Baker P. Clinton Courts Head of Oil-Rich Azerbaijan. *Washington Post.* 1997, August 2. URL: <https://wapo.st/47A8tjn>

¹³ Armenia and Azerbaijan: Key West Peace Talks, 2001. *US Department of State.* URL: <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rm/2001/2098.htm>

¹⁴ Statement of the National Democratic Institute (NDI) International Observer Delegation to Azerbaijan's November 5, 2000 Parliamentary Elections (Baku, 2000, November 7). *National Democratic Institute.* URL: https://www.ndi.org/sites/default/files/azerbaijan_elections_2000.pdf

Despite Section 907 persisting, Pff facilitated U.S. funding for these private NGOs, eliciting disapproval from the Azerbaijani government due to their unwavering critiques and demands. Nevertheless, during this period, the Clinton Administration adopted a relatively lenient stance toward strongman regimes, notably in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, prioritizing energy exploration and security interests at the expense of democracy promotion and human rights¹⁵.

EVOLUTION OF UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARDS AZERBAIJAN (1991-2001): A COMPREHENSIVE ANALYSIS

The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the conclusion of the Cold War ushered in transformative dynamics in the international system, marked by a reconfiguration of global power dynamics, notably with the United States assuming a unilateral role. The cessation of Russian influence in the Soviet periphery and the emergence of independent nations, eager to cultivate relations with the U.S., provided a conducive milieu for the U.S. to assert its influence in this region. The Clinton Administration, positioning itself as a liberal hegemon, prioritized fostering the autonomy and sovereignty of post-Soviet nations. However, this strategic outlook excluded Azerbaijan from substantial consideration until at least 1994. The U.S., characterized by a general lack of awareness regarding Azerbaijan, allowed the influential Armenian lobby to shape the perceptions of U.S. policymakers against Azerbaijan in the context of the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, leading to the imposition of Section 907 sanctions. This disposition persisted until the latter part of 1994¹⁶. The NK conflict received minimal attention from the Clinton Administration in its early stages, deeming it lacking in significance to vital Western interests, thereby ceding control of the conflict resolution process to Russia in 1994, despite Azerbaijan's opposition to Russian intervention¹⁷. Consequently, the early phase of U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan lacked attention to the tripartite dimensions of energy, security, and democracy.

The pivotal factor driving heightened U.S. interest after 1994 was the discovery of oil in the Azerbaijani sector of the Caspian Sea. During this initial period, influential lobbying efforts by transnational oil corporations, emerging as a formidable advocacy group supporting Azerbaijan, played a crucial role in influencing American policymakers to turn their attention to Azerbaijan. In 1997, a State Department report estimated substantial oil reserves in the Caspian region-ranging from 160 to 200 billion barrels-asserting its potential to become a paramount player in global oil markets over the ensuing decade¹⁸. The strategic promotion of Azerbaijani oil aligns seamlessly with the broader U.S. objective of diversifying global oil supplies, given Azerbaijan's non-membership in OPEC. Secretary of Energy Bill Richardson underscored its potential to "save us from total dependence on Middle East oil"¹⁹. The Azerbaijani regime, characterized by a pro-market orientation, further facilitated the efficacy of U.S. policy by offering favorable conditions to transnational corporations through Production-

¹⁵ Carothers T. *The Clinton Record on Democracy Promotion*. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2000. P. 3.

¹⁶ Ambrosio T. *Congressional Perceptions of Ethnic Cleansing: Reactions to the Nagorno-Karabakh War and the Influence of Ethnic Interest Groups*. *The Review of International Affairs*, 2002, Vol. 2 (1). P. 24-45.

¹⁷ Nichol J. *Transcaucasus newly independent states...*

¹⁸ *Caspian Region Energy Development Group Report*, 1997...

¹⁹ Goldberg J. *The Crude Face of Global Capitalism*. *The New York Times Magazine*, 1998, October 4. P. 51.

Shared Agreements (PSA) and endorsing the construction of westward oil pipelines, notably the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan route, despite yielding comparatively less revenue than northbound (Russia) or southbound (Iran) alternatives²⁰.

The realms of security and energy intricately evolved in a mutually reinforcing manner, with the interconnection between the two serving as a prominent feature. The impediment to the U.S. security partnership with Azerbaijan stemmed primarily from the constraints imposed by Section 907 of the Freedom Support Act (FSA), which prohibited the provision of U.S. military aid and weapons sales to Azerbaijan. Consequently, the development of an autonomous and robust security dimension in Azerbaijan proved challenging within the confines of this legislative constraint. Instead, the security dimension found its impetus through the energy sector. On one hand, U.S. support for Caspian energy played a pivotal role in fortifying Azerbaijan's independence and sovereignty, serving as an economic lifeline and facilitating connectivity to Western markets. Concurrently, successful security initiatives during this period were intricately linked to U.S. interests in the energy domain, given Azerbaijan's emerging significance as a global energy producer.

Several challenges were articulated in the annual reports of the U.S. Department of State in 1999 and 2000, emphasizing the inadequate resources for Azerbaijani maritime law enforcement agencies in conducting surveillance and boardings in the Caspian Sea, along with the need for port-security training in Baku²¹. Subsequently, the U.S.-Azerbaijan Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) treaty was signed in 1999, and in 2000, the Clinton Administration expanded the Export Control and Related Border Security (EXBS) program to include Azerbaijan.

Despite the deepening engagement with Azerbaijan, the Clinton Administration subordinated democracy-related issues to broader U.S. interests in energy and security dimensions. Upon assuming power in 1993, the Clinton Administration introduced 'democratic enlargement' as its overarching strategy for the post-Cold War era²². This strategic vision, however, was pragmatic, acknowledging the interconnectedness of U.S. interests in democracy, security, and market economics, particularly within the post-Soviet sphere. During Clinton's initial term, democracy promotion efforts primarily concentrated on reinforcing Soviet-era legislative and judicial institutions. Nevertheless, the resistance to change within these institutions, coupled with the constraints imposed by Section 907, rendered this strategy largely ineffective in catalyzing democratic reform in Azerbaijan.

The initiation of the Partnership for Freedom (PFF) strategy in 1997 marked a shift in U.S. focus toward non-governmental organization (NGO) networks in Azerbaijan. Simultaneously, amendments to Section 907 allowed the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) to redirect assistance to these networks, resulting in heightened activism. Despite these efforts, U.S. policy fell short of establishing a robust position in support of democracy in Azerbaijan. President Clinton's perspective on democracy promotion reflected a pragmatic approach, viewing it as a means to

²⁰ Manning R., Jaffe A. The myth of the Caspian 'great game': the real geopolitics of energy. *Survival*. 1998. Vol. 40, Issue 4. P. 112-129.

²¹ US Department of State. US Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union FY2000 Annual Report, 2001.

²² *Bouchet N.* Democracy promotion as US foreign policy: Bill Clinton and democratic enlargement. London: Routledge, 2015.

foster global stability and security, particularly in nations transitioning from communism to capitalism²³.

A discernible clash ensued between the operations of what Thomas Carothers termed 'low policy,' encompassing the democracy aid bureaucracy and the NGO sector, and 'high policy,' which pertained to strategic interests in energy and security domains²⁴. The Clinton Administration's 'high policy' priorities, centered on political stability in Central Asia and the Caucasus, led to incomplete and ineffective U.S. democracy promotion efforts. The inherent tension between the divergent policy objectives of supporting democratic processes and safeguarding strategic interests in energy and security underscored the complexity of U.S. engagement during this period.

THOROUGH EXPLORATION OF TRANSFORMATIVE PHASES IN UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARDS AZERBAIJAN (2001-2007)

During the subsequent phase, U.S. policy in Azerbaijan underwent significant programmatic and goal-oriented transformations, accompanied by adjustments. The Bush Administration continued the Clinton Administration's endorsement of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline construction, showcasing an apparent adjustment change with increased support. This was evident through substantial loans from the Export-Import Bank (EXIM Bank) and Overseas Private Investment Corporation (OPIC), the involvement of Chevron and Eni in the project, and the notable participation of U.S. Secretary of Energy Spencer Abraham in the BTC construction's launch ceremony in Baku in 2002²⁵.

In the realm of security, U.S. policy experienced substantial alterations in both programmatic and goal-oriented aspects. In the post-9/11 landscape, the overarching objective of U.S. security policy underwent a significant shift, with the primary focus transitioning to the combatting of international terrorist networks. In response to this shift, the Bush Administration authorized a substantial \$3 billion assistance package through the Export Control and Border Security (EXBS) program to Azerbaijan²⁶. Acknowledging Azerbaijan's strategic significance in supporting the U.S. mission to eradicate global terrorism and facilitate operations in Afghanistan, the U.S. initiated military assistance in various forms, including Foreign Military Financing (FMF), International Military Education and Training (IMET), and Non-proliferation, Anti-terrorism, Demining, and Related Programs (NADR)²⁷.

As part of broader efforts, Azerbaijan's integration into NATO accelerated, marked by the signing of its inaugural Individual Partnership Action Plan (IPAP) in 2005. The U.S. played a role in funding enhancements to navigational and safety-of-flight infrastructure at the Nasosnaya base, aligning with the IPAP framework²⁸. These multifaceted developments underscore the nuanced and evolving nature of U.S.

²³ Cox M. Wilsonianism Resurgent? The Clinton Administration and the Promotion of Democracy. In Cox M., Ikenberry J., Inoguchi T. (Eds.). *American Democracy Promotion: Impulses, Strategies, and Impacts*. Oxford, 2000. P. 227.

²⁴ Carothers T. The Clinton Record on Democracy Promotion... P. 2.

²⁵ Nichol J. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia...

²⁶ US Department of State. US Government Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union FY2000 Annual Report, 2001. P. 34.

²⁷ Nichol J. Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia... P. 62-63.

²⁸ US Department of State. FY 2008 Foreign Operations Appropriated Assistance, 2008. URL: <https://www.state.gov/p/eur/rls/rpt/eurasiafy08/117312.htm>

engagement with Azerbaijan during this period, encompassing strategic energy considerations and the imperative to address emerging security challenges.

Concurrently with the construction and completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline, a significant programmatic shift introduced new methodologies for safeguarding energy infrastructure in the Caspian, indicative of a program change. The Bush Administration, recognizing the strategic importance of securing critical energy assets in the region, expanded its security partnership in the maritime domain. This move aimed to assist Azerbaijan in balancing military advancements by Russia and Iran in the Caspian region and fortifying defenses against potential terrorist threats. In 2003, the Department of Defense's (DoD) Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) programs underwent expansion specifically to 'strengthen Azerbaijan's capability to interdict Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) trafficking through the Caspian Sea²⁹.' The Caspian Guard program, initiated in 2003, sought to coordinate activities in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan with those of the U.S. Central Command and other government agencies to enhance Caspian security. A substantial investment of \$100 million was allocated to this program. In 2005, the Caspian Guard was succeeded by the Caspian Sea Maritime Proliferation Prevention Program (CSMPPP), designed to 'promote maritime safety and security and maritime domain awareness in the Caspian Sea'³⁰. Between 2005 and 2011, the DoD provided a total of \$51 million in assistance, including naval training, long-range radars for coastal surveillance, and the establishment of a joint command and control center for the Azerbaijani Navy and Coast Guard.

Conversely, with regard to democracy promotion policy, while there was a substantial program change in the Middle East, the adjustments in U.S. policy toward Azerbaijan were more nuanced, focusing on the effort and scope of support for U.S.-backed NGO networks. During the early 2000s, these networks expanded their activities to bolster opposition political parties and civil society organizations in Azerbaijan, signifying an adjustment change in U.S. policy. Notably, the National Democratic Institute (NDI) orchestrated meetings that convened opposition parties in the lead-up to the 2003 presidential elections. NDI Director Madeleine Albright's visit to Azerbaijan four months before the 2005 parliamentary elections involved meetings with opposition parties and public statements criticizing the human rights record of the Aliyev government. Concurrently, U.S.-backed NGOs published reports critical of both the 2003 and 2005 elections, eliciting disapproval from the Aliyev government. Despite these actions, the Bush Administration did not prioritize democracy promotion in Azerbaijan during this period and refrained from exerting significant pressure on the Aliyev government in the lead-up to the 2003 and 2005 elections, both of which were deemed lacking in fairness and freedom by the U.S. NGO community³¹.

The September 11 terror attacks marked a pivotal shift in the U.S. approach, steering towards hegemony through military means, including direct invasions of identified adversaries who did not comply with American directives. This transformative shift culminated in the declaration of a Global War on Terror (GWOt) by the U.S., soliciting

²⁹ Quigley S. European Command Transforming to Accommodate New Challenges. *American Forces Press Service*. 2006, March 9. URL: <https://bit.ly/3HrsJsN>

³⁰ Former Soviet Union Threat Reduction Cooperative Threat Reduction Program. Fiscal Year (FY) 2008/FY 2009 Budget Estimates. *Department of Defense*. 2007. URL: <https://bit.ly/3vBR5y5>

³¹ Alieva L. Azerbaijan's frustrating elections. *Journal of Democracy*. 2006. Vol. 17 (2). P. 147-160.

support from allies for military interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq, as well as anti-terrorism operations globally. Azerbaijan's willingness to align itself with the GWOt further fortified bilateral security cooperation with the U.S. Notably, Azerbaijan promptly pledged full support for the fight against international terrorism in the immediate aftermath of the 9/11 attacks. Consequently, the GWOt injected fresh momentum into U.S.-Azerbaijani relations, particularly in the realm of security cooperation, creating the conditions for what Svante Cornell referred to as "the honeymoon in U.S.-Azerbaijani relations³²."

The urgency of the GWOt provided the Bush Administration with leverage to advocate for the repeal of Section 907 sanctions from Congress, thereby facilitating bilateral military assistance. While Congress responded by authorizing the U.S. president to annually waive the sanctions, stipulations were imposed to ensure that the U.S. aid would not be utilized for offensive purposes against Armenia and would not disrupt the military balance between Azerbaijan and Armenia³³. Consequently, while enabling the initiation of military cooperation, these provisions continued to restrict U.S. weapons sales and army training that could be employed in a conflict against Armenia.

Furthermore, heightened awareness among U.S. policymakers of calls by international terrorist groups, such as al-Qaeda, to "focus their attacks on the stolen oil" and crucial pillars of the American and global economy prompted concerns about systematic attacks on critical energy infrastructure. This heightened risk perception led the U.S. government to significantly augment the scale and scope of its military assistance to energy-exporting nations in the post-2001 period. This augmentation is exemplified by programs such as Caspian Guard and the Caspian Sea Maritime Proliferation Prevention Program (CSMPPP) in Azerbaijan. Another influential factor in U.S. policy shifts was Iran's actions, particularly its aggressiveness in the Caspian, evidenced by an incident in 2001 where an Iranian gunboat chased two Azerbaijani survey vessels operated by BP out of the offshore Alov field³⁴. Iran also emerged as a principal target in the GWOt, heightening Azerbaijan's strategic importance for the U.S., particularly in the context of potential U.S. strikes against Iran. Consequently, countering Iranian influence in the Caspian became an evident goal of U.S. security assistance in the maritime domain.

In the realm of energy, the incoming Bush Administration reiterated the focus of its predecessor on ensuring energy security by "expanding the sources and types of global energy supplied", particularly in the Caspian region. The imperative to diversify geographical sources of energy gained prominence in the early 2000s due to declining U.S. oil production and the consistent rise in global oil prices³⁵. The National Energy Policy Development (NEPD) Group, spearheaded by Vice President Dick Cheney, emphasized the significance of diversifying global oil production away from OPEC and the Middle East. The group argued that, given the anticipated growth in the U.S.'s

³² Cornell S. Azerbaijan since independence... P. 410.

³³ United States Code, 2012. Vol. 16, Title 22: Foreign Relations and Intercourse. Washington, DC: Government Printing Office, 2013. P. 115.

³⁴ US warns Iran about meddling with its Caspian interests. *Oil and Gas Journal*. 2002, March 18. URL: <https://bit.ly/3U5pjmZ>

³⁵ Bang G. Energy security and climate change concerns: Triggers for energy policy change in the United States? *Energy Policy*. 2010. Vol. 38 (4). P. 1645-1653.

dependence on oil imports, “exports from ...the Caspian ...are important factors that can lessen the impact of a supply disruption on the U.S. and world economies”³⁶. As highlighted by Stokes and Raphael³⁷, energy security considerations heavily influenced U.S. policy in oil-rich regions during this period, evident in political, economic, and military interventions in the Persian Gulf, the Caspian Basin, West Africa, and Latin America. In Azerbaijan, the primary focus in this context was on the completion of the BTC pipeline, garnering significant attention from the U.S. during this period.

While the Bush Administration initially expressed criticism of Clinton’s democracy promotion agenda³⁸, the events of 9/11 and the subsequent Global War on Terror (GWOt) gave rise to an evolving ideology of democracy promotion in U.S. policy by the late 2002. This ideological shift involved endorsing military interventions and supporting regime changes to advance the primary goal of establishing market democracies. President Bush referred to this as the ‘freedom agenda,’ envisioning the active support for the growth of democratic movements and institutions across nations and cultures. However, as highlighted by Carothers³⁹, the grandiose rhetoric of the Bush Administration did not translate into robust policy action, as the U.S. refrained from strong criticism of autocratic regimes in the Middle East.

In the context of America’s policy toward Azerbaijan during this period, a notable aspect was the prevalence of continuity rather than substantial change. Analogous to its predecessor, the Bush Administration exhibited rhetorical endorsement for democratization on the ‘low policy’ front, yet this stance collided with the prevailing U.S. interests in ‘high policy,’ specifically within the realms of energy and security. Paradoxically, the Global War on Terror (GWOt) inadvertently bolstered the position of the Aliyev government, as it positioned itself as a bulwark against radical Islamist elements, deflecting criticism for its severe crackdown on political opposition.

Due to the predominant U.S. interests in energy and security, the Bush Administration, at best, offered subdued criticism of Azerbaijan’s deteriorating human rights record and, at worst, tacitly approved of it. As noted by an International Crisis Group (ICG) report⁴⁰, the Bush Administration prioritized continuity and energy investments, refraining from exerting significant pressure on the Aliyev government ahead of the 2003 and 2005 elections, widely perceived as lacking in fairness and freedom by the U.S. NGO community. Despite the stark contrast between the ongoing democratization in neighboring Georgia and the dynastic succession in Azerbaijan, which cast Azerbaijan in an unfavorable light, the Bush Administration refrained from issuing robust criticisms of the elections in both 2003 and 2005. However, the Bush Administration’s swift alignment with the Color Revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan, as noted by Mitchell⁴¹, raised concerns in Azerbaijan. There was apprehension that the U.S. might be contemplating similar scenarios within Azerbaijan.

³⁶ Cheney D. National energy policy: Report of the national energy policy development group. Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 2001. P. 7.

³⁷ Stokes D., Raphael S. Global Energy Security and American Hegemony. Baltimore: JHU Press, 2010.

³⁸ Bouchet N. The democracy tradition in US foreign policy and the Obama presidency. *International Affairs*. 2013. Vol. 89 (1). P. 48.

³⁹ Carothers T. US Democracy Promotion during and after Bush. Washington, DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2007.

⁴⁰ Azerbaijan: turning over a new leaf? *International Crisis Group*. Europe Report, 2004. P. 18. URL: <https://bit.ly/3S5axtF>

⁴¹ Mitchell L. The Color Revolutions. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012.

Consequently, the Azerbaijani government, growing increasingly frustrated with the activities of U.S.-supported NGO networks, began imposing significant restrictions on their operations⁴².

NUANCED SHIFTS IN UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARDS AZERBAIJAN (2007-2015)

The period spanning from 2007 to 2015 witnessed a notable shift in U.S. policy, marked by diminishing engagement in energy and security dimensions, coupled with an increasing emphasis on democracy and human rights concerns. Within the energy sphere, significant adjustments and programmatic changes occurred following the completion of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline in 2006. The subsequent phase of Caspian energy development aimed at linking Kazakh and Turkmen energy resources with Azerbaijan through the Trans-Caspian pipeline network and establishing the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) to connect Caspian natural gas with European consumers⁴³. Despite the Bush Administration expressing a clear preference for the construction of Phase II, there was a noticeable reduction in U.S. efforts. Political support for Southern Gas Corridor projects, including Nabucco, Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP), or Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), was notably absent. The final decision on the SGC pipeline, which prioritized the more profitable Trans Adriatic Pipeline route through Albania to Italy, overlooked U.S. concerns for Central and Eastern European energy independence from Russian gas⁴⁴.

Simultaneously, U.S. security policy underwent a significant program and goal change, characterized by an overall disengagement. The pivotal event signaling this shift was the 2008 Russian invasion of Georgia, a NATO-candidate country and a U.S. ally. Despite causing alarm in the post-Soviet region, particularly in Azerbaijan, which feared potential Russian aggression, there was a lack of substantial assistance from Washington or the Atlantic Alliance to Georgia. When Azerbaijan sought explicit security guarantees from the U.S. and NATO in exchange for its partnership with the Alliance, the U.S. refrained from providing such assurances, underscoring the absence of a comprehensive geopolitical objective in its agenda⁴⁵.

Furthermore, during this timeframe, U.S. military assistance to Azerbaijan witnessed a decline, reflecting broader changes in foreign policy, as highlighted by Scott and Carter⁴⁶. The evolution of U.S. financial assistance to Azerbaijan during this period exhibited both adjustment and programmatic shifts, contributing to the deterioration of bilateral security cooperation. Adjustment changes were evident in the substantial reduction of U.S. financial assistance to Central Asia and the South Caucasus. Simultaneously, programmatic changes saw the conclusion of U.S. military assistance programs in the Caspian region. Both the Caspian Guard and the Caspian Sea Maritime Proliferation Prevention Program (CSMPPP), aimed at safeguarding critical energy

⁴² *Bashirov G.* Energy, security and democracy... P. 710.

⁴³ *Shaffer B.* Caspian energy phase II... P. 7209-7215.

⁴⁴ *Kerry J., et al.* (Ed.) US Congress. Senate. Committee on Foreign Relations Energy and Security from the Caspian to Europe, S. Rep. Washington: U.S. Government Printing Office, 2012. P. 112-142. URL: <https://bit.ly/3U0uFzZ>

⁴⁵ *Jahangirli J.* Contradictions of Realism and Liberalism on Interstate Relations: in the Case of Russo-Georgian War. *Grani*. 2021. Vol. 24 (11). P. 55-66.

⁴⁶ *Scott J.M., Carter R.G.* Promoting democracy in Latin America: foreign policy change and US democracy assistance, 1975-2010. *Third World Quarterly*. 2016. Vol. 37, Issue 2. P. 299-320. DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2015.1108824

infrastructure in Azerbaijan, concluded by 2009 without renewal or replacement⁴⁷. Post-2009, U.S. efforts in Caspian security were restricted to a one-time \$10 million assistance in response to a 2009 incident involving Iran's move of its Alborz rig into disputed waters in the Caspian⁴⁸.

Moreover, after 2011, the Department of Defense's (DoD) Cooperative Threat Reduction (CTR) program shifted away from its prior focus on Caspian Sea security, redirecting its attention to the Cooperative Biological Threat Reduction (BTR) program. Under this program, the U.S. funded the construction and renovation of several biosafety laboratories in Azerbaijan. Contrary to geopolitical expectations, this transition from Caspian military security to biosafety concerns occurred as Russia expanded its naval presence in the Caspian Sea post-2011, citing the need to address transnational security threats⁴⁹.

A significant regional initiative during this period was the U.S. attempt to normalize relations between Turkey and Armenia, known as the Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement. Commencing in late 2007 and gaining momentum under the Obama Administration from 2009, the U.S. believed that the Rapprochement could be detached from the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict, anticipating positive repercussions in NK from improved relations between Turkey and Armenia⁵⁰. However, these assumptions proved misguided. Azerbaijan vehemently opposed the Rapprochement, foreseeing that open borders between Turkey and Armenia without progress in Nagorno-Karabakh would severely undermine Azerbaijan's strategic position in NK negotiations. Azerbaijani opposition and lobbying efforts led to Turkey reneging on its commitment to the Rapprochement, resulting in the collapse of the process and the frustration of the Obama Administration⁵¹.

With the termination of the Rapprochement in 2010, the Obama Administration's tepid efforts to address the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict also ceased. Throughout Obama's tenure, a strategy of 'passive diplomacy' characterized his approach to the NK conflict, marked by a lack of active, high-profile diplomatic endeavors towards its resolution. In contrast, Russia assumed a more direct role in NK conflict negotiations from 2009 onward, positioning itself as a key player. This enabled Moscow to manipulate both Azerbaijan and Armenia to serve its strategic interests, maintaining the supply of arms and weaponry to both nations. Despite the conclusion of the 'Reset' policy, which aimed to normalize U.S.-Russia relations, Obama's passive stance persisted even after the Russian invasion of Crimea in 2014. The West, including the U.S., failed to mount a robust response to Russian aggression in its 'Near Abroad,' and the U.S. did not invest significant diplomatic capital to alter Russian leadership dynamics in the NK negotiations⁵².

During this period, the primary security interest of the U.S. was securing Azerbaijani

⁴⁷ Cooperative Threat Reduction Program Fiscal Year (FY) 2011 Budget Estimates, 2010. *Department of Defense*. URL: <https://bit.ly/3O8Bb3E>

⁴⁸ *Serafino N.* Security Assistance Reform: "Section 1206" Background and Issues for Congress. Washington: Congressional Research Service, 2013. P. 8. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/natsec/RS22855.pdf>

⁴⁹ The Cooperative Biological Engagement Program Research Strategic Plan, 2015. *US Department of Defense*. URL: <https://bit.ly/3U7JVeI>

⁵⁰ *Cornell S.* Azerbaijan since independence... P. 412-414.

⁵¹ *Ibidem.*

⁵² *Volker K.* Where's NATO's Strong Response to Russia's Invasion of Crimea? *Foreign Policy*. 2014, March 18. URL: <https://bit.ly/3tUI6a1>

support for the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), particularly crucial following the Obama Administration's decision to surge troops in the Afghan theatre in 2009⁵³. Azerbaijan played a pivotal role in the NDN, with thirty percent of all land cargo passing through its territory en route to Afghanistan. Despite Azerbaijan facilitating nonlethal shipments to Afghanistan, these contributions to the NDN did not translate into increased U.S. security engagement in areas of significance for Azerbaijan, such as the NK conflict and military assistance. Section 907 provisions continued to restrict U.S. military sales to Azerbaijan. Between 2003 and 2015, the average annual total military sales agreements between the U.S. and Azerbaijan remained modest, at less than \$4 million, a nominal figure given Azerbaijan's military budget of \$2 billion in the early 2010s⁵⁴. In 2010, both Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Secretary of Defense Robert Gates visited Azerbaijan, seeking support for the NDN. However, no new security programs were articulated during their visits, leading to frustration within the Azerbaijani leadership. As a symbol of strained relations, President Aliyev did not extend an invitation to Secretary Gates to the presidential dinner table during Gates's May 2010 visit. Secretary Clinton's subsequent visit in June focused on the Afghan supply corridor and the Rapprochement⁵⁵.

Parallel to developments in the security realm, U.S. democracy promotion policy underwent a significant shift during this phase, albeit in a distinct trajectory. As previously noted, the Bush Administration was inclined to overlook democratic deficiencies in Azerbaijan, adopting a policy of tacit endorsement or, at best, discreet criticism of the deteriorating human rights situation. This stance began to evolve after 2006, when the U.S., at the high policy level, was no longer willing to turn a blind eye to manipulated elections and curbs on civil liberties in Azerbaijan. The Aliyev government started facing U.S. censure for its failure to adhere to democratic standards. Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, in the 2008 Peace Corps Conference, expressed disappointment with Azerbaijan's democratic performance. In an official statement just five days later, President Bush classified Azerbaijan as one of the world's primary 'jailers of journalists,' alongside Iran, Cuba, and China⁵⁶.

Upon assuming office, President Obama sought to avoid missionary rhetoric, asserting that his administration would refrain from imposing 'American-style democracy' and instead prioritize 'patient diplomatic engagement' in matters related to democracy and human rights. This approach characterized U.S. policy in Azerbaijan from 2009 to 2011. For instance, during Secretary Clinton's visit to Azerbaijan in July 2010, her focus was on repairing bilateral relations strained during the Rapprochement process and securing Azerbaijan's support for NDN shipments to Afghanistan. However, despite the initially non-interventionist stance, global political events after 2011 prompted the administration to become involved in democracy-promoting initiatives. The repercussions of this policy shift began to manifest in Azerbaijan after 2011. During Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's 2012 visit to Baku, she held a one-on-

⁵³ Kuchins A., Sanderson T. *The Northern Distribution Network and Afghanistan Geopolitical Challenges and Opportunities*. Washington DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2010.

⁵⁴ Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales And Other Security Cooperation Historical Facts, 2016. *US Department of Defense*. URL: http://www.dsca.mil/sites/default/files/fiscal_year_series_-_30_september_2016.pdf

⁵⁵ *Socor V.* Clinton Follows Gates in Fence Mending Visit to Azerbaijan (Part One). *Eurasia Daily Monitor*. 2010. Vol. 7, Issue 131. In *Jamestown Foundation*. URL: <https://bit.ly/48DIk07>

⁵⁶ *Bush G.* Statement on World Press Freedom Day. *The American Presidency Project*. 2008, May 01. URL: <http://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/ws/index.php?pid=77229>

one meeting with recently released opposition youth group leader Bakhtiyar Hajiyev. While commending his efforts, Clinton openly criticized the deteriorating human rights situation in Azerbaijan during a joint press conference with Azerbaijani MFA Mammadyarov. She urged "the government to respect their citizens' right to express views peacefully, to release those who have been detained for doing so in print or on the streets or for defending human rights⁵⁷."

The altered stance of the Obama Administration became more evident following the 2013 Presidential elections, in which Aliyev secured an 85 percent victory. The State Department's official statement sharply criticized the conduct of the elections, citing 'serious shortcomings' such as ballot box stuffing and irregularities⁵⁸. This marked a stark departure from the State Department's response to the 2009 Presidential elections, where Aliyev claimed an 89 percent victory. Despite previous criticisms from the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR) mission, the State Department had applauded the Azerbaijani government for 'improvements' in election conduct at that time.

Transformations in both domestic and international variables contributed to the diminishing significance of Azerbaijani energy in US foreign policy during this phase. On the domestic front, a recalibration of US energy security policy commenced in 2007, emphasizing the pursuit of energy independence through investments in clean energy, a reduction in the reliance on imported oil, and augmented domestic production via unconventional oil exploration. The Obama Administration bolstered this policy by allocating over \$3.4 billion for the development of Smart Grid technology and research in clean energy, aiming to diversify away from oil⁵⁹.

Crucially, the unconventional oil and gas revolution in the US substantially augmented domestic oil and natural gas production. This trend triggered a decline in global energy prices and markedly diminished the importance of swing producers like Azerbaijan for US energy security. It is noteworthy that US energy policy toward Azerbaijan was formulated in the late 1990s when the US and the West were heavily dependent on imported oil, with expectations of even greater dependency due to declining US production and escalating demand. In the wake of the unconventional revolution, which witnessed a surge in US oil and gas output, the international oil industry experienced a surplus capacity, altering the landscape for US energy policy. The Obama Administration, instead of concentrating on modest producers of conventional oil like Azerbaijan, launched two global programs to promote unconventional oil and gas exploration worldwide, particularly in Europe.

The descent in natural gas prices resulting from the oil price slump, coupled with the expansion of liquefied natural gas (LNG) capacity and the potential transportation of American LNG to Europe, further diminished the relevance of accessing Azerbaijani energy for American and European energy security during this period⁶⁰. Additionally,

⁵⁷ Clinton H. Remarks With Azerbaijani Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov. *U.S. Department of State. Diplomacy In Action*. 2012, June 6. URL: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2012/06/191855.htm>

⁵⁸ Azerbaijan Presidential Election. *U.S. Department of State. Diplomacy In Action*. 2013, October 10. URL: <https://2009-2017.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2013/10/215283.htm>

⁵⁹ President Obama Announces \$3.4 Billion Investment to Spur Transition to Smart Energy Grid, 2009. *US Department of Energy*. URL: <https://bit.ly/3O6YmeO>

⁶⁰ Ratner M., Belkin P., Nichol J., Woehrel S. Europe's energy security: options and challenges to natural gas supply diversification. Congressional Research Service. 2013. URL: <https://sgp.fas.org/crs/row/R42405.pdf>

internal dissensions within the EU regarding natural gas procurement from Russia weakened European countries' inclination to support Azerbaijan's natural gas projects, consequently reducing Azerbaijan's role in the Western energy landscape. Given the bilateral nature of natural gas transport deals between European countries and Azerbaijan, the United States assumed a facilitating role rather than being a direct stakeholder. Consequently, the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) ceased to be a pivotal component of US energy security policy, with American objectives regarding Azerbaijani gas aligning as a derivative of European interests in diversifying gas resources away from Russia.

A confluence of international and domestic factors played pivotal roles in molding the shifts observed in US security policy during this period. Concerning the Russian invasion of Georgia, the anticipation of American military intervention to support Georgia proved unfounded. This discrepancy arose from a misconceived notion that the United States was engaged in a geopolitical rivalry with Russia, vying for territorial control in the Caucasus. Additionally, towards the conclusion of Bush's second term in office, a palpable aversion to military interventions had permeated both the American public and bureaucratic elites⁶¹.

Upon the inauguration of the Obama Administration in 2009, a discernible trend of US disengagement in Azerbaijan took shape. Azerbaijan's security interests progressively waned in significance for the US as the Obama Administration accorded priority to addressing issues in the Afghan and Iraq theaters, executing a pivot to Asia, and recalibrating bilateral relations with Russia. In alignment with these strategic objectives, the Obama administration curtailed bilateral military assistance to regional allies under the aegis of the Global War on Terror (GWoT). This recalibration had a consequential impact on US military aid to Azerbaijan, reflecting the administration's strategic realignment and shifting security priorities.

DISTINCTIVE TRENDS IN UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARDS AZERBAIJAN (2015-2020)

At the close of 2015, it is evident that US policy toward Azerbaijan has entered a distinct phase characterized by limited engagement across the energy, security, and democracy promotion dimensions. In the realm of energy, the pattern of US disengagement initiated in the late 2000s persists, aligning with the diminishing significance of Caspian energy resources for US energy security. While the primary objectives of US policy, such as the establishment of the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) and trans-Caspian connections, remain unchanged from the preceding period, there has been a discernible reduction in the level of US commitment to realizing these goals. Despite the SGC project securing loan support from the European Investment Bank for the construction of TANAP and TAP, notable backing from the US government has been lacking. Additionally, efforts to expand the project eastward to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan and southward to Iraq and Israel have not garnered the anticipated interest, even within Europe⁶².

In the domain of security, Azerbaijan, while continuing to contribute to the NATO mission in Afghanistan and serving as a transit point for the Northern Distribution Network (NDN), has struggled to elicit heightened US interest in bilateral security

⁶¹ *Jahangirli J.* Contradictions of Realism and Liberalism on Interstate Relations...

⁶² *Roberts J.* The Southern Gas Corridor. *Hafner M., Tagliapietra S.* (Eds). *The European Gas Markets*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017. P. 315-357. DOI: 10.1007/978-3-319-55801-1_14

cooperation. During the latter part of the Obama Administration's second term, the policy focused on maintaining existing low levels of security cooperation through routine meetings. President Aliyev participated in the Nuclear Security Summits in 2014 and 2016, engaging with Vice President Biden and Secretary Kerry in 2016. However, these meetings did not yield the articulation of new areas of security cooperation⁶³.

Democracy promotion, an area of active US engagement in Azerbaijan during the preceding period, witnessed a reduction in emphasis under the Obama Administration after 2015. Official statements in the final two years of Obama's second term avoided explicit discussions of Azerbaijan's human rights record, despite an intensified crackdown on civil society following President Aliyev's visit to Washington in 2016. This trend further intensified with the election of Donald Trump as US president in 2016⁶⁴.

The continued US disengagement in Azerbaijan during this period is contextualized by the ongoing unconventional oil and gas revolution, declining overall importance of Central Asia in US foreign policy, a surge in isolationist sentiments in the US, and the election of Donald Trump. The Trump administration, emphasizing the expansion of domestic oil production, has yet to formulate specific policies for collaboration with Azerbaijan in developing Caspian energy resources. Simultaneously, the European Union is pursuing alternative solutions to its natural gas challenges, including the development of liquefied natural gas (LNG) processing capacity, a unified energy market, energy regulation liberalization, energy conservation, and the promotion of clean energy sources⁶⁵.

In the domain of security, the Obama Administration substantially contracted the scope of the US-led Global War on Terror (GWOt), leading to Azerbaijan losing its status as a crucial locus in the struggle against international terrorism. Concurrently, the Obama Administration's overtures to cooperate with Iran and the subsequent signing of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) altered the perception of Iran from an existential enemy necessitating support to a state with which the US could engage. While Russia's geopolitical expansionism emerged as a potential gravitational force in the region, the Obama Administration, considering the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict as an intercommunal rather than an international affair marked by Russian expansionism, did not respond to Russia's growing influence in the South Caucasus.

Against this backdrop, Russia continued to consolidate its mediator role in the NK conflict without encountering opposition or counteraction from the US. Consequently, Azerbaijan and Armenia, disillusioned by the inconsistent and lackluster engagement of the US and the Minsk Group, lost trust in these entities. The violent clashes between Azerbaijan and Armenia in April 2016 underscored the waning US interest in security matters in the South Caucasus. The OSCE's Minsk Group meetings in May and June 2016 yielded no tangible results, with the ceasefire eventually brokered under Russian leadership. An International Crisis Group (ICG) report in June 2017 underscored the consequences of Western inaction, arguing that the absence of proactive Western

⁶³ Kramer D., Kauzlarich R. It's time for the United States to act on Azerbaijan. *The Washington Post*. 2016, September 8. URL: <https://wapo.st/3O7tv1O>

⁶⁴ Ibidem.

⁶⁵ Austvik O.G. The Energy Union and security-of-gas supply. *Energy Policy*. 2016. Vol. 96. P. 372-382. DOI: 10.1016/j.enpol.2016.06.013

participation left the conflicting parties with no genuine alternative to Russian mediation⁶⁶.

The Trump Administration seems similarly disinclined to invest substantial political or military capital in the peaceful resolution of the NK conflict or in ensuring Azerbaijan's security and independence. Although Trump's National Security Strategy (NSS) document⁶⁷ acknowledged Russia's subversive measures in Europe and willingness to violate regional sovereignty, it has not articulated a concrete policy aimed at supporting the independence and sovereignty of South Caucasus countries.

Furthermore, President Trump's evident disregard for democracy promotion is notable. His belief that promoting democracy abroad is not in the United States' interest is reflected in proposed budget cuts to funding for US-supported NGO networks and USAID⁶⁸. Trump has signaled a hands-off approach to the internal affairs of Muslim-majority countries, aligning with various authoritarian leaders and praising them for their perceived strong leadership. Consequently, tensions between the US and Azerbaijan over human rights matters have diminished, with Trump even extending a congratulatory message to President Aliyev after his re-election in 2018, strategically sidestepping mention of democracy and human rights concerns⁶⁹.

RUSSIAN PERSPECTIVE ON UNITED STATES POLICY TOWARDS AZERBAIJAN

During the stage spanning from 1993 to 1996 in Russian foreign policy, a discernible shift unfolded with the waning influence of liberal Westernist ideas in favor of a resurgence of fundamentalist nationalist principles. With the formulation of the Foreign Policy Concept and Military Doctrine, Russian Foreign Minister Kozyrev introduced the "Yeltsin Doctrine." This doctrine contended that Russia, as the most efficacious guarantor of stability across the expanse of the former Soviet Union, should undertake the role of peacemaking within the post-Soviet political landscape⁷⁰. Andrei Kozyrev, in a 1994 speech, asserted that the states within the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltics constituted the focal point of Russia's vital interests: "States of the CIS and Baltics constitute the area of concentration of Russia's vital interests. This is also the area from which the main threats to these interests emanate... I think that raising the question about complete withdrawal and removal of any Russian military presence in the countries of near abroad is just an extreme, if not extremist, suggestion comparable to the idea of sending [Russian] tanks to all the former republics to establish there some imperial order."⁷¹

Following Boris Yeltsin's departure from the Russian presidency due to health issues in 2001, Vladimir Putin, his Prime Minister, assumed office, prompting speculation about potential shifts in Russian foreign policy. Putin, renowned for his

⁶⁶ Nagorno-Karabakh's Gathering War Clouds. *International Crisis Group*. 2017. URL: <https://bit.ly/4b1sFNI>

⁶⁷ National Security Strategy of the United States of America. December 2017. P. 47. URL: <https://bit.ly/48VIW56>

⁶⁸ Remarks by the President at Clinton Global Initiative. *The White House*. 2014, September 23. URL: <https://bit.ly/48CF8WN>

⁶⁹ Donald Trump sends message to Ilham Aliyev: I look forward to working with you. *Report.az*. 2018. URL: <https://bit.ly/47H6A4q>

⁷⁰ Jackson N. Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS... P. 69.

⁷¹ МИД избавляется от "беловежского синдрома". *Газета «Коммерсантъ»*, 19.01.1994. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/68994>

resolute actions against Chechnya during his premiership, triggered concerns that Russia might adopt a neo-imperial stance toward former Soviet republics, coupled with discussions on the emergence of Eurasianism⁷². However, some scholars, such as Akerman, Graeme, and Giorgadze, positioned Putin within the pragmatist school, suggesting a continuity of policies rather than a radical departure⁷³. Giorgadze outlined the key tenets of 'Putin's Doctrine' encapsulated in four documents⁷⁴. The Defense Doctrine asserted Russia's right to a first nuclear strike under specific critical conditions for national security⁷⁵. The National Security Doctrine rejected attempts to establish a unipolar world, advocating for a multipolar order and regional spheres of influence to diminish American power⁷⁶. The Foreign Policy Doctrine envisioned Russia as the dominant Eurasian power, aiming to exert influence over neighbors and foster friendly states along its borders. The Concept of International Security identified free media, television, and the internet as potential threats to Russian security, emphasizing the need for management⁷⁷. In the context of Azerbaijan, these doctrines illuminate Russia's strategic approach, implying a desire for regional dominance and influence over neighboring states, including considerations of their alignment with Russian interests.

Russia's stance on Azerbaijan-USA relations is deeply rooted in its historical and strategic interests in the near abroad, influenced by evolving domestic politics and foreign policy goals. As the successor of the Soviet empire, Russia harbors strategic interests in the North Caucasus, aiming to maintain the region within its sphere of influence and prevent encroachment by other major powers, particularly the United States. This sensitivity is intricately tied to Russia's perceived global status and prestige. Moreover, Russia pursues economic interests in Azerbaijan, seeking control over its abundant natural resources, particularly oil, to secure access to industrial and defense facilities. This control is envisioned to guarantee a market for Russian products and create revenue streams through transit fees for Caspian-to-Europe oil and gas pipelines. The control of Azerbaijani oil would not only enhance Russia's standing as a major player in the global energy market but also fortify its influence in the international arena⁷⁸. Additionally, Russia views its involvement in Azerbaijan as a means to protect its territorial integrity, responding comprehensively to potential regional rebellions, such as Chechnya⁷⁹. Thus, Moscow aims to ensure that Caucasus states, especially Azerbaijan, do not pose threats to Russian territorial integrity by supporting any form of rebellion. Understanding these multifaceted interests provides

⁷² Berman I. Slouching toward Eurasia? *Perspectives*. 2001. Vol. 12, № 1 (September-October). P. 1-9. URL: <https://open.bu.edu/handle/2144/3589>

⁷³ Akerman E., Herd G.P. Russian Foreign Policy: The CIS and the Baltic State. In **Ross, C. (Ed.)**. *Russian Politics under Putin*. Manchester, NY: Manchester University Press, 2004. P. 270-271.

⁷⁴ Giorgadze K. Russia: Regional Partner of Aggressor? *The Review of International Affairs*. 2002. Vol. 2, № 1 (Autumn). P. 64.

⁷⁵ Russia's Military Doctrine. Arms Control Association, 2000. URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-05/russias-military-doctrine>

⁷⁶ Russia's National Security Concept. Arms Control Association, 2000. URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000-01/features/russias-national-security-concept>

⁷⁷ Gül M. Russia and Azerbaijan: Relations after 1989. *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*. 2008. Vol. 7, № 2-3. P. 47-66.

⁷⁸ Bakhshaliyev A. 1990 sonrası Rusya-Azerbaycan ilişkileri. Karabük: Karabük Üniversitesi, 2021.

⁷⁹ Ambrosio T. *Authoritarian backlash: Russian resistance to democratization in the former Soviet Union*. Farnham: Ashgate Publ. Company, 2009.

a crucial backdrop for comprehending Russia's nuanced approach to Azerbaijan's relations with the United States.

The Caspian Sea's legal status has historically been a contentious issue between Azerbaijan and Russia, significantly impacting their relations. The disagreement, rooted in Russia and Iran's contention that the Caspian is a lake rather than a sea, revolved around demands for equal and cooperative exploitation of its reserves. Azerbaijan, along with other littoral states, asserted its right to exploit its own territorial waters. Russia, particularly concerned about the strategic implications of potential European and American interests in its near abroad, opposed Azerbaijan's early attempts to collaborate with Western oil companies and insisted on equal revenue sharing among littoral states⁸⁰. The initial opposition intensified when Azerbaijan, under Elchibey's leadership, signed an agreement with a British Petroleum-led consortium in 1992. Russia's rejection, articulated in a letter to the UK, was interpreted as resistance to perceived encroachment on its interests. Another factor behind Russia's continued opposition was Azerbaijan's refusal of Russian military peacekeeping in Nagorno-Karabakh⁸¹. However, as Russian interests were partially accommodated in Azerbaijan's oil industry, and Western powers de facto accepted the Caspian as a sea, Russia's stance evolved. In 1998, a mutual agreement was signed, recognizing Azerbaijan's right to exploit waters coinciding with its borders. This change in Russia's position marked the resolution of a significant obstacle to normalizing relations between Azerbaijan and Russia⁸².

CONCLUSIONS

The author identifies 4 periods of US-Azerbaijan relations in 1991-2020: 1) 1991-2001, 2) 2001-2007, 3) 2007-2015, and 4) 2015-2020.

From 1991 to 2001, the United States underwent a transformative phase in its policy towards Azerbaijan, marked by an increased focus on regional stability and economic partnerships through energy initiatives like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Security concerns in the South Caucasus also influenced policy decisions, while considerations of democracy and human rights were weighed against broader strategic imperatives. This period set the foundation for subsequent shifts in U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan.

In 2001-2007, U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan underwent significant changes, prioritizing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and intensifying efforts in combatting international terrorism. The Global War on Terror played a crucial role, leading to strengthened U.S.-Azerbaijan relations, though democracy promotion took a back seat to energy and security interests.

The period from 2007 to 2015 saw a nuanced shift, with decreased U.S. focus on energy and security, increased attention to democracy and human rights, and challenges arising from Azerbaijan's opposition to the Turkish-Armenian Rapprochement. Azerbaijan's strategic concerns regarding Nagorno-Karabakh intensified, and U.S. engagement faced limitations in influencing regional outcomes.

Between 2015 and 2020, U.S. policy towards Azerbaijan further disengaged across

⁸⁰ Zainullina N. Political and legal status of the Caspian Sea: The position of the Republic of Kazakhstan in regard to the Caspian Sea. Kocaeli: Kocaeli Üniversitesi, 2020.

⁸¹ Bölükbaşı S. Azerbaijan: A Political History. London: I.B. Tauris, 2011.

⁸² Bakhshaliyev A. 1990 sonrası Rusya-Azerbaycan ilişkileri...

energy, security, and democracy promotion dimensions, influenced by factors like the unconventional oil and gas revolution, decreasing Central Asia significance, rising isolationism, and the Trump administration's priorities. The U.S. response to regional dynamics, notably the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, showcased a trend of reduced involvement. Finally, from 1993 to 1996, Russian foreign policy shifted towards fundamentalist nationalist principles, laying the foundation for an assertive stance in its near abroad, including relations with Azerbaijan. Putin's pragmatist approach, outlined in 'Putin's Doctrine,' emphasized continuity, and Russia's interests in Azerbaijan centered on historical and strategic factors. The resolution of Caspian Sea disputes in 1998 marked a positive turn in Azerbaijan-Russia relations.

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