

Russia's Policy towards the Caspian Region, 2001-2015

*Thesis Submitted to Jawaharlal Nehru University
for the award of the degree of*

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SUNITA MEENA



Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies

School of International Studies

Jawaharlal Nehru University

New Delhi-110067

2019



JAWAHARLAL NEHRU UNIVERSITY

Centre for Russian and Central Asian Studies

School of International Studies

New Delhi-110067

Tel.: (O) +91-11-2670 4365

Fax: (+91) -11-2674 1586, 2586

Email: crcasjnu@gmail.com

Date: 22.07.2019

DECLARATION

I declare that the thesis entitled "Russia's Policy towards the Caspian Region, 2001-2015" submitted by me for the award of the degree of Doctor of Philosophy of Jawaharlal Nehru University is my own work. The thesis has not been submitted for any other degree of this University or any other University.

SUNITA MEENA

CERTIFICATE

We recommend that this thesis be placed before the examiners for evaluation.

PROF. PHOOL BADAN
(Chairperson, CRCAS)

अध्यक्ष/Chairperson

रूसी और मध्य एशियाई अध्ययन केन्द्र
Centre for Russian & Central Asian Studies

अंतर्राष्ट्रीय अध्ययन संस्थान
School of International Studies

जवाहरलाल नेहरू विश्वविद्यालय
Jawaharlal Nehru University
नई दिल्ली/New Delhi - 110 067



PROF. PHOOL BADAN
(Supervisor)

PROFESSOR

Centre for Russian & Central Asian Studies
School of International Studies
Jawaharlal Nehru University
New Delhi - 110 067



ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This thesis would not have seen the light of the day if there had not been the guidance and blessings of many people from professional and personal life. I am extremely grateful to my supervisor Prof. Phool Badan for his timely guidance, patience, and mentoring for my Ph.D thesis. His guidance was imperative in research, evolving my conscience and writing of the thesis.

I also take this opportunity to extend my heartiest gratitude to all faculty members Prof.Rajan Kumar, Prof.S.K. Pandey, Prof.Ajay Patnaik and Dr.Krishnendra Meena along with all the members of Centre for Russian & Central Asian Studies and staff of JNU library, with an extended thanks to Teen Murthy, IDSA for their assistance and cooperation.

I am highly obliged to Prof.Aditya Narayan Mishra (Aurobindo College), Prof.Rajesh Jha (Rajdhani College), Prof.Prem Chand (ARSD College) for sharing their wisdom and insights.

I am deeply indebted to my parents, without their support, higher studies could not have been possible for me. My mother (Smt.Supyar Devi) and father (Shri.K.C Meena) have supported me unconditionally throughout the life. Apart from them, my mother-in-law (Smt.Kamla Devi) and Father-in-law (Shri.Dinesh Kumar)'s support had been instrumental in accomplishing this feat. Their love, affection and dedication for my study encouraged me a lot. Today, I also recall the love and affection of all my family members including Dr.Anil Kumar, Mr.Dalip Kumar, Pushpa, Priyanka, Suman, Mr.Kshitiz Kanwat, Mrs.Manisha Kanwat, Mr.Pradeep Jeph, Nidhi, Pooja, Somesh, Bajrang, Diksha, Kanishka, Vihan, Vivan, Chinty and Kittu who have played a pivotal role in my life.

However, no one else's contribution has been more influential, supportive, generous and kind than my life partner and soulmate (Mr.Varun Kumar) who have always motivated and inspired for expanding my vision as a professional. He supported me in analysing the Economic, Strategic, Energy and other concepts of my study. He always stood by me in the difficult times. Without his constant support, it was impossible to complete this study.

Finally, I also express my sincere gratitude to my dear friends Dr. Kahkashan Kamaal, Keka Das, Chimet, J.K.Jeph, Shweta, Nizara, and Poonam. And most importantly my eldest brother Dr. Vijay Kumar for encouraging and directing my focus for achieving extraordinary feats in life since my childhood.

Last but not the least; I thank 'the almighty' who bestowed me with physical and inner strength to carry on this work.

SUNITA MEENA

Dedicated To:

My Father (Shri. Kailash Chand)

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List of Abbreviations

| | |
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| ACG | Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli |
| AIOC | Azerbaijan International Operating Company |
| ANZUS | Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty) |
| BCM | Billion Cubic Metres |
| BRI | Belt and Road Initiative |
| BSEC | Black Sea Economic Cooperation pact |
| BTC | Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline |
| CACGP | Central Asia-China gas pipeline |
| CAREC | Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation |
| CAR | Central Asian Republics |
| CIS | Commonwealth of Independent States |
| CNPC | China National Petroleum Corporation |
| CPC | Caspian Pipeline Consortium |
| CSTO | Collective Security Treaty Organization |
| CU | Custom Union |
| EBRD | European Bank for Reconstruction and Development |
| ECO | Economic Cooperation Organization |
| EEC | European Economic Community |
| EEU | Eurasian Economic Union |
| EEZ | Exclusive Economic Zone |
| EIA | Energy Information Agency |
| EU | European Union |
| EurAsEC | Eurasian Economic Community |
| GDP | Gross Domestic Product |
| GUAM | Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova |
| IAEA | International Atomic Energy Agency |

| | |
|---------|---|
| IMU | Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan |
| INOGATE | Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe |
| IPAP | Individual Partnership Action Plan |
| ISAF | International Security Assistance Force |
| ITE | Iran-Turkey-Europe |
| JCPOA | Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action |
| KPO | Karachaganak Petroleum Operating |
| LBSA | Land Based Source and Activities Protocol |
| MoU | Memorandum of Understanding |
| NATO | North Atlantic Treaty Organization |
| NCOC | North Caspian Operating Company |
| NDN | Northern Distribution Network |
| NK | Nagorno Karabakh |
| NRC | NATO-Russia Council |
| NSS | National Security Strategy |
| OBOR | One Belt, One Road |
| OIC | Organization of the Islamic Conference |
| OKIOC | Offshore Kazakhstan International Operating Company |
| ONGC | Oil and Natural Gas Company |
| OPEC | Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries |
| OSCE | Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe |
| PfP | Partnership for Peace (PfP) |
| PSA | Production Sharing Agreement |
| RSFSR | Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic |
| SCO | Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| SGC | Southern Gas Corridor |
| SOCAR | State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic |

| | |
|---------|---|
| SWG | Permanent Special Working Group |
| TANAP | Trans-Anatolian Gas pipeline Project |
| TAPI | Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India |
| TCO | Tengizchevroil |
| TCP | Trans- Caspian Pipeline' |
| TRACECA | Transportation Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia |
| UN | United Nations |
| UNCLOS | United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea |
| UNSC | United Nations Security Council |
| US | United States |
| USAID | United State Agency for International Development |
| USSR | Union of Soviet Socialist Republics |
| WTO | World Trade Organization |

Caspian Sea¹

Caspian riches



¹ <https://www.gisreportsonline.com/caspian-oil-and-gas-in-a-world-of-plenty,energy,2240.html>

Chapter I

Introduction and Research Design

The Caspian Sea is an enclosed inland water body without any natural outflow. It is the world's largest landlocked water body and Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iran share the shore of the Sea. The Caspian region is strategically located in between Asia and Europe, and besides due to availability of abundant energy resources, the area has become a center of primary attention in international politics. It has historically been the main transit and trading center between eastern and western powers. In the current context, the region has become even more important after the discovery of hydrocarbon resources, including "50 billion barrels of oil and 9 trillion cubic meters of natural gas in proven or probable reserves"¹. Thereby, the region has become significant to the global economy in terms of global energy security. Moreover, nearly more than 90% of the world's caviar is produced in the region. Beluga Caviar (a species of Sturgeon family) is an expansive delicacy, and it is in high demand worldwide. Due to Moscow's strong control over the Caspian region during the then Soviet era, it was neglected by the outside world, but today, it is presumably one of the 21st century's last discovered proven source of unexplored oil reserve.

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan possess the majority of the Caspian Basin's oil resources, and Turkmenistan has huge gas reserves. However, currently, by far, Russia and Iran continue to be the world's largest producer and exporter of energy. After the Persian Gulf and Siberia, the Caspian Basin is the world's third-largest source of oil and natural gas (Misiagiewicz, 2012: 69). The collapse of the USSR created a power vacuum and thus hanged the geopolitics as well as the security concerns of Central Asia and the Caspian region. As a result, the neighbouring powers, as well as superpowers, sought to fill the vacuum. Given this scenario of the potential game of power tussle in the region, Russia and China have become a concern with the resurgence of religious extremism and its potential threat to stability. Especially, in context of growing networks of international terrorism with its epicenter located in Afghanistan. In fact, the post-Taliban era remains vulnerable to terrorism, and this, in turn, has become a likely

¹ Stratfor Worldview (2018), "What does the New Caspian Sea Agreement Mean for the Energy Market?," (Online web), Accessed on 18 November 2018, URL: <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/what-does-new-caspian-sea-agreement-mean-energy-market>.

source of major threat for the former Soviet republics. Thereby, geopolitical concerns and security of the Caspian region have become one of the main prerogatives of the Caspian states.

The 9/11 attack opened a new door for the U.S to get involved in Central Asia to further their foreign policy objectives on energy security and in combating international terrorism. The ongoing struggle to control the natural resources and marine reserves of the region (fisheries and other sea species, particularly Sturgeon) among the regional powers and superpowers has complicated the security scenario. Therefore, with regard to ensuring regional security, the role of the U.S and Russia in the region has continued to expand (Patnaik, 2016: 36). Moreover, the threats arising from militant Islamic Fundamentalism and the Taliban have brought all Central Asian states together to focus on the security of the region. This growing security concerns culminated to a 'round table' meeting among the Central Asian states held on 17 February 2004 with objectives to normalise the diplomatic relations states, and also to discuss the broad contours of security of the Caspian Sea Basin. As per the official Russian position, the five Caspian states should have an absolute right on the oil and gas resources of the Sea (Cohen, 2006:5).

During the period of Yeltsin Presidency (1991-1999), Russia faced internal political and economic crisis, which had impinged on the Russian role in the Caspian region, making it insignificant and extremely weak. The uncertainty in the domestic political economy and at the same time, the exigencies of transfer of power largely affected the Russian foreign policy up till Vladimir Putin officially became the President of Russian Federation in March 2000. Prior to this in August 1999, Vladimir Putin was appointed as Prime Minister, afterward as an acting President in December 1999. A dramatic alteration in the Russian foreign policy began to take shape under Putin's leadership. Putin envisaged on making Russia regain its lost ground due to the disintegration of USSR. He initiated measures so that Russia could again become a confident and powerful economic player not only in the region but also in world politics. He introduced a 'new policy', declaring that 'the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States) countries would be our absolute priority, and emphasised to strengthen Russian influence in the region with new initiatives for economic development, in particular to promote Russian businesses and also to secure broader geopolitical interests (Kubicek, 2004:211). From the very beginning, Putin was very keen to establish a pragmatic relationship with the West. Consequently, Moscow became a member of G-8, intensified its ties with NATO, and succeeded to maintain a balanced relationship between the U.S and EU. However, Russian foreign policy later shifted from global to regional issues. Since then, Russia has sought to

build up its influence in the regional affairs of Central Asia. As a result, Custom Union and Eurasian Economic Union were formed to meet the foreign policy objectives.

Putin's policy towards the Caspian region reflected his commitment to reclaim Russia's position in international politics and the aim to fulfill the aspiration of creating a multipolar world order. Hence, the Caspian Oil Company was formed in July 2000 by a conglomerate of leading Russian companies i.e., Lukoil, Gazprom, and Yukos, mainly to explore energy resources in the Russian part of the shelf and also in the neighbouring states (Kubicek, 2013: 175). These companies continue to play a crucial role in the expansion of pipeline networks in Central Asia and the Caspian region. In the meanwhile, the Gazprom has managed to acquire a cheap source of energy from the Central Asian states. This Russian company then sell the gas to Europe at a higher price. This collaboration could be seen as a Russian attempt to advance its political influence over the European states by making them dependent on the pipelines controlled by the Russian companies, in meeting their consistently increasing energy requirements. Besides, this policy is geared towards restoring Russian political supremacy over the former Soviet territory. Moreover, Russia has been following a basket of different policies that broadly aims to gain control over the energy resources of the Caspian region and Central Asia, enhance political stability, cooperation on counterterrorism, build up a platform for common economic cooperation and lastly safeguarding the interests of the Russian citizens inhabiting in the region (Cooley, 2012:51).

The Caspian region due to its huge deposit of energy resources, geographical and geostrategic location has become a zone of political, economic and military rivalry between Russia and the U.S, which is also known as the "New Great Game." Throughout the 19th century, the region remained to be a source of constant tension between the Russian and British Empire that led to a fierce indirect struggle to exert control over the area. Currently, Russia and the U.S are the two major actors vying for supremacy in the Caspian region. Both countries have officially claimed that the region has become a vital zone in the protection of their national interests, mainly energy security (Chufrin, 2004: 1).

After the 9/11 attack, the increasing presence of the U.S in the region has alarmed Russia. The U.S has succeeded in establishing military bases in Uzbekistan (Karshi-Khanabad), Kyrgyzstan (Manas) by way of providing aid to these countries. On the other hand, Russia, in order to counterbalance the U.S has also signed several military agreements with the former Soviet republics. For example, Russia has deployed around 14,000 soldiers in the region of Belarus,

Armenia, Georgia (mainly in Abkhazia and Ossetia), Kyrgyzstan, Moldova, and Ukraine (Abilov, 2012:43). Additionally, China has also arrived into the region under the umbrella of the SCO as a major instrument to advance its strategic involvement, which in all likelihood would further prolonged and complicate the ongoing tussle among the great powers. In the Iraq war in 2003, despite reservation, the U.S had utilised the military bases of the Central Asian states to conduct the war. In a meeting held in 2009, between the Kyrgyz President Kurmanbek Bakiyev and Russian counterpart President Dmitriy Medvedev stated that “the U.S Manas airbase would be closed.” (Ibid, 44). This military development has presumably shifted the tide in favor of Russia. Consequently, the Central Asian states have begun to tilt more towards Russia. In short, Russia policy has aimed to secure its presence and at the same time to prevent American activities in the name of ‘democracy’ in the region. In other words, the unfolding rivalry, competition, and pipeline politics among the great powers in Central Asia and the Caspian region have no doubt determine the imperative of Russian. Therefore, extraction of energy resources and future route development of the pipelines and the changing geostrategic concerns of the great powers are factors that would determine the nature of economic and political development in the region.

Prior to 1991, Moscow was mostly confined to the oil industries within its borders, and the energy resources, especially oil of the Caspian region was managed mainly through Russian controlled Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC). Russia not only controls the CPC pipeline from Kazakh oil fields, but also the Blue Stream to Turkey. Besides, gas deal with Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have tremendously increased the Russian influence on the world energy economy. In contrast, to contain Russia’s influence or a monopoly of the pipeline, the Western countries in 1999 laid an alternate pipeline, known as ‘Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan,’ (BTC) pipeline too, that exports gas to the Western countries. Western powers have reckoned the growing Russian dominance in the Caspian and Central Asian region. Given the Russian strategic vision on energy in the context of foreign policy and the initiatives they have taken up until now, Russia with its unique Eurasian location and the abundant oil and gas resources could ensure the supply of energy to the eastern as well as the western side of the globe in the 21st century. The same objective is in tandem with the common agenda of the Caspian states. (Campaner and Gubaidullin, 2009)

Therefore, for Russian foreign policy, energy is not only the most significant strategic commodity but also a geopolitical tool to not only restore but also to increase its influence in the region, which in turn help meet the objective of creating a multi-polar world order.

Currently, Russia is a major exporter of oil and gas exporter to Europe. The European Union imports around 70% of gas and 80% oil from Russia (Ibid.). The EU Commission stated in 2018, “Russia was the largest supplier of natural gas to the EU both in 2016 and 2017”. (Sengul, 2018), The Commission disclosed that in 2018, 11 member countries of the EU: Austria, Bulgaria, Czech Republic, Estonia, Finland Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Romania, Slovakia, and Slovenia, have imported gas from Russia, approximately more than 75 percent of their total (Ellyatt, 2019). As mentioned above, in context of international terrorism and the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the region and the concerns on energy and security among the major powers the dynamics of the struggle among them – would largely shape the future prospects of the Caspian region.

The terrorist attack on the twin towers of the World Trade Center and Pentagon in September 2001, the U.S was able to gain the sympathy of the international community, and this, in turn, has justified of contemporary American foreign policy on counter-terrorism, especially with regard military engagements around the world. Since, the time of the decision of the Roosevelt administration to establish world order, according to the UN, the world has greatly changed. His decision implied a prospective American leadership in the global economy that would open all the market for American trade and investment. China is one of the fastest emerging economies of the world, which holds \$300 billion in US Treasury Bonds, while the U.S economy continues to be heavily indebted. However, both economies need more resources to sustain the growth rate in the case of China and stay afloat for the U.S economy. Given this economic prerogatives, the U.S intervention in Iraq and the wider region in West Asia, signify as the geopolitical imperative of gaining control over oil and gas resources around the globe. In fact, the U.S had been trying to exploit energy resources not only in West Asia but also in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America; and particularly in the Caspian Sea region (Klaus Dodds, 2007).

Throughout history, the Caspian region had remained to be a traditional zone of Russian interests, i.e. both political and economic. Russia has remained as one of the most indispensable players in the area. Currently, approximately 25 million Russians still continue to live in the erstwhile Soviet republics. Ethnic Russians constitute 23.7% of total Kazakh population, followed by Ukraine 17.3%, Turkmenistan 4% and Azerbaijan 1.3% (Birnbaum, 2014). Putin has started a campaign in these countries to unite the assertive ethnic Russians. Moscow attained an imperative peacekeeping role in resolving many conflicts in the post-Soviet space. In fact, Russia claims that it has the right to intervene in the former Soviet republics to protect

the Russian minorities. Interventions in Abkhazian-Georgian and Nagorno-Karabakh conflicts are examples of restating this claim. The Russian strategic interests are not only limited to gaining control of oil and gas resources but also maintain cordial relations with all Caspian states, especially with gas-rich Uzbekistan on security issues and the problems of energy transportation to the outside world (Chufrin, 2004: 2). In doing so, Putin has taken initiatives to continuously engage with the leaders of Caspian states.

Given this, though Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran have only minimum trade, nevertheless Russia and Azerbaijan have supported Iranian commitment to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on the Iranian Nuclear Programme. Meanwhile, the U.S has initiated new sanctions on Russia, and this has brought Iran and Moscow, closer, as both face similar external pressure from the West, notwithstanding their disagreements over the Syrian crisis. Furthermore, in October 2017, Putin had a separate meeting with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev on the Nagorno-Karabakh issue. Consequently, after a break of eleven years, Azerbaijan State Oil Company and Gazprom signed a deal to resupply Russian natural gas to Azerbaijan (Pritchkin, 2017).

The integration of Crimea into the Russian Federation in February 2014 was a dramatic turning point in Putin's 15 years as the Russian President. In reaction US, Europe, and Japan had imposed economic sanctions against Russia. In 2015, Russia faced one of the deepest economic crisis since 1998, and the relations with the U.S and Europe has become worse again, as it was during the Cold War. This trend opened the door for Russia to expand its ties with China, for example, after more than 10 years negotiations, Russia and China signed an agreement in May 2014 in Shanghai, in which Russia agreed to provide 30 bcm of natural gas annually to China for the next 30 years through the "Power of Siberia Gas Pipeline". During the Chinese Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Moscow in October 2014, both the country signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) wherein, Russia agreed to supply 138 bcm of gas annually. Although China is also set to soon become one of the dominant economic power in Central Asia, nevertheless Russia is maintaining guarded political, economic and cultural ties with the region (Kuchins, 2015:148-149).

In the geopolitical security realm, the Caspian Sea region continues to be very important for Russia. Evidently, after the cruise missiles launch from the ships of the Caspian fleet and Russian intervention in Syria as well as the war with Ukraine, neighbouring countries, especially Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iran has been alarmed about their sovereignty and security. However, this has to be seen in the backdrop of centuries-old multi-

dimensional relations between Russia and the Caspian states. In fact, currently, Russia has been working with Caspian bordering states on some issues such as; combating terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism, ethnic problems, controlling the narcotics trade by improving border security, enhancing economic development and integration through SCO, CSTO, EEC and a new CIS Antiterrorist Program (Kubicek, 2004: 211).

With the disintegration of the erstwhile Soviet Union, began a new debate on the legal status of the Caspian, specifically with regard to how to classify it, either as a 'sea' or as 'lake.' Undoubtedly, the Caspian is a unique body of water in which characteristics of both sea and lake are seen. Although, the coastal states have already been exploiting the mineral resources in surface and the bed close to the coasts, whereas their position regarding the legal status of the Caspian is different. Like all other lakes, it is not connected to any oceans. According to its size and depth, it is like a sea. However, if it is a lake, then the surface and waterbed have to be equally divided among the littoral states. Sea is governed according to the UN's Law of the Sea. Before the disintegration of USSR, the Caspian Sea was equally divided between Iran and the USSR. As per one of the bilateral agreements between them, the waterbody of the Caspian classified as a lake, because of the short Caspian coast, Iran still favours this idea, while Kazakhstan having the longest shore with the Caspian, prefers it as a sea. With regard to the renewed ongoing debate on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, since 1996 onwards, in order to discuss the legal status of the sea and also environmental issues related to laying of new pipelines, the Caspian states have conducted regular summits.

The latest of one of such meetings took place on 12 August 2018 in Aktau (Kazakhstan) where, the representatives of the five littoral states signed a legal convention to determine the legal status of the waterbody. However, it has to be noted that it took off several meetings for them to reach a meaningful compromise regarding the legal status of the waterbody. Despite still being popularly referred to as a sea, as per this latest compromise, it is neither a sea nor a lake. However, the latest compromise means the surface is to be treated as a sea, with each state granted jurisdiction over 15 nautical miles of the waterbody starting from their coastline where mineral exploration is not prohibited, plus additional 10 nautical miles for fishing, while rest is to be treated as international water (M.L, 2018).

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The review of the literature analyzes the existing information that is relevant to the area of research and also attempts to resolve the anomalies of the current discourse in the field of this

study. Therefore, it is important to identify the problem of the study so as to avoid the repetition of the mistakes of the earlier studies done by others in the field. The review of literature begins with the analysis of the various readings on the evolution of the trajectory of Russia's foreign policy towards the Caspian region during the period between 2001-2015. The various published literature on the area has been reviewed here in a thematic manner to find out the existing gap that needs to be filled.

Geopolitics of the Caspian Sea Region

The concept of geopolitics encompasses factors such as the economy, geography, and demography, which guides the government to implement its foreign policy. Klaus Dodds, in his book "*Geopolitics: a very short introduction*" described two distinct ways of understanding of geopolitics. According to him, "geopolitics provide ways of looking at the world and the global landscape by using geographical descriptions, metaphors, and templates such as 'Third World,' 'iron curtain'² and 'rogue state'³." Each of these terms is geographically inherited and describes certain areas of the world. Further, it serves as useful information in formulating foreign and security policymaking. Secondly, geopolitics concepts actually set the tone of the academic discourse and also influences popular practice. Labels such as 'Third World, iron curtain' works in the understandings the nature and status of communities, places, and so on. For example, the 'Third World,' as a concept not only serves a geographical narrative of Asia, Africa, and Latin America, but it provides an account of "triangulated political geographies" during the Cold War. For instance, the U.S and the west, in general, are considered as the First World, the USSR as the Second World. While Third the term "iron curtain" first used by Winston Churchill demarcates Europe into two different political areas; Western Europe (under the U.S), while Eastern Europe was under the communist rule (USSR).

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³ The term "rogue state" applied by many international theorists to state, which breaks international laws and deliberately does transgression work. In other word, the states, which threat world's peace, violate human rights, support terrorism, and terrorist activities and pursuance weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The term is mostly used by the UN

by many international theorists to state, which breaks international laws and deliberately does transgression work. In other word, the states, which threatens the world's peace, violate human rights, support terrorism, and terrorist activities and pursuance weapons of mass destruction (WMD). The term is mostly used by the UN. Moreover, the term also symbolised the efforts of the USSR to blocked its territories and the satellites from being in open contact with the West. Many scholars contend that the world is an open space for the geopolitical rivalry. In this context, leaders and intellectuals from Asia, Africa, and Latin America had deliberately embraced the term 'Third World' to show their political and geographical differences from the Global North. Thus, geographical attributes always play a significant role in the implementation of foreign as well as security policies (Klaus Dodds, 2007).

Professor Ajay Patnaik (2016) in his book "*Central Asia: geopolitics, security, and stability*" discussed the importance of geopolitics and explored various theories of geopolitics which contend that geopolitical concerns continue to influence the strategic thinking and determine the foreign policy of a given state in various forms. Over time, realist interpretations of on geopolitics have taken a hold on the understanding of international politics. In this context, according to Mackinder, the period from the late 19th century to the early 20th century could be considered as the age of period of 'classical geopolitics,' and Mackinder is one of the prominent scholars who has advocated this proposition. For instance, the Soviet Union has taken controlled over the vast natural resources of East Europe and Eurasia after defeating Nazi Germany. In contrast, the heartland theory, Nicolas Spykman, an American strategic thinker emphasised on 'Rimland,' whereas Mackinder defines the same as 'inner crescent.' Evidently, after the fall of the USSR, the 'heartland' area or the post-independent Soviet states became a disjointed space because of the assertion of its sovereignty. However, the discovery of new hydrocarbon reserves found in these states has further enhanced the strategic importance of Eurasia. In fact, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan possess ample hydrocarbon resources. Simultaneously, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan also have the potential to harness substantive energy from hydroelectric power plants, which can benefit its neighbors (Pakistan and Afghanistan). The point is each of the countries in Central Asia thus serves as an important link that connects the whole world.

Therefore, the strategic location of the region had led to the geopolitical rivalry in the 19th century between the British and Russian empires to control Central Asia and the Caucasus region, popularly known as the "Great Game." It came to a temporary halt due to the Russian Revolution (1917). Russia replaced tsarist Russia in 1920, and consequently the British exited

from the Caspian region. Since then and until the 1990s, Russia was the sole superpower in this region. After the dissolution of USSR, rivalry and power struggle began again over the Caspian Basin and this phase is known as the called “New Great Game.” Currently, besides the regional and other major world powers are vying to enhance the economic interest, international oil companies with profit-making motive, and a plethora of energy consortiums are active in the region (Khagani: 2007).

Professor, Edwards, M (2003) pointed out that in the 19th century, the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and Great Britain was mainly for topographical control and more importantly dominance over the artery of the trade route that connected the east and the west. Given this, the concept “New Great Game” is however broader. It encapsulates the competition for influence and power among the states and the profits making international oil companies and consortiums. In a practical sense, all the entities are seeking hegemony over the oil and gas industries. Lastly, also securing the reserves energy resources found in the Caucasus and Central Asian region. Currently, due to the geopolitical significance and abundance of energy resources, in the “New Great Game” broadly competitions and rivalries have begun among EU, U.S, Russia, China, Turkey, Iran, and India. Besides, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan have also started to claim their share on the Caspian resources to fulfill their interests. All these developments have, in turn, renewed the sea or lake debate of the Caspian Sea. In the “New Great Game,” the purpose of the western powers is to push back Russia and Iran from the region.

After the 9/11 terror attack, the Caspian Sea region has become geopolitically sensitive in the context of combating terrorism but more importantly securing the natural resources both energy and marine resources has become the main source of conflict in the “New Great Game.” In this context, it is important to note that the littoral states of the Caspian Sea region are politically as well as economically unstable, and one of the main reasons is the persistent lack of the legal definition and the division of resources of the Caspian Sea and contestation over the potential export routes (Janusz-Pawletta: 2014). Dekmejian and Simonian (2003) argue in their book that since early, the surrounding region of Caspian has been a crossroad of many cultures and civilisations and the focal point for imperial competitions. The northern and southern parts of the Caspian had been used as invasion routes by the Central Asian nomadic empires. Besides, the historical evolution, the book examines the domestic politics and the foreign policies of the five Caspian states. It also examines the political rivalries in the Caspian Sea region, among

the external powers, Islamic militants, various nationalist movements, national corporations, NGOs and international corporations.

After the dissolution of USSR in navigating the power vacuum thus created, the newly independent countries soon started to claim their own national interests. The unfolding scenario of a power vacuum in the region in due course also drew the attention of the world and thus the region again became the focal point of world geopolitical game. As mentioned earlier, factors that make this region significant in the geopolitical sense: Caspian shelf is richest in terms of oil and gas resources in the world. Topographically, the Caspian Sea region is centrally located in the context of the whole of Eurasia and southern Russia, northern Iran, western parts of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are directly connected to the Caspian Sea. The political and economic crisis in Russia throughout the 1990s and the 9/11 event provided an impetus to the U.S to strengthen its political and economic positions in the region (Kaliyeva, 2004).

In the contemporary period, the Caspian Sea region became the hotbed in the geopolitical sense, i.e., because of energy and security concerns. To put it more precisely, since 1991, the Caspian region became a place for international contestation over control of resources, and the region has become vulnerable to possibilities of open conflicts. The western, as well as eastern countries, are engaged in form alliances with the Caspian neighboring countries, mainly to coordinate the construction of energy export pipelines and also at the same time, trying to establish a monopoly on the oil resources of the region (Aydin: 2004). Nevertheless, the 'New Great Game,' hinges on the Caspian bordering states, which are essentially unstable due to ethnic conflicts, some latent and some out in the open. Besides, environmental issues, lack of clear-cut legal definition on the status of the Caspian Sea, the multiplicity of existing and potential competing pipeline routes, and finally the regional rivalries make the region inherently unstable.

In light of the new great game theory, Russia also has been trying to restore its image and influence in the CIS countries. Fatima and Zafar (2014) argue that the Central Asian states are significant in international politics for three factors. First, geographically the region is landlocked with no direct access to the oceans. Second, the proximity of the region with Russia and China who are currently important powers. The third factor is the area rich natural endowment, especially in oil and gas. Therefore, the geo-economic, geo-strategic, and geopolitical significance of Central Asian countries has changed since the Great Game theory was first put forth. The "New Great Game" to say the least, is markedly much more complex

and multi-layered. The major external players of it are Russia, China, the U.S, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan. The current dynamics of the 'New Great Game' have pitted Russia and China on one side trying to keep the U.S out while the U.S aims to contain the Russian and Chinese by using energy export pipelines and different organisations the short circuit each other in the game. The Caspian region connects Azerbaijan, is situated at the crossroads of Asia and Europe. The region with all the geopolitical weights and inherent instabilities has turned it into an area of major interests for regional and extra-regional powers (Zastera: 2006).

Analysing in detail, Vaishnav P. (2016) wrote in her article "Impact of energy resources on the foreign policy of Azerbaijan" that as a Caspian bordering state, various empires including Persian, Ottoman, and Russia for a long time ruled Azerbaijan. In the early 1990s, the three Caucasus states- Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia had suffered political and economic turmoil. The country has a well-developed oil industry and also is rich in various other energy resources. In January 2013, the proven crude oil and natural gas reserves were approximately estimated to be 7 billion barrels and about 35 trillion cubic feet respectively. This prospect has captured the imagination of many western countries, particularly the U.S. After the independence of Azerbaijan in 1991, the U.S and other countries soon opened their embassies in oil-rich Baku and the country got the invitation to become a member of NATO's Partnership for Peace Program (PfP). Moreover, on 20 September 1994, the State Oil Company of Azerbaijan (SOCAR) and a Western Oil Consortium led by British Petroleum and Amoco signed the "Contract of the Century" to ward off any future Russian intervention.

As a result, pipelines projects such as "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and Baku-Tbilisi- Erzurum (BTE)" has been built. Moreover, Azerbaijan and the U.S has arrived into an understanding to strengthen the bilateral relations as well as has come to an agreement on strategic cooperation. Some of the political analysts believe that Azerbaijan with western companies' involvement, multiple pipelines, and prospective energy export diversification will guarantee them 'real independence and sovereignty.' "Happiness is multiple pipelines" has become a famous slogan in Azerbaijan. Given the ample natural resources, geostrategic location, bordering with powerful states such as Russia, Iran, Turkey and the unresolved conflict Nagorno-Karabakh region with Armenia would nonetheless remain significant factors that influence Azerbaijan's foreign policy. Additionally, the country has become a hub for western countries.

Russian Objectives and Policies towards the Caspian Region

Russian foreign policy primarily relies on energy and security in the region. The Caspian Sea region potentially has 10 % of the world gas and oil reserves, and this makes the area very important for the international energy market. This region became a source of alternative energy for the western countries, which are otherwise dependent on the West Asian countries. Besides, due to being geographically landlocked location, it lacks direct access to the world market. As a result, the western countries represented by their multinational energy companies have been seeking to get a foothold in the region to shape their own national interests, securing their future energy needs and energy independence. While Russia intends to secure and bolster its presence over the region to ensure its own interests has implementing a proactive energy policy towards the Caspian basin (Penkova, 2014). In this context, an academician Griffith (1998) elaborates the Russian foreign policy. According to him, Russia has focused mainly on two aspects: the ownership and control of the existing pipelines and secondly, in tailoring the legal status of the Caspian Sea itself. Currently, Moscow has a significant monopoly over energy pipelines, and Russia had been using it as a trump card to dominate the energy supply route to Europe. As a matter of fact, in 1993, it arbitrarily stopped the gas supply to Ukraine and later to Estonia. Moreover, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have been compelled by Moscow to use the Russian oil pipeline to pump the Caspian oil to the Black Sea port of Novorossiysk. (Griffith, 1998).

For the Central Asian countries, independence did not bring a complete breakaway Russia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have remained dependent on Moscow not just for energy and economic development, but also politically and militarily. Moscow largely has ignored this region because of its weak financial and political realities. However, the imperative of Russian foreign policy has shifted under the Putin administration, especially in the backdrop of a revived Russian economy. In the meantime, energy demands have increased in the global markets, and Russia with an invigorated economy re-emerged to reclaim the historical position of predominance as before in international politics. As a result, Russia began challenging the western states, particularly the United States. Under Putin Russian, foreign policy again became proactive, this shift made the post-Soviet space the focal point of Russian foreign policy, for example, Russia 'Gas dispute with Ukraine', Conflict with Georgia. Dr. Robert H. Legvold has elaborated on how Moscow's relations with its neighbors, particularly with the Caspian states have been influenced by concerns not only stemming from internal of security, economy, and politics but also by the external. For instance, security means dependence of the

Central Asian states on Russian military technology in counterterrorism as well as self-defence and safeguards from frozen conflicts and the influence of other major powers on the region. Moreover, Moscow has been strengthening its energy ties, trade, and investments in the post-Soviet countries so that Russia become indispensable economic partners. In the political field, Russian policies in the region indicate that it has a significant interest in influencing the outcomes of regional politics. (Legvold and Collins, 2009).

Russia has been deploying troops in the region against threats and extremism on vital infrastructures related to the energy economy. In other words, restoration of Russian influence in Central Asia and the Caspian region is one of the key objectives of Russian foreign policy under Putin administration. Given the dependence of the “Central Asian Republics (CARs)” on Russia pipelines, Moscow has used energy as the weapon to force these states to adopt a pro-Russian approach in the conduct of their foreign policy. Under the Putin administration, Russia’s foreign policy has seemingly adopted the ‘realist’ approach. Subsequently, Moscow has become more assertive in various security-related issues of international politics. Evidently, Putin emphasised on security was evidently demonstrated in the Chechnyan crisis and also in the ongoing global ‘war on terrorism’ wherein Russia has cooperated with the U.S. Nevertheless, with regard to Nagorno- Karabakh and Chechnya Russia and Turkey were in loggerhead on security issues. Despite the competition between Russia and Turkey on security matters, there was cooperation in the case of Blue -Stream Project that carries natural gas from Russia to Turkey (Bardakci, 2003). In this context, Huotari (2011) points out the centrality of ‘energy policy’ in determining Russian foreign policy in the last fifteen years. This means economic considerations have become the central fulcrum of both domestic as well as the foreign policy under the Putin administration.

Dellecker and Gomart (2011) in their book “*Russian energy security and foreign policy*” also argue that energy and geopolitics are closely interlinked in Eurasia. Energy security is an important element in Russia’s national security. They examine the correlation between Russian energy strategy and foreign policies in Eurasia. Further, the book provides a thorough perspective on broader geopolitical matters in Eurasia at a time when things could go way, towards either consumers or producers. Many chapters of this book deal directly or indirectly with Russia’s relations with both producers’ countries (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan) and transit countries (Belarus, Georgia, and Ukraine).

Prior to the disintegration of the USSR, Russia had dominated not only the production of oil in the region but also had control over the eastern and northern approaches to the Black and Caspian seas. The disintegration was soon followed by eruption of serious conflicts in Russia's southern border and due course; this has weakened the strategic position of Russia in terms of control over the production of Caspian-Black sea oil and gas and also over the pipeline routes. One of the main reasons for the setback is due to the changing perception of the Central Asian and the Caucasian states on how to deal with the dependence on Russia. Consequently, these states have veered towards the U.S, Iran, and Turkey and thus in a way, has jeopardised the age-old Russian dominance and posed a new geopolitical challenge to Moscow. In order to stem the tide in its favour, Russia has adopted three policies in the region; first, employ even military means to regain its status in the region by force. This policy orientation has led to increased Russian interference in regional politics. For instance, Russia has supported coups and even gotten engaged in armed conflicts in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Besides, Russia has acquired military bases in Georgia and Armenia and also has compelled Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to use of Russian pipeline networks. Second, Russia has been using its veto power in the UN Security Council to stall the debate on the definition of the legal status of the Caspian Sea, which in turn has prevented the division of the Caspian Sea into national sectors. Third, to counter the U.S presence in the region, Russia has been shaping an alliance with Iran. For example, in December 1995, Russia and Iran signed a comprehensive ten-year agreement on the issues related to energy, oil, and military cooperation. This agreement has effectively made both countries as "partners in strategic cooperation." (Hill, 1997).

The Caspian regions and Central Asian countries are vulnerable to instability due to weak economic and social conditions, regional and ethnic divisions, crime, and Islamic fundamentalism. Russia, China, and the U.S are seriously concerned about the security of this region and working through security organisations such as SCO, CSTO, CIS, and NATO (Jonson: 2001). Supporting this argument, professor Misiagiewicz (2012) stated that security in the region is unpredictable. One of the reasons for the current security situation is due to the mistake made by the then USSR in demarcating the borders of the Central Asian and Caucasus Republics an arbitrary manner. Evidently, after 1991, regional conflicts because of the contestation of boundary flared up, and instability became the norm within the new states. He points out that the lack of definition of the legal status of the Caspian Basin makes it very risky for investors to do business in the region. He also argues that the exposition made by the Mackinder's 'Heartland-theory,' has turned on the spotlight on Central Asia, the Caucasus, and

the Caspian region as the fulcrum of the contemporary international politics. Further, he also points out that geostrategic location and potential natural resources have made the area a playground for strategic rivalries and competitions.

As mentioned above, the Caspian Sea region, in the 1990s, was not a priority area for Russian foreign policy and security policy. However, the whole approach has changed after Putin became the Russian President and region was accorded the status of top priority in the Russian policies towards the Caspian Sea region. Under the Putin administration, Russia has improved and pursued balanced relations with the Caspian Sea bordering countries (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan) in terms of energy and security. Consequently, Russia has taken steps to strengthen its military presence in the neighboring countries, because of the uncertainties arising due to Chechnya war, ethnic conflict and unresolved legal status of Caspian Sea (Antonenko, 2004).

Therefore, Russia's geopolitical or security interests are much more important than economic interests. The oil factors and the eastward NATO expansion have made the region a ground for the rivalry between the U.S and Russia. The Caspian Sea region and the Central Asian countries are multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multicultural society and these conditions added with other economic and political reasons make the region highly unstable, this, in turn, has made the Russian to feel threatened. For Russia, in comparison, the eastern part, the western part of the Caspian region is more complex because of the existing strong ties of Azerbaijan and Turkey with the major western powers. Russia evidently being a regional as well as a global power, therefore has significant vast interests in the region. Whereas, the southern part of Russia is seen as "a source of various threats and challenges of predominantly non-traditional type." This means terrorism, internal conflicts, and separatism continues to pose great threats in the Caucasus region and Central Asia. These factors are not only accounted in Russia's relations with other external powers but also play a significant role in determining the geopolitical and geo-economics interests of Russia (Naumkin, 2001).

Since 2001, the U.S has stepped up its involvement in Central Asia, the Caspian, and Caucasus region. On top of this, European and Asian countries have also increased its engagement in the Caspian, and this has further complicated the relations of the CARs countries with Russia. The Caspian and Caucasus region has become a major interest for the states involved because of unresolved territorial boundaries and political disputes that have at times led to military confrontation, such as Armenian-Azerbaijani war, the Georgian-Ossetia dispute, and tension

over South Ossetia, Russia's war with Chechnya and other inter-ethnic tensions (Tchilingirian, 2006).

In this regard, professors (Chenoy and Kumar, 2017) argued that from the Western perspective the recent Russia's annexation in Crimea's clear-cut evidence that the Russian policy has become aggressive. On 1 March 2014, Putin was able to get approval from the Russian Duma, to take military actions in Ukraine. Further, he signed an agreement on 18 March 2014 to re-integrate Crimea into the Russian Federation – a part of the former Soviet Union. It must be noted that since the intervention in Afghanistan during the erstwhile Soviet era, Russian military intervention in Ukraine is significant because for the first time, Russia has intervened beyond its borders. Further, affirming the renewed vigour in Russian foreign policy, at the end of September 2015, Russia again deployed its military into Syria with the aim to weaken the Islamic State (ISIS) and to bolsters the Bashar-al-Assad government in Syria. Besides, Russia also considers ISIS and its alleged nexus with Islamic groups in the Central Asian states as a potential major threat to its own security. While the United States supported the anti-Assad forces, including Nusra Front, Jaish-al-Fatah in the Syrian crisis. With regard to the Syrian intervention, Russia managed to secure the help of Iran, and so far, has succeeded in sustaining the Assad regime by preventing a takeover of the Syrian state by ISIS.

Legal Status of the Caspian Region

During the Soviet era, the Caspian Sea was considered as a common resource for both Iran and the Soviet Empire. However, after the demise of the Union, the post-Soviet countries like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have started to claim their shares of the resources in the Caspian Sea. Therefore, the region has transformed into a disputed area, which led to multiple conflicts, and currently, its legal status has become a cause of disagreement among the bordering countries. In fact, there are different perceptions among riparian states regarding the division of the Caspian region (Kapyshev: 2013). The question of the legal status of Caspian Sea, the matter has become a perpetual debate, i.e. whether "Caspian should be defined as a lake or sea." Russia considered it "a lake and thus is subject to joint sovereignty, whereas Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have continued to assert that it is a sea and thus should be divided among the littoral states." To resolve the ongoing perpetual debate on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, a large number of treaties and agreements were signed among the coastal states. In this regard, the five coastal states are categorised into two groups. First, the northern group comprises of three states, i.e. Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan and by late 2001 they were

agreeable to divide the seabed on the basis of the middle (median) line principle and also holding the sea surface as common to all the littoral states. The other group consists of Iran, and Turkmenistan opposed this move. (Lee, 2005).

Nonetheless, with regard to the southern part of the Caspian Sea, there is an ongoing dispute between Iran and Azerbaijan, and there is also a similar conflict between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan still remains unresolved. If the Caspian is categorised as a 'sea', "the division of the jurisdiction of the sea has to follow the provisions of the United Nations Convention on the Law of Sea (UNCLOS), i.e. 12 miles of the territorial water, 200 miles of exclusive economic zone and the continental shelf are meant for the littoral states". However, it must be noted that UNCLOS's definition of the "Caspian as a closed sea is questionable due to the absence of a narrow outlet or natural water reservoir to connect it to the ocean and overlapping issue. Besides, the Caspian Sea cannot be subjected to UNCLOS because its provisions are applicable only to member states who have ratified and Russia is the lone country to have ratified the UNCLOS. On the contrary, if the Caspian is accorded as a lake, the issue of jurisdiction would still remain unresolved because the legal norms governing international lakes are different from the ones that governs the closed seas. Furthermore, currently, with regard to the division of international lakes, the international community has not been able to develop any uniform code (Abilov, 2013).

In the eighteen and nineteen century, Russia and Persia concluded the first treaty on the "legal status of the Caspian," which established Russian geopolitical supremacy in the Caspian region. Additionally, both countries had signed several treaties such as; "the Treaty of Friendship 1921, the Treaty of Establishment, Commerce, and Navigation 1935, the Treaty of Commerce and Navigation 1940 and the 1957 Treaty on border regimes and subsequent Aerial Agreement". But all these treaties had lost their validity after the emergence of new sovereign states – from two, it has become five. Therefore, the unique geographical features of the Caspian Sea has made the UNCLOS and other international customary laws related to waterbody are not applicable to the Caspian Sea. In the meanwhile, the Caspian states have been organising regular meetings and have signed a large number of agreements to define the legal status of the Caspian. For instance, with regard to the 'division of the northern part of the seabed' Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Russia have signed a treaty in 2003'. While Iran and Turkmenistan are ambiguous about the validation of their respective positions. Though the Special Working Group and the Caspian summits have been held regularly to define the status of the Caspian, nevertheless, they have not been able to arrive at an understanding on the nature

of the final agreement. Despite these failures, at the end of September 2014, the five littoral states have reached a unanimous agreement to ban the foreign military presence in the Caspian region, which could be considered as a big victory for Russia and Iran (Bajrektarevic, and Posega, 2014).

In terms of size, the “Caspian Sea is the world’s largest body of enclosed salt water.” Currently, even after signing numerous treaties, the five riparian states still have failed to define the legal status and thus have not managed to demarcate the possession of the resources of the Caspian. The five countries have also not shown their sympathy to ‘condominium’ principle. Thus, none of these legal regimes are capable of defining the Caspian legal status. The obvious reason for the current imbroglio is that various non-negotiable national interests of littoral states have prevented a concrete compromise on the issue. Moreover, divergence in the positions of riparian states on the “legal status of Caspian” has complicated the matter. To begin with, initially Russia has supported the principle of ‘condominium’ along with Iran. However, the Russian position has changed over time. Now Russia considered the Caspian an ‘international lake.’ Turkmenistan follows Iran’s stand, while Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have a similar stand on the Caspian legal status, and consider it to be a ‘sea.’ Thus, the difference of positions among of the Caspian states, have made the international companies, as well as foreign investors, worry about the safety of their investments in the Caspian region, except in Azerbaijan (Hosseinzadeh, 2008).

Analysing in detail, Karbuz, S. (2016) points out that neither UNCLOS nor international Customary Law has been able to resolve the debate on the “legal status of the Caspian Sea.” As a result, the division of the Sea has become a legal headache and this, in turn, has posed a major challenge in proper development and exploration of several fields and many projects such as “trans-Caspian oil and gas pipelines” which has been stalled. Therefore, the riparian states of the Caspian need a distinctive framework to sort out the nitty-gritty of arriving at the agreeable legal definition of the status or regime to manage the conflict of interests with regard to the exploitation of the resources of the Caspian. In short, any such arrangement would require a unanimous decision on the part of the littoral states. The Caspian bordering states have different interpretations and views with regard to the division of the Caspian Sea. For example, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan are in favor of a complete division (subsoil or seabed, and water layers) by applying the UNCLOS to the Caspian Sea. Whereas, Russia and Iran support joint utilisation of the Sea, where all the littoral states would equally have access to surface water and seabed, except for 10-mile coastal zones. However, the proposal of the joint

control of the sea was rejected by all the littoral states. Iran, on the other hand, prefers the equal division of the Sea among five Caspian states, which means it has to be legally defined as a lake.

The available literature talks about the ‘New Great Game,’ which denotes the conflict among the major powers, namely U.S, EU, Russia, and China. This situation has arisen because all these powers want to exploit the natural resources in the region. Existing literature does not answer many questions like whose right over the Caspian Sea. Why there has been a presence/conflict between states who are not even a part of the region? The above literature review shows that there is a persistent gap in the existing literature, whereby the geostrategic importance of the region (Caspian Sea) is ignored. The region is surrounded by Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, and Azerbaijan. This region itself defines how important it is, in terms of virtually controlling the neighboring states and making one’s influence permanent in the region. It must be mentioned that the hidden motive of each of the littoral states has not been highlighted in the above literature review. Another major gap, which has not been pointed out, is that this region has no definition of either sea or a lake, which in turn does not go by the legal application of Law of the Sea Convention or Customary International Law of the lake. This in itself, creates the conditions for a conflicting situation.

DEFINITION AND RATIONALE OF THE STUDY

This study has dealt with ascertain the importance of the Caspian Sea in the 21st century. Energy, natural resources, acceleration of international trade, etc. are the many possible trajectories of the future significance of the region. Therefore, the study has focused on the strategic angle/ importance of the region starting from 2001 to 2015. An important gap in the existing literature is that the strategic locations of the Caspian Sea in this particular time frame have been hitherto neglected. This study highlighted its location, which has a huge role in making this region a place for ‘Great Game’ during the period of colonisation and “New Great Game” in contemporary time. The literature review suggests that there is a huge gap in determining the strategic importance of the region. The importance of geostrategic location then further showed how the area plays a vital role in contemporary international politics. This study intends to fill the gap in the literature by testing the proposed hypotheses. This research an effort has been made to answer multiple questions, which were unanswered in the past.

OBJECTIVES

Following are the objectives of the research:

- i. To examine Russian objectives and policies towards the Caspian Sea region.
- ii. To understand the geopolitics in and around the Caspian Sea and its implication for Russia
- iii. To study Putin's Foreign Policy towards the Caspian Sea, its neighbors, and also understand the involvement of other great powers.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The study seeks to find answers to the following research questions:

- i. How are the security of Russia and other surrounding states determined by the attributes of the Caspian region?
- ii. How and why the strategic location of the Caspian region attracts great powers?
- iii. What is the legal status of the Caspian Sea?
- iv. What is Putin's policy towards the Caspian Sea region? 5. What significant changes have occurred in the Caspian Sea region since the 9/11 attack?

HYPOTHESES

Following are the hypothesis of the research:

- i. The geostrategic location of the Caspian Sea region plays an important role in determining the Russian foreign policy with its neighbours and other powers.
- ii. Putin's foreign policy in the Caspian region is to reassert the Russian influence in terms of its security, commercial, and diplomatic interests and to tackle the security threat posed by the external actors.
- iii. New Great Game' in the Caspian region provides an opportunity for the bordering states to achieve economic progress and gain international significance

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research is based on historical, analytical, and descriptive methods. The research is exploratory. The analysis has been undertaken by using relevant themes of International Relations (IR) theories, and most of the concepts incorporated in this study are from the realist

paradigm. There are two key concepts of international relations: cooperation and competition. The thesis has been written using both primary and secondary sources. The primary sources consist of official diplomatic Bluebook of Russian foreign ministry and White Paper on international trade, government documents, bilateral treaties, agreements, declarations, etc. The secondary sources include books, articles, academic journals, working papers, project reports, and symposia to understand the complex and multifaceted aspects of the foreign policy of Russia. Resources available on the website of various think tanks, foundations and newspaper articles have been consulted. The analysis of primary data has been conducted through this approach. In addition, a detailed study of memoirs and autobiographies of prominent personalities who belonged to the period of the timeframe identified in this study have been very helpful in understanding the nature of the problems and complexities in the processes. The time period is from 2001 to 2015.

The study has three hypotheses. In the first hypothesis, geopolitical location is the independent variable, and Russia's foreign policy is the dependent variable. In the second hypothesis, Putin's foreign policy is the independent variable, and the dependent variable is Russia's influence and tackling of external actors in the region. In the final hypothesis, the 'New Great Game' is the independent variable, and economic progress of the bordering states in the region is the dependent variable.

LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are certain limitations and shortcoming of the research, which are;

- I did not conduct a field trip in the Caspian states,
- not interacted with the CEO and energy experts.
- Due to the Russian language barrier, I could not access the Russian documents, books, articles, etc. therefore, the research work primarily relied on secondary sources.

CHAPTERS OVERVIEW

Chapter I: Introduction and Review of Literature: The first chapter introduced the subject and provided details of the review of the literature. It also focuses on the aims, objectives, scope, and rationale and research design of the study.

Chapter II: Geopolitics of the Caspian Sea Region: This chapter primarily deals with the geopolitics and geo-strategic importance of the Caspian Sea. Undoubtedly, the Caspian Sea possesses huge hydrocarbon reserves, which attracts energy-hungry countries (mainly Russia,

the U.S, China, and EU). Therefore, due to the geo- strategic location as well as the availability of hydrocarbon resources, has made the region a playground for great powers, which created the so-called “New Great Game”. Apart from, this chapter also presents a historical perspective of the Caspian region with a special reference to the rivalry between Russia and Persian empires.

Chapter III: Russian Objectives and Policies towards the Caspian Region: The third chapter evaluates the Russian interests in the Caspian region. It analyses Russian economic-energy, strategic and security policies in the region. Russia is trying to restore its status in the former Soviet Republic by functionalising energy as a weapon to influence the course of events in the Caspian states, such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan. Further, the chapter describes the naval powers of the littoral states and the militarisation of the Caspian Sea. The chapter also analyses the pipeline politics and comparative study of NATO and SCO in the region. However, Putin’s role is very important to achieve all above-mentioned goals. This chapter also would detail data on energy exports to the world markets.

Chapter IV: Legal Status of the Caspian Region: The chapter begins with description of the geographical characteristics in the context of historical background of the contestation of the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Russian and Persian empires fully controlled the Caspian Sea during the Soviet period. After the fall of the USSR in 1991, instead of two, the Caspian region got further divided, and the number of states became five. As a result, disputes started among the littoral countries for enlargement of their jurisdiction. So far, the five littoral states signed a large number of treaties and agreements to define “the legal status of the Sea.” Although recently, the five Caspian states have arrived an agreement on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, which says it, is neither a sea nor lake, but they could not reach a final agreement to divide the energy resources. Each littoral state has different views and perceptions of its status. Apart from this, the chapter examines the status of the “Caspian as a ‘sea’ under the UNCLOS and the Customary International Law in defining the Caspian as a ‘lake.’”

Chapter V: Russia’s Relations with Caspian Bordering Countries: This chapter analyses the Russian relations with the Caspian bordering states Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran. It provides a thorough picture of energy- related relations and other major sectors of the economy such fishing and more importantly security relations of Russia with the Caspian states. Further, it identifies the cooperation, conflicts, and major challenges among the five Caspian states. The second part of this chapter deals with the cooperation, complexities, and

conflicts among the Caspian littoral states in the context of the division of resources in the Caspian region.

Chapter VI: Conclusion: The concluding section summarises the whole study and includes observations and findings. It also points out the problems, prospects, and their implications on Russian interests in the region.

Chapter II

Geopolitics of the Caspian Sea Region

Among the Caspian states, “Russia is the largest country, followed by Kazakhstan (the 9th largest country in terms of territory) and the Islamic Republic of Iran (17th largest in the world)”. It is noted that Azerbaijan is not a Central Asian state but a Transcaucasian state (Glantz et al., 2010). This distinction is important because much of what happens in the Caspian states with respect to energy economy are closely interlinked with what goes on in Azerbaijan, apparently Azerbaijan has been a host to Western powers aiming to influence the regional politics. The Caspian Sea itself is 700 miles long, and it has been an epicenter of many conflicts throughout most of modern history. It is a major sub-region within the continent of Eurasia. Geostrategically, the Caspian region is connected with Europe (the Russian factor), the Mediterranean (the Turkish factor) and the Indian Ocean (the Iranian factor) and serves as the border between Christianity and Islam (Darabadi, 2003). All the littoral states of the Caspian are linked together through its shores and the sea itself, though each country is separated by hundreds of kilometers. The Caspian Sea also separates Azerbaijan from the former Soviet republics.

Geographically, the Caucasus Mountains, which run from the northeast shore of the Black Sea to almost Baku on the Caspian Sea divides the Caucasus region into north and south. After the disintegration of the USSR, the southern Caucasus also referred to as the Trans Caucasus includes post –Soviet states of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Armenia. The Northern Caucasus is constituted by ethnically defined autonomous territories within the contemporary Russia, which includes Adyghea, Chechnya, Dagestan, Kabardino-Balkaria, Ingushetia, North Ossetia, and Karachay–Cherkess Republic (Iikhamov and Schoeberlein, 2000: 29-30). It is a major source of oil, gas and sturgeon stocks, and it offers idiosyncratic capabilities of logistics, transportation, and tourism. The extraordinary geography provides a significant transportation route linking the European part of Russia, Central Asia, and Transcaucasia. (Vinogradov and Wouters, 1995:605).

Given the ethnic unrest in these autonomous territories, Russia views the North Caucasus region as important because local political situations in the directly impinge on the decision-making process with regard to pipeline politics. Thus, Russia has sought to enhance its

economic, political, and military influence in the region. In this context, Russian President, Putin stated that “For Russia, the Northern Caucasus is one of the strategic regions”. Thus, in the current scenario, Russia’s policy towards Caspian and the Caucasus, in general, is a replication of the policy that was designed for Dagestan. Dagestan is very fragile in terms of security in order to resolve this Russia has been strengthening the military presence. Like in Dagestan, Russia has been seeking to increase the presence of Russian military in the whole of the region. Besides, Russia has also focused on availing the energy resources, development of transportation routes, and other issues. The main objective of Russian foreign policy towards the region is to secure the energy resources and also exercise absolute control the supply of Caspian energy to China, Europe and other areas (Magomed, 2005: 79).

From the historical perspective, the Caspian region has always been very important in terms of geopolitical location as it served as a transit point of the trade between the east and west. In the 20th century, the Caspian oil has become a strategic resource and thus have become a source of contention among great powers in contemporary politics. In the 20th century, the German attack on Baku in the Second World War, “the discovery of oil in the Volga- Urals region and then later also in western Siberia” had preoccupied Russia and thus the Caspian Basin for a time remained least explored. However, by the late 1980s, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan managed to develop their energy resources and have gradually begun to occupy a central position in the global energy markets. After independence, these three countries have succeeded to attract massive foreign investments in the oil and gas sectors. Subsequently, for several reasons many international oil companies have shown an ever-increasing interests in the region: the “Caspian Basin is the largest underdeveloped oil and gas reserves in the world”; the decline in production of oil in the North Sea and also in the Alaskan North Slope. The growing disinterest of Western investors in energy-rich countries such as Kuwait, Iran, Iraq, and Libya because of the risk factors arising out of the unfolding political instability in the region, which has continued to disturb the security scenario for large-scale investment (Bahgat, 2003: 140-142).

In hindsight, after the split-up of USSR in 1991, even though the Central Asian countries won the political independence, these states continue to remain overly dependent on Russia for myriad necessities related in governance and also material resources that are required to run the day-to-day affairs of the state. (Johnson, 2009: 135). The Central Asian countries have extremely weak economies, and utilisation of the hydrocarbon resources is seemingly the only way to rebuild the economy. Thereby, attracting foreign investments in the oil and gas fields

has become a necessary precondition to improve economic growth. Evidently, many international oil companies have so far negotiated and signed numerous agreements with the Caspian states. In fact, in April 1993, a deal worth \$20 billion between Kazakhstan and Chevron is one of the largest among many such deals, wherein both the countries agreed to develop the Tengiz oil field. Similarly, in September 1994, an International Consortium signed “an \$8 billion deal with Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC)” to share the responsibility of for developing and then the production of oil in Azeri, Chirag, and Gunashli oil fields (Bahgat, 2003: 142).

There are numerous geopolitical opinions referring to the term Caspian region. Some scholars identify it as “Eurasian Pearls” due to its vast territory, which is sandwiched between Asia and Europe (Abilov, 2012: 30). Geopolitically, the Caspian region covers southern Russia, Northern Iran, the Northern and Southern Caucasus as well as the western part of Central Asia (Darabadi, 2003). As mentioned earlier, the geopolitics of the Caspian region is largely shaped by the ongoing competition among the major powers to secure their energy requirements. The energy factor has made the region a place for geopolitical struggle. The unfolding competition for securing the energy resources is known as the “New Great Game.” Thus, the ongoing “New Great Game,” effectively began in the mid-1990 when Russia and the major Western countries started to compete over the control of the construction of pipeline networks.

In the “New Great Game”, technological know-how on extraction and infrastructures of distribution of natural gas and oil and more importantly control over the existing known gas reserves are considered as ‘strategic assets.’ Evidently, in the context of gaining control over the ‘strategic assets,’ contemporary world politics has seen unprecedented political as well as an economic rivalry. In fact, the U.S, China, Turkey, Iran, and India are all competing to influence the Caspian regional politics in order to gain a share from the growing energy economy of the region. These great powers believe that the region’s natural resources have the capacity to meet the energy demand of the world economy for the rest of the 21st century’ (Timur, 2006:10). In the meanwhile, the “Central Asian and the Caspian states” have been making efforts to shield the region from the influence of these powers. At the same time, they have been trying to focus on extracting the maximum benefits out from the rivalries among the major powers.

The geopolitical approach accounts for the geographical factors in analysing the political security conditions of a given case. In a broad geopolitical sense, the geopolitics of the ‘Caspian

Region' has been determined by the peculiarities of its location and also by the endowment of abundant natural resources, especially oil and gas. In a strategic sense, the region encompasses most of Central Asia, Transcaucasia, and the North Caucasus. Besides, the surrounding states, i.e. Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, China, and Pakistan (Abilov, 2012: 31). In the context of the current international geopolitics, the Central Asian region is considered the most strategically significant. This region continues to influence the economy and politics of the great powers – in the foreseeable future, this influence is set only to become more prominent. In the post-cold era, the U.S is the only remaining superpower in the world that displayed and flexed its military and economic muscles in Central Asia as well as in the Caspian region to secure its national interests. After the 9/11, the U.S encouraged by the political development in the Caspian region has been looking out opportunities to intervene in the regional politics on the pretext of promoting democracy. The entry of the U.S in the region significantly changed the dynamics of strategic conditions both at regional as well as international levels (Kaliyeva, 2004: 2).

In this context, professor, Kaushik, D. argues in his article “*New geopolitics of hydrocarbon resources: a Eurasian perspective*”, that the primary goal of the U.S interests in the Caspian region is to meet its growing energy demands. Hence, the aim of the U.S’s intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan is not just to attain global political hegemony but also to make access to natural resources. In fact, without having control over the raw materials and natural resources, it is not feasible to accomplish global political hegemony. Thus, it is only logical that the abundant energy resources will automatically draw the attention of the U.S to the Caspian and Central Asian region. Likewise, new actors have appeared in the ongoing geopolitical contestation in the Caspian region. For instance, the EU also has deep interests due to its dependence on the energy resource of this area. Besides, the neighboring states such as China, India, Iran, and Turkey for the same reasons are also very interested in this region (Kaushik, 2011: 3). However, Russia has constantly engaged in trying to maintain its traditional influence in the region.

The change in the dynamics of the “New Great Game” became evident after 2001, 9/11 terror attacks in the U.S. For instance, in various capacities, most of the Caspian states supported the U.S led ‘coalition of the willing’ in executing the ‘Afghan Operation’. Despite Russia’s opposition, two years later, the U.S again similarly intervened in Iraq. However, instead of resolving the crisis by 2005, the political-security situation in the post-Saddam Iraq had gradually deteriorated. Subsequently, Moscow confronted the U.S policies in the Caspian region. In doing so, Russia has been successful in realigning the position of the Central Asian countries with regard to the U.S. As a result, Uzbekistan has disconnected its alliance with the

U.S. Moscow has relied on the “Shanghai Cooperation Organization” (SCO), in countervailing the U.S influence in the region. In a meeting of the SCO held, the SCO member states unanimously declared on 5 July 2005 that the U.S should withdraw from the region (Rywkin, 2010: 98). In this sense, one of the purposes of the SCO is to counter the increasing presence of the NATO, and the U.S military personnel’s in the Caspian region.

Currently, the Caspian Sea is dominated largely by Russia and to a certain extent also by Iran. In fact, militarily Russia has the most sophisticated and the largest naval capabilities to monitor the Caspian Sea. At the same time, under a “Moscow Umbrella” Russia continues to perform a crucial role in trying to harmonise the politics and economy of the Caspian states through several organisations.⁴ From the Western perspective, in particular, Azerbaijan and the entire Caspian region represents a stupendous asset that the international oil companies could profit from and at the same time, could serve as a reliable and alternative option for future energy requirements. Given this, Azerbaijan is one of the main pivots in the “New Great Game” because it has become a vital hub for the transportation of goods between Europe and Central Asia. Nevertheless, the country has remained vulnerable to security risks, for example, the diplomatic tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan with regard to the status of the Nagorno-Karabakh, which led to a crisis, which could potentially destabilise Azerbaijan. In fact, in this rivalry, Russia and Iran’s support for Armenia, a so-called traditional enemy of Azerbaijan and poor execution of the rule of law, Azerbaijan could also potentially provide shelter to the international terrorist group in its territory. Given this, Azerbaijan is seen as a likely source for a major regional conflagration. In any such eventuality, the strategic importance of natural resource available in the region, if not made inaccessible, could totally be control by any of the major powers (O’Hara, 2004:138).

Under this light, understanding the geopolitics of the region would entail a broad categorisation of actors involved in the region into two parts: the transit states on one side and global and regional powers on the other side. Among the transit countries such as Russia, Romania, Iran, Turkey, Armenia, Bulgaria, Georgia, Ukraine, and China due to their geographical locations have benefitted by promoting pipeline routes via their territory. Global and regional powers include, the U.S, Russia, EU, Iran, China, and Turkey have been competing to control the region by strengthening their own positions (Kaliyeva, 2004: 2).

⁴ “LEVICK Risk and Business Strategy (2016), "Geopolitics in the Caspian Sea", Accessed on 17 November 2018, (online web) URL: <http://levick.com/blog/risk/geopolitics-caspian-sea/>”

History of the Caspian Sea

Throughout history, the Caspian Sea has been known by different names because of its geographical attributes and economic relevance. The Persians, Turks, and Russians have struggled with each other to gain control over the trade routes of the region both land and water routes. All three of them have termed and examined the Caspian Sea according to their own specific needs and motivations. Many European historians and geographers have used six names for the Caspian region. Additionally, about 35 various names have been listed in Islamic, Arabic, and Iranian sources. Various names of the waterway of northern Iran are included in more than 30 books, such as: Caspian Sea, Tabarestan, Jorjan (Gorgan), Bahr-e (sea) A'ajem, Bahr-e (sea) Qazvin, Abskoun-e Deilam, Astarabad, Sari, shirvan, Gol-o- Galan, Talisan, Mazandaran, Moghan, Badkoubeh, Akfoudeh Darya (Dera Akfoudeh), Kamroud, Zereh Ojestan, Talisan, Kharazm, Khorassan, Jebal and Bab-ol-Abvab, Jili, Bahr-ol-Ajam (Ajam, 2019). The genealogy of different names is traced to the following five origins (Ibid):

- Various names were given based on different tribes and nationalities living in the surrounding areas such as Albanium Mareh, Deylam, Ghaz, Caspian, Gilan, Khazar, Ajam, Hirkan, Fars, Khvlinsk, Sit, Tipr.
- Names according to surrounding towns and areas such as Shirvan, Astarabad, Jebal, Mazandaran Khorassan, and Moghan.
- Include the names of coastal cities such as; Abskoun, Astrakhan, Gorgan (Jorjan), Bab Bab-ol-Abvav (Darband), Vaurukesh, Sari, Saraie, Farakhkart, Talisan (Talesh), Gil, Galan (Gilan).
- The equivalent words for "Sea" such as Darah, Deniz, Darya, Zarayeh, Sala, Sihaie, Voroushka.
- Other names of the sea such as; Qalzam Sea, Kharazm Sea. The Arabs, Turks, and Iranians, mostly use Khazar Sea. The Greek and Europeans preferred the Caspian Sea. Caspian and Khazar also pronounced by Arabs as Qazvin- were used more frequently. Russian and Iranian Governments have also often used these two names in signing bilateral and international treaties in the past 250 years (Ibid).

In the case of Iran, the northern waterway of Iran in Persian is known as the Mazandaran Sea. The Europeans and Turks and other nations call it as the Caspian Sea, while the Arabic states refer to it as Bahr-e Qazvin (Qazvin Sea) or Caspian. The region is characterised diversity of

religious affiliations, and ethnic heterogeneity that includes tribal population too. Two renowned Greek historical figures “Herodotus (460 B.C) and Aristotle (348 B.C) had referred to the sea as Caspi”, while the Europeans used, the Caspian Sea. In the early 5th century B.C., Herodotus had very accurate knowhow about the size and characteristics of the Caspian Sea. As he wrote, “this is a closed water body that has no outlets to any other sea”. Further, he said, “there are many different tribes living in the Caucasus”. This fact was again later confirmed by many others, among them geographer Strabo (1st- century B.C. -1st century A.D.) and historian Cornelius Tacitus (55-117) are the prominent ones. (Darabadi, 2009: 179). The British scholar Richard Holmes argues that “the Caspian Sea is abundant with Russian ships and called it Astrakhan and Khazar”. (Kohansal, et al., 2015: 29-30).

The “Caspian is the biggest lake of the world” and it is over 30 million years old. The Caspian Sea is connected to the Black Sea and at one point of time; it was apparently ‘the residence of the first civilised men’. Since early times, the surrounding region of the Caspian Sea has been a center for competition among the multiple imperial powers and thus became a melting pot of various cultures and civilizations. Some of the earliest human civilizations have been traced to have emerged and developed in the region. Research at Huto cave near the city of Behshahr has proved that man resided there for the past 75,000 years ago (Ajam, 2019). Even then, within itself, people with diverse culture and ethnicity inhabited the Central-Eurasian region, which seemingly proves the melting pot theory. In fact, in the last three millennia, the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the region continue to remain a reason for all the transformation that had taken place in the politics, economy and culture of the region. . In geostrategic context, the region could be considered to be an ‘open door’, which provides an entry, point to the near and West Asia and Central Asia and further on to India. (Darabadi, 2009: 178).

The earliest of the trade exchanges between the east and the west was mainly on spices and exotic materials the region became a transit point for reasons mentioned above. To put otherwise, the region became a bridge, which connected north-south and east-west. In fact, the northern and southern access points to the Caspian was used as invasion routes by the Central Asian nomadic tribes/communities in their quest to expand towards the west. About 33,000 years ago, the southern shores were colonised by the Iranians and in the north, the mountains of Dagestan became home to a diverse indigenous group of people in the Caucasus region. Currently, there are a dozen indigenous Caucasian groups such as Darghins, Lezghins, and Avars who continue to inhabit the coastal region and further inland, there are Ingush and Chechens. Until the 19th century, Dagestan remained the point of regular conflict due to the

clash of interests between many countries, especially between Imperial Russia and Persia (Iran). (Akiner: 2004: 3)

Besides, the Caspian Sea had always held great economic significance too, especially, for the varieties of fish stocks exploited by the coastline communities. Being a transit point of world trade, development of shipbuilding technologies flourished in the region and thus increasing the traffic in the maritime routes linking to the main ports. This also led to the expansion of trade in terms of both the volume and diversity of the materials traded and the better means of transport also facilitated the movement of people (Ibid. 4). Various Turkish rulers ruled over Central Asia such as the Seljuks and later the Khorezm Shahs, until the arrival of the Mongol/Turkish conquerors of Ghengiz Khan in the 13th century (Feneis, 1992: 9, 10). The Shi'ite Persian and the Sunni Ottoman empires conquered the southern reaches of the Caspian (Simonian and Dekmejian, 2001: 10).

Between the 17th and 18th centuries, Russia and Persia fought several wars on the issue of control over the Caucasus region. The geostrategic rivalry and struggle for control over the Caspian Sea effectively started in 1721-23 when the Russian Tsar, Peter the Great marched through the Caucasus. Russian ships navigated from Astrakhan south to Darband, Baku, and Gilan and the potential for trade and commerce had increased manifold. In addition, the Russian empire was expanding in the Caucasus and Caspian region, while the Iranian and Turkish similarly were seeking an opportunity to expand its influence (Magomed, 2005: 74).

Consequently, in order to control the Caspian, Black sea region and more importantly, the Caucasus region, Russia fought wars with the Ottoman Turkey and Safavid Iran. Throughout history, Transcaucasia (current Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and large parts of Dagestan were part of Iran. However, the Russian Empire conquered these territories from Qajar Iranian (Qajars were a Turkmen tribe who took full control of Iran in 1794) by fighting several wars with Persia, for example, Russia-Persia wars (1722-23; 1804-13; and 1826-28). Under the looming danger of Turkish invasion in the Caucasus, the Russia-Persia war (1722-23) effectively ended in 1723 when Iran and Russia signed a treaty in Petersburg in September 1723. Under this treaty, the Shah of Iran acknowledged Russian domination on several territories such as Baku, Mazandaran, Derbent, Astrabad, and Gilan. The Caucasus was the main cause of disagreement where the interests of three states (Russia, Persia, and Turkey) frequently clashed in a triumvirate conflict. In this conflict, Russia was supported by most of

the local people and the rivals, i.e. Persia and Turkey, were supported by West-European powers, on the other side. (Gasanov, 2005: 77).

Another round of war between Russian and Persian Empire was fought during (1804-13); the war ended in 1813 with the Golestan Treaty. As per this treaty, Russia was allowed to take control of the previously disputed territory of Georgia, Dagestan, northern Azerbaijan and the minor part of Armenia. Apart from this, Russia and Persia again fought in 1826-28 the Treaty of Turkmenchay was signed at the end of the war. This time, Persia ceded Yerevan and all the territories up to the Aras River to Russia. Moreover, this treaty finally erased the Persia's role in the Gulf and the Caucasus region. The Treaty of Turkmenchay marked the last major military conflict between two empires. After this, Russia became an unquestioned dominant power in the Caucasus (Daniel, 2001).

Throughout the 19th century, Russia gradually expanded its influence southwards and then to both the eastern and western shores of the Caspian Sea. As a result, in between (1879-1885), the Trans-Caspian Oblast was formed. During the 19th century, the territory captured by Russia consisted of highly diverse groups of tribal, religious, and ethnic communities who had not been affected by the ideas of nationalism and modernity of Europe. Although the majority of the population was Muslim, there was a marked difference in the way they professed with Islamic orthodoxy. Subsequently, in response to the Russian expansion influence with the Russian empire, three Islamic movements had emerged in the late nineteen and early twenty century: Jadidism, Pan-Islamic, and Pan-Turkism in (Simonian and Dekmejian, 2001: 11).

Jadidism was an Islamic reform movement, which emphasised on educational and cultural reforms, which later got converted into a political movement. The aim of this movement was to reform the traditional Muslim system of education by introducing a new method of education, such as science, western way of teaching, Arabic, Persian, Russian language. Evidently, this movement raises the quality of life of Muslims and eventually became the genesis of the future Muslim intelligentsia. The best of the new reform Islamic practices happened places like Crimea, the Transcaucasia, the Volga region, Iran, and Turkey. The Muslim intelligentsia was already aware of the progressive political, social, spiritual, and natural way of life that was prevalent in Europe. In taking forward the movement, the Jadids adopted Turkish enlighteners and established close ties with progressive Tatars and Azerbaijanis. However, the colonial authorities soon became suspicious and thought that the activities of the Jadids movement encouraged the anti-colonial struggle. To counter this

perspective problem, the Tsarist Russian government started to trample the traditions and customs of the peoples, especially of the Muslims through Russification policy in the whole of the Russian empire. Besides the Tsarist authority, conservative political forces within the Russian empire were against the ideas of Jadids. (Kaldybekovich et al. 2012: 85).

In due course of time, Jadidism split three-way, the splinters groups, i.e. Pan-Islamism and Pan-Turkism had their own unique conception of Islam. Pan-Islamism was a movement that aimed to strengthen the Islamic ideology and also to attain political unity among Muslims. Whereas Pan-Turkism was a secular movement with the grand objective to attain political and cultural unification of all Turkish speaking peoples in the Ottoman Empire, China, Iran, Russia, and Afghanistan. Evidently, around 90% of the populations are Muslim in the former Soviet, and 90% of them are Muslims of them are of Turkish origin (Feneis, 1992: 2). The ideas of the Pan-Turkism to unify all Turkish origin Muslims were movement were perceived as a threat by Russia. Eventually, the policies of Russification playing its part, the whole of Central Asia soon shattered into ethnically demarcated republics. In order to stop the Central Asian ethnic groups from having connections with Turkey and Iran, Russia resorted to closing the southern access point of the Sea. Moreover, Russia also introduced Cyrillic writing and Russian language in the region (Benke, 2010: 21). These actions provoked people against Russia. Nonetheless, after the collapse of the USSR, currently, the Jadids have seemingly regained new meaning and momentum in shaping public policies in Central Asia. For example, “Bolashak” a program sponsored by the government of Kazakhstan has been helping hundreds of young people to pursue an education in developed the countries, mainly to Canada (Kaldybekovich et al., 2012: 93).

Leaving aside the above mentioned current developments, the point here is, after the mid-19th century, these Islamic movements influenced by ideas of nationalism and socialism that came from Europe were able to awaken the peoples of the Caspian littoral states. Subsequently, Armenia and Georgia became the first nationalist countries; both were predominantly inhabited by the Christian population who had a closer connection with Europe rather than to the Muslim world. (Simonian and Dekmejian, 2001: 11). Until the Russian revolution (1917), the process of formation of national identity gradually gain ground among the Kazakhs and Turkic peoples of the eastern Caucasus (Azeri). The impact of the Russian revolution led to wide spread chaos in the Caspian region, and this provided a widow for intervention by Ottoman Turkey, Britain, and Germany. Amidst the resulting crisis, the Armenians, Georgians and Turkic Muslims of the southern Caucasus formed a Transcaucasian Federation in January 1918. By that time, the

Bolsheviks established the Baku Commune. However, due to the external pressure arising out of the intervention of the above-mentioned powers and the complex dynamics of the internal conflict, the Transcaucasian Federation broke up, giving birth to the independent republics of Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan in May 1918. After their independence, Azerbaijan remained an ally of Turkey while Georgia became closer to Germany. The power vacuum created by the withdrawal of the Turkey and Germany at the end of the World War I was soon reoccupied by Britain amidst fighting between Armenia and Georgia and Armenia and Azerbaijan (Ibid, 12).

Despite the growing Russian influence in the region, especially throughout the first half of the 19th century, Iran also continued to hold sway over parts of the Caspian coast mainly to protect its national interest. In fact, the main rivalry in the 19th century was between Russia and Britain and Iran maintained itself as an independent country and primarily served as a weak buffer state that prevented Russia and Britain from coming into direct conflict. But after the discovery of oil in the southern part of the country, Iran also gained a position of strategic importance. However, before the discovery of oil, due to the lack of modern means of transport and communications, international and domestic contacts were limited. The northern territories of the Persia were economically developed because of the geographical location of Caspian provinces of Mazandaran and Gilan, which allowed trading with Russia by the sea route. While Azerbaijan and Khorasan were relatively also developed as it was connected by Russia's railway network (Ibid, 13).

With regard to the history of British interests in the region, in 1901, the King of Persia, Muzaffar- al-din Shah Qajar granted the first Persian oil concession to Britain for 60 years period on oil fields, which cover most of the country except the provinces bordering Russia. With gaining access to the Persian oil, Britain hoped to reduce the dependence on Russian oil (Shujaat, 2015: 30). Given this situation, oil indeed became an important factor that shaped Iran's internal and external policies. In 1925, Colonel Reza Khan proclaimed himself as Reza Shah and set out to modernise the country, Persia was discarded, and he renamed the country as Iran. He was keenly aware of the political developments elsewhere and was impressed by the model of the national building. As a result, Reza Shah started a rapprochement with Nazi Germany. In August 1941, the Allied forces consisted mainly of the Soviet Union and Britain invaded Iran and were on the verge of destroying the Iranian army that crumbled like a pack of cards. Under the pressure of the Allied forces, Reza Shah handed the country's command to his son Muhammad Raza and became Shah of Iran. However, the country got divided into two

spheres of influences; the northern region was captured by the Soviets while the southern provinces were occupied by Britain. In the Soviet-occupied zone, the demand made of two secessionist ethnic entities led to the establishment of 'an Autonomous Government of Azerbaijan in December 1945 and similarly, the Kurdish Republic of Mahabad in January 1946. These political developments were closely watched the Western power, and the U.S then under Truman administration exerted strong pressure on USSR, and the Russian army withdrew in May 1946. After the Russian withdrawal, soon internal conflict started, and Iran supported by the U.S and Britain re-entered into the geopolitical game subsequently, the arrangement of autonomy for the Kurdish and Azerbaijani people were put to an end in December 1946 (Simonian and Dekmejian, 2001: 14- 15).

In the context of the age-old tussle with Russia, during the early part of the cold war, Iran sided with the west and Iran adopted a containment policy towards the USSR. However, the situation radically changed when Muhammad Musaddiq became the Prime Minister of Iran (1951-53). He wanted Iran to be a secular democracy and also always opposed foreign domination over the Iranian oil industry. The Iranian oil industry that was largely built by the British was thus nationalised in 1951. He aimed to take control of the British-run Anglo Iranian Oil Company (AIOC) and also to weaken the power of the pro-Western Shah. Eventually, the difference in the position of the Prime Minister and the Shah resulted into an internal conflict wherein Britain supported the Shah. As a result, the Musaddiq regime was overthrown by the U.S-British sponsored coup supported by the Iranian military (Ibid).

The Development of Caspian Oil Industry

During the 7th and 8th century, the first evidence of oil was discovered in the western shore (today's Baku) of the Caspian Sea (Barnes and Briggs, 2003: 3). Thus, Baku is considered as one of the birthplaces of the oil industry, and therefore it was also known as 'the land of fire.' Initially, oil was used in household and medicinal purposes. In the 10th century, Marudee, the Arabian traveler claimed that "both white and black oil were being extracted naturally from Baku." Naturally, the availability of oil promoted commercial activities and also helped in the expansion of relations with its neighbors North, South, East, and West. Eventually, the demand for oil increased, and people started to look for new ways to extract oil. In 1771, Gemlin, a Russian scientist and in 1827, Vosco-boynikov, a mine-engineer, both visited Baku and carried out research on the then existing oil wells. Thus, towards the end of the 19th century, Baku famously became to be known as the "Black Gold Capital" in the world (Aliyev, 1994: 22). In

fact, Marco Polo recorded the various uses of oil in religious and medicinal purposes by the people of the Baku.

The history of oil industry development in Baku was particularly influenced by the Nobel family. The Swedish Nobel brothers were the pioneer of the oil industry, under their supervision, in Absheron Peninsula near Baku, the first oil field was developed in 1846. Later, it had become home of competition among international oil companies. In 1901, Baku produced “more than half of the world’s oil (11 million tons), i.e. 95% of all Russian oil”. The main oil-producing regions near Baku were Surakhani, Sabunchi, and Bibi-Heybat. By the end of the 19th century and beginning of the 20th century, the inflow of foreign capital had increased tremendously in Baku. As a result, oil production has increased significantly due to foreign capital. (Mir-Babayev, 2004). Subsequently, the region had started to attract Western European commercial oil companies to further develop more units of the oil industry in and around Baku. After the Russian revolution, Bolsheviks captured Azerbaijan, including all the oil wells and factories. During the early 20th century, the Russian Empire became one of the leading oil producers and 30% of the oil in the international oil market was produced within the confines of the Russian Empire. By the turn of the 20th century, the Absheron peninsula had become the most industrialised center in the Caucasus. In this context, Winston Churchill once aptly said that “if the oil is a queen, Baku is her throne” (Ptitsyn, 2017).

However, during the preliminary stage of the growth of the oil industry, there was a lack of adequate transportation. Thus export of oil became a critical problem. In due course, the Noble brothers, Robert and Ludwig modernised the Caspian Basin by establishing the Noble Brothers Oil Extracting Partnership in 1873. As a result, the first oil tanker was made available in 1877, to resolve the problem of exportation of oil to the Western markets. Thus, the Noble brothers played an indispensable role in the modernisation of Baku oil industry, the creation of oil tankers revolutionised the ‘export facilities’ and they had gain a total grip over the oil industry in the Caspian Basin. Sooner, oil-hungry countries started to move towards the Caspian Sea looking to develop new transport routes. At the conclusion of the First World War, the strategic importance of Caspian oilfields as a valuable source of energy in the foreseeable future became evident, and thus the region attracted both the Allied and Central powers. In August 1918, Britain captured Baku city but withdrew sooner. In November, Allied powers again re-entered and proclaimed Azerbaijan as an independent republic; however, the Allied forces had to give up Baku as the Bolsheviks captured it in April 1920 (Akiner, 2004: 7).

Amidst the ongoing tussle to control Baku, in 1920, the Communist Party of Russia nationalised all the oil industries, this event shocked the Western companies, all of them started to sell their holdings, and totally withdrew their financial support (Barnes and Briggs, 2003: 5). Evidently, by this time, the northern Caucasus, Central Asian and the Caspian states had come under the control of Soviet rule. Subsequently, Baku city became a significant source of revenue for the government of the Soviet Union. In this regard, Stepan Shaumian, Chairman of the Baku Commune of Commissars, stated, “without Baku’s oil, Russian badly suffers. We must supply oil to Russia and in return; the Russians will send us bread to feed all of the poor in Baku” (Abilov, 2013: 9).

During the 20th century, especially in the last quarter, i.e. the period right after the dissolution of USSR, the Tsarist Russian government began to encourage foreign investors to get involved in the development of Baku oil industry. In the context of the changed scenario, Prince M. Golitsyn, the Caucasus Governor-General stated that “the situation in the Caucasus is unique.” He pointed out the lack of free money, the low level of agriculture; limited industrial infrastructures and lack of new technologies are long-term obstacles to the economic growth of the region. Further, he acknowledged that without the Russian participation, if not impossible, solving economic problems of the area would be a very difficult challenge. He, therefore, supported foreign investments in the Caucasus region, which was later supported by the Russian Ministers of Finance, Sergei Witte and V. Kokovtsov (Mir-Babayev, 2004).

By 1960, after the discovery of the oil in western Siberia, Russia became the second-largest oil producer in the world. With plenty in reserve, Russia began to sell oil to western markets at a low price, this forced other oil-producing countries to do the same, bringing the oil prices in the world market. Moreover, Russia also imposed a high tax on the oil industry in the Caspian region. Consequently, the industry soon was plagued by the lack of new technology for drilling and refining, rapid exhaustion of reserves due to anarchic methods of exploitation, political instability, and labour unrest had led to the Baku oil crisis of 1903. Hence, oil production in the region declined and also Baku lost the international market share (Dekmejian and Simonian, 2001: 16). By the mid of the 20th century, it had evidently become clear that Russia wanted to control the international oil market. To protect their national interests, the oil-producing countries of West Asia formed the “Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)” in 1960 to help stabilise the world oil market against the flourishing Soviet oil industry, which had the capacity to cut prices at will. In doing so, the Soviet had unwittingly sown the seeds of their own demise by focusing only on short-term interests. This eventually,

by the mid-1990s caused the decline in production of Caspian oil, mainly because it led to overexploitation of the oil fields and also mismanagement of the oil reserves by the erstwhile Soviet regime (Barnes and Briggs, 2003: 5). After the dissolution of USSR, the Caspian ‘black gold’ again became a powerful magnet that attracted foreign investment and this, in turn, renewed the old competition among the major powers, which is currently known as the “New Great Game” (Akiner, 2004: 12). Consequently, by 1999, foreign investment in the Caspian had increased substantially because of multiple investors, which includes Chevron, Amoco, Mobil, Exxon, Royal Dutch/Shell, Lukoil of Russia, British Petroleum, and Elf Aquitaine of France, the China National Petroleum Corporation and Agip of Italy. British Petroleum and ExxonMobil both have strong ties with the U.S and have invested in several fields together (Chapman, 2006).

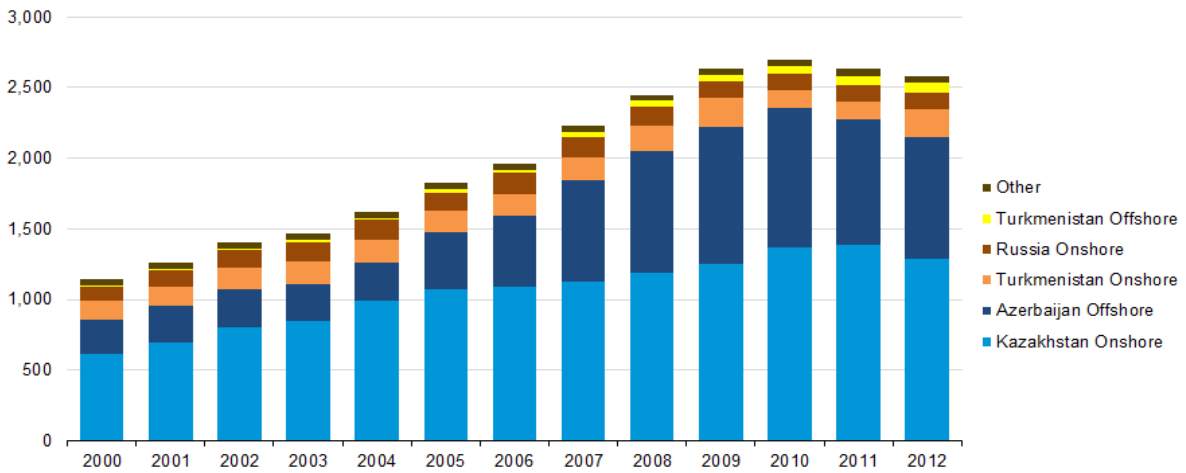
Overview of Caspian Oil and Gas Resources and Involvement of Outside Powers

In January 2007, the U.S Department of Energy stated that “the Caspian Sea region including the sea and states surrounding it, has become an important oil and natural gas exporter in the world markets over the next decade” (Klare, 2008: 116). The sea contains huge volume of energy resources located in the offshore as well as onshore deposits. US Energy Information Administration (EIA) estimated in 2013 that “the Caspian holds 48 billion barrels of oil and 292 trillion cubic feet (tcf) of natural gas in 2012”. “Offshore fields have around 41% of the total Caspian crude oil reserves and 36% of the natural gas (tcf) and 19.6 billion barrels of Lease Condensate – a low-density mixture of hydrocarbon liquids”. Majority of the offshore oil fields are located in the northern portion of the Caspian, whereas the offshore natural gas reserves are mostly found in the southern part of the Caspian Sea. According to EIA, (2013) estimates that “around 2.6 million barrels per day of crude oil had been produced by the Caspian Sea region in 2012, i.e., around 3.4% of the total world supply”.

The Tengiz field, which is one of the onshore oil fields of Kazakhstan, in the past decade, has been one of the biggest contributors to the overall production of oil in the region. Similarly, the “Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG)” field group based in Azerbaijan has also contributed to increasing the total production of Caspian oil. Additionally, Russia’s North Caucasus region and Turkmenistan located near the coast are the other significant sources of Caspian oil. EIA estimated that “the Caspian area produced 2.8 tcf of natural gas in 2012” (EIA, 2013). The dispersed nature of large quantity of the Caspian natural gas reserves indicates that there are possibilities of increasing the production in the future.

Table 2.1

Caspian basins oil production 2000-2012
thousand barrels per day



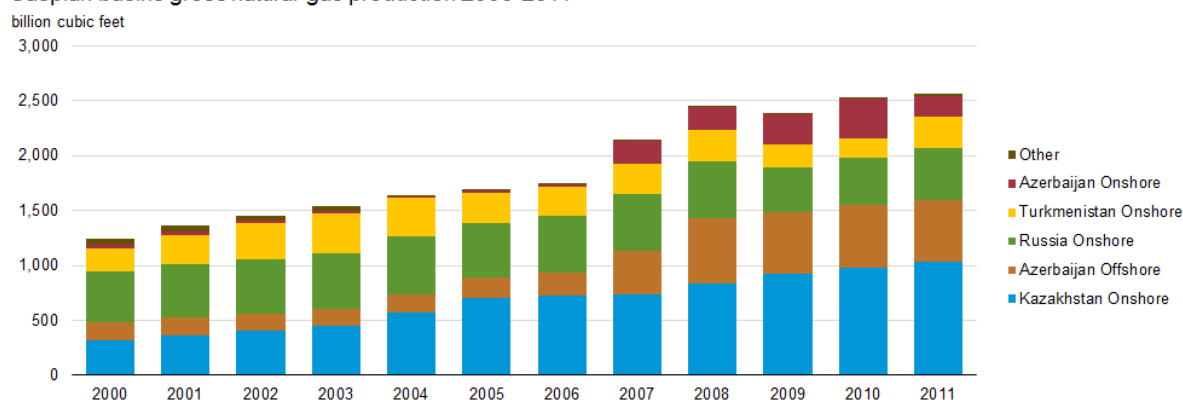
Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, IHS EDIN, Eastern Bloc Energy, Rigzone, Rystad Energy
Note: Oil production includes crude oil and lease condensate production for all fields in Caspian basins .

Source: “U.S Energy Information Agency (2013), Caspian Sea: Overview of oil and natural gas in the Caspian Sea region, accessed on 17 January 2019, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.php?RegionTopicID=CSR>

The analysis of the above table is between 2000 to 2012 among various Caspian states reflects the crude oil production growth. Major beneficiaries’ states in the Caspian region in this decade were Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. Russia’s contribution in overall in Caspian oil production growth is stagnant and relatively negligible to other Caspian states. Total oil production per day has increased from 1200 thousand barrels to 2600 thousand barrels per day.

Table 2.2

Caspian basins gross natural gas production 2000-2011



Sources: U.S. Energy Information Administration, IHS EDIN, Eastern Bloc Energy, Rigzone, Rystad Energy
 Note: Natural gas production is for all fields in Caspian basins.

Source: ibid.

The analysis of the above-discussed table 2.2 show the data between 2000 to 2011 of the Caspian states, which reflects the natural gas production growth of onshore fields. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were primary beneficiaries'. Whereas fluctuations reflected in Turkmenistan's natural gas production. Russia's contribution to overall Caspian natural gas production growth is stagnant. Total natural gas production per day has increased from 1200 (bcf) to 2600 bcf.

Table 2.3: Crude oil production in the Caspian Region, 2012 (thousand barrels per day)

| Country | Caspian region production | | Total Caspian production | Total Caspian production in %ge | Total country production | Caspian % of country total production |
|--------------|---------------------------|---------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| | Caspian offshore | onshore basin | | | | |
| Azerbaijan | 890 | 32 | 922 | 34.86 | 922 | 100% |
| Iran | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0.00 | 3,367 | 0% |
| Kazakhstan | 3 | 1,384 | 1,387 | 52.44 | 1,515 | 92% |
| Russia | 6 | 114 | 120 | 4.54 | 9,922 | 1% |
| Turkmenistan | 46 | 170 | 216 | 8.17 | 216 | 100% |
| Total | 945 | 1,700 | 2,645 | 100.00 | 16,007 | 17% |

Source: Source: “U.S Energy Information Agency (2013), Caspian Sea: Overview of oil and natural gas in the Caspian Sea region, accessed on 17 January 2019, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/regions-topics.php?RegionTopicID=CSR>

This table explains the total crude oil production in the Caspian region of different states along with their comparative analysis against the total oil production of the countries.

As a matter of fact, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan put together possesses 321 tcf of proven gas reserves, effective exploitation of the gas reserves could make these countries to become the world’s “fourth-largest gas provider, preceded only by Russia, Iran, and Qatar.” Thus, from the perspective of the investors, the above-mentioned countries in the region: Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan because of its oil and natural gas; Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan for its natural gas alone have become the focal point of foreign investment. Besides, some oil and gas fields which lie in Russian and Iranian territory (Klare, 2008). British Petroleum statistics of 2015 estimated that the region holds around 17.6% global proven reserves, 46.4% of natural gas and 21.4% of coal. There are six major oil and gas fields in the Caspian region namely: “Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli and Shah Deniz located in Azerbaijan; Karachaganak, Kashagan, Tengiz (Kazakhstan) and South Ýölöten located in Turkmenistan” (Babajide, 2016).

Table 2.4: Total Petroleum and other liquids production, 2017

| Ranking (at international level) | Country | Thousand barrels per day |
|----------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------|
| 3 rd | Russia | 11,210 |
| 6 th | Iran | 4695 |
| 16 th | Kazakhstan | 1880 |
| 25 th | Azerbaijan | 799 |
| 33 th | Turkmenistan | 279 |

Source: EIA, International Energy Statics (2017), “Total Petroleum and other liquids production, 2017”, accessed on 18 January 2019, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/rankings/#?product=53-1&cy=2017>

This table of total petroleum and other liquid production, 2017 clearly shows that Russia secured the third position after the U.S and Saudi Arabia at the global level. Iran is on the sixth rank while Kazakhstan got 16th rank, Azerbaijan 25th, and Turkmenistan 33th. Thus, there is a huge difference between Russia and Turkmenistan in terms of total petroleum production in the world.

Table 2.5: Dry natural gas production, 2017

| Ranking | Country | Billion cubic feet |
|------------------|--------------|--------------------|
| 2 th | Russia | 23508 |
| 3 th | Iran | 7577 |
| 11 th | Turkmenistan | 2735 |
| 30 | Kazakhstan | 791 |
| 35 | Azerbaijan | 599 |

Source: EIA, International Energy Statics (2017), “Dry natural gas production, 2017”, accessed on 18 January 2019, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/rankings/#?product=53-1&cy=2017>

In contrast to the petroleum and other liquid production, the Caspian states produce more natural gas than crude oil. In the context of dry natural gas production in 2017, Russia ranked 2nd and Iran 3rd after the U.S. Turkmenistan stood at 11th followed by Kazakhstan 30th and Azerbaijan 35 rank at the international level. Among the Caspian states, Turkmenistan was at the bottom of the list with respect to petroleum production, while it achieved third place after leaving Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan in natural gas production. Thus, both tables indicate that Iran and Russia are the largest producers of gas and other liquid as well as dry natural gas.

Russia: Russia, by far, is the largest producer and exporter of oil and natural gas. The economic growth of the country heavily relies on energy exports. As in 2016, revenues from the export of energy accounted for 36% of Russia’s federal budget (EIA, 2017: 1). According to the Oil & Gas Journal (OGJ), (January 2017), estimated that “Russia has 80 billion barrels of proven oil reserves mostly located in the western Siberia between the Central Siberian Plateau and the Ural Mountains and also in the Urals-Volga region, extending into the Caspian Sea” (EIA, 2017: 4).

Table 2.6: Russia's oil production by region, 2016

| Region | Thousand b/d | Percentage |
|--|---------------|---------------|
| Western Siberai | 6,294 | 57.87% |
| Khanty- Mansiisk | 4,830 | 44.41% |
| Yamal- Nenets | 977 | 8.98% |
| Other West Siberia | 487 | 4.47% |
| Urals- Volga | 2,498 | 22.97% |
| East Siberai & the Far East | 1,338 | 12.30% |
| Krasnoyarsk | 426 | 3.9% |
| Irkutsk | 364 | 3.34% |
| Sakhalin | 344 | 3.16% |
| Yakutia | 204 | 1.87% |
| Arkhangelsk | 328 | 3.01% |
| Komi Republic | 284 | 2.6% |
| Caspian | 41 | 0.37% |
| Arctic Offshore | 36 | 0.33% |
| Other | 57 | 0.52% |
| Total | 10,875 | 100 |

Source: EIA U.S Energy Information Administration (2017), "Russia: overview", Accessed on 22 September 2018, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=RUS>

Table 2.7: Russia's natural gas production by region, 2016

| Region | Trillion Cubic Feet (Tcf) | Percentage |
|--|---------------------------|---------------|
| West Siberia | 19.3 | 85.40% |
| Yamalo-Nenets | 17.9 | 79.20% |
| Khanty-Mansiisk | 1.2 | 5.30% |
| Tomsk | 0.2 | 0.88% |
| East Siberia & the Far East | 1.7 | 7.5% |
| Sakhalin | 1.0 | 4.42% |
| Krasnoyarsk | 0.5 | 2.21% |
| Irkutsk | 0.1 | 0.44% |
| Yakutia | 0.1 | 0.44% |
| Urals-Volga | 1.1 | 4.9% |
| Orenburg | 0.7 | 3.09% |
| Astrakhan | 0.4 | 1.77% |
| Komi Republic | 0.1 | 0.44% |
| Others | 0.4 | 1.77% |
| Total | 22.6 | 100 |

Source: EIA U.S Energy Information Administration (2017), "Russia: overview," Accessed on 22 September 2018, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=RUS>

Kazakhstan: After Russia, it is the second-largest producer of oil among the former Soviet republics. The "Offshore Kazakhstan International Operating Company (OKIOC)" discovered the Kashagan deposit in the northern Caspian in July 2000 (Akiner, 2004: 8-9). In 2012, Kazakhstan had "proven natural gas reserves of 1.3 trillion cubic meters (TCM)". About 80% of the country's natural gas reserves are located in four areas: Tengiz, Kashagan, Karachaganak, and Imashevskoye (German, 2014: 11).

Table 2.8: Kazakhstan’s major oil and gas fields

| Field Name | Companies | Start year | Liquids production | Natural gas production |
|--------------------|---|------------|---|---|
| Tengiz (& Korolev) | Chevron, ExxonMobil, KazMunaiGaz, and Lukoil | 1991 | 570,000 b/d petroleum and other liquids production in 2016 Expansion project to add 260,000 b/d of crude production beginning in 2022 | 274 Bcf dry marketed gas production in 2016 |
| Karachaganak | BG, Eni, Chevron, Lukoil, KazMunaiGaz | 1984 | 206,000 b/d total liquids production in 2016 An expansion project is under consideration, but potential production volumes are uncertain | About 300 Bcf wet marketed gas production in 2016 |
| Kashagan | KazMunaiGaz, Eni, ExxonMobil, Shell, Total, China National Petroleum Corporation, Inpex | 2016 | 370,000 b/d liquids processing capacity with current development | Over 100 Bcf gas production capacity |

Source: “US EIA Country analysis brief: Kazakhstan (2017), Accessed on 30 Sep 2018 URL: http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2017/EIA_Country_Aanlysis_Kazakhstan_10may2017.pdf”

In 2013, British Petroleum’s (BP) Statistical Review of World Energy circulated a report stating that “Kazakhstan is a major oil generating country that has proven oil reserves of 30 billion barrels and producing 1.7 million barrels per day in 2012”. The majority of natural gas reserves of Kazakhstan, both onshore and offshore are found on the western side of the country. In 2013, Tengiz and Karachaganak are major colossal onshore fields, produced over 40% of the country’s total output. Tengiz located in Atyrau region is the largest oilfield of the country. Tengizchevroil (TCO) a joint venture between LukArco and KazMunaiGaz (Kazakh state oil companies) operate it; Chevron and ExxonMobil both are U.S oil companies (Kazakhstan oil and gas profile).

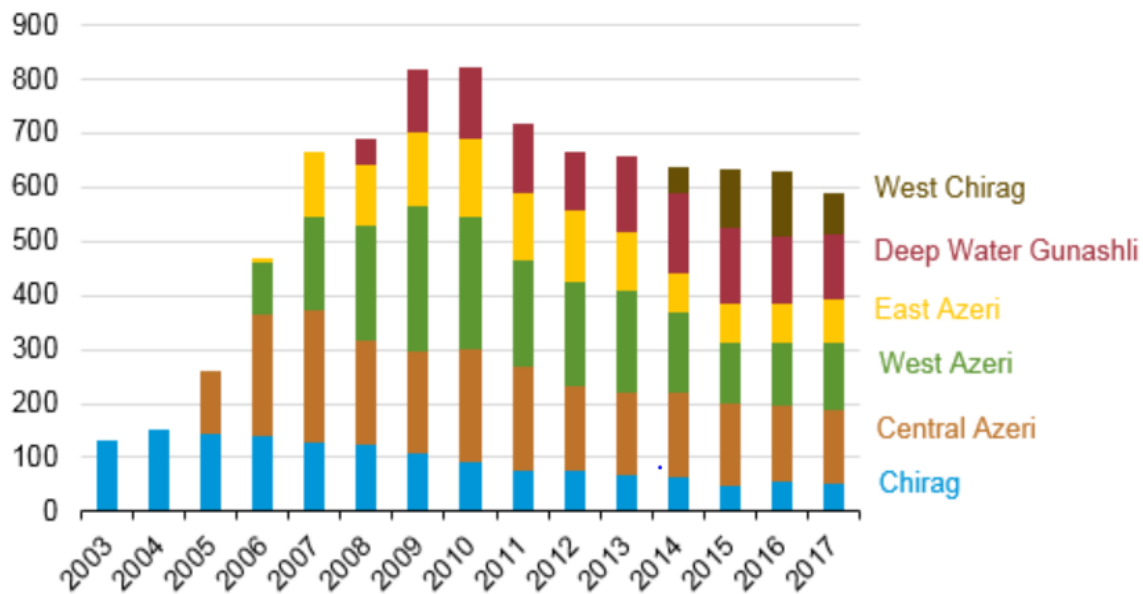
In 2013, Karachaganak region produced about 12% of the total oil production of Kazakhstan. ENI, BG, and Chevron operate Karachaganak Petroleum Operating (KPO), and Lukoil has a 15% share in this private oil company. The super-colossal Kashagan oil field is located offshore of North Caspian Basin; it is estimated to produce 2/3 of future oil mainly. The oil fields in the region are also developed by the North Caspian Operating Company (NCOC) consortium, which includes Shell, KazMunaiGaz, Eni, ExxonMobil, Inpex, CNPC, and Total. Kazakhstan’s

long-term economic growth depends on the development of the country's 'superfields,' and Kashagan will play a vital role to achieve its goal (German,2014:11-12). In 2017, "Kazakhstan's total production of petroleum and other liquids was estimated as 1.77 million barrels per day (b/d)". According to the Oil & Gas Journal (January 1, 2018), "Kazakhstan has proven crude oil reserves of 30 billion barrels and also natural gas reserves of 85 trillion cubic feet" (U.S Energy Information Administration Agency, 2019: 1-3).

Azerbaijan: Azerbaijan is a resource-rich republic located in the South Caucasus. It is the oldest oil-producing country and has remained the most important supplier oil and natural gas, particularly to the European market. The BP's Statistical Review of World Energy, 2018 estimated that "the country holds 0.4 percent of the world's total oil reserves and currently it produces about 800,000 barrels of oil from several oilfields, such as Ashrafi, Azeri, and Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli". It also produces around 17.5 billion cubic meters of gas. Though out history, oil had, and it still has largely determined political, economic, and foreign policy strategies of Azerbaijan (Fallahi, 2018). The Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG) fields are operated and developed by the U.S supported BP, as per an understanding arrived in 1994, it is the largest shareholder in the Azerbaijan International Operating Corporation, other international oil companies such as Chevron, ExxonMobil, Inpex, ITOCHU, Petrolleri, ONGC, SOCAR, Statoil, and Turkiye and are also interested in the ACG field. ACG and Shah Deniz are the natural gas producing fields of the country. In fact, Shah Deniz is one of the world's largest gas-condensate fields, which has over one TCM of gas.

In 2012, like oil, Azerbaijan's natural gas was estimated at 0.9 TCM. In fact, the region has more gas than oil. Foreign investment is predominately centered on oil products in the hydrocarbon sector, except Shah Deniz (German, 2014: 14). The GDP of Azerbaijan is primarily dependent on exports of energy. In 2013, the total exports were recorded at \$29.975 billion, whereas the contribution of the non-oil sector was mere \$1.615 billion, which came mostly from fishing industry comprised mainly of Sturgeon and Beluga. For example, in 2013, approximately 793.8 tons of this kind of fish were caught in the Caspian Sea (Ibrahimov, 2014: 102-103).

Table 2.9: Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli Oil Production (thousand barrels per day)



Source: U.S. Energy Information Administration, based on BP

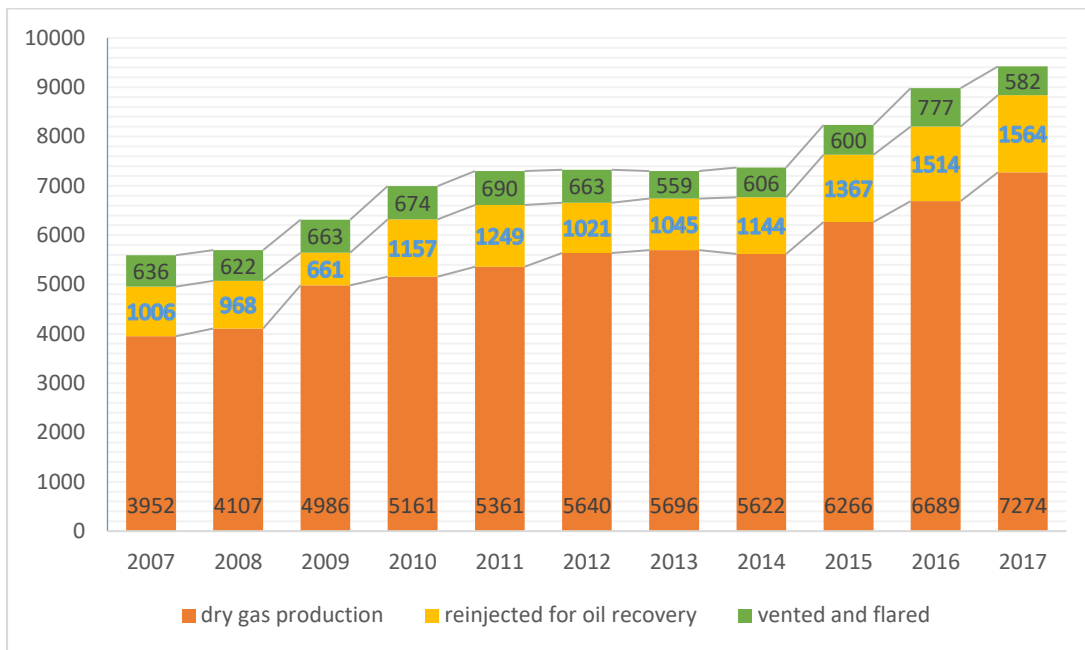
Source: EIA U.S energy information administration (2016), “Azerbaijan overview”, accessed on 10 January 2017, [URL:https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=AZE](https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=AZE)

Turkmenistan: Turkmenistan is rich in energy, particularly in gas reserves. In 2018, the British Petroleum (BP) Statistical Review of World Energy estimated that “Turkmenistan, as of the end of 2016, had 100 million tons of proven oil reserves and 17.5 trillion cubic meters of gas” (Fallahi, 2018). Serdar field (also known as Kyapaz in Azerbaijan) is currently claimed by both Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan. It contains 370-700 million barrels of projected recoverable reserves.

Iran: In 2012, Iran discovered Sardar-e Jangal, a gas field, 700 meters underneath the surface water of the Caspian Sea. A total “50 trillion cubic feet of proven reserves natural gas” has been found in this field, which is approximately ten times more than the potential of Shah-Deniz field of Azerbaijan (Fallahi, 2018). National Iranian Oil Company stated, “Sardar-e Jangal field in the Caspian holds significant reserves which are approximately worth U.S.\$50 billion”. However, potential hydrocarbon reserves are very limited within the Iranian territory of the Caspian. These reserves have remained largely unexplored, as the Iranian territory of the

sea is very deep. Moreover, because of the U.S and European sanctions that restrict international oil companies to do the trade with Iran, the country could not get access to the most up-to-date oil drilling technologies. Besides, the Caspian Sea is not a priority for Iran in comparison to other littoral states. Iran has other reserves that are more economical in production and also convenient to transport to world markets. This is one of the reasons why Iran is least interested and unwilling to commit to an agreement on the Caspian’s legal status. (German, 2014: 16).

Table 2.10



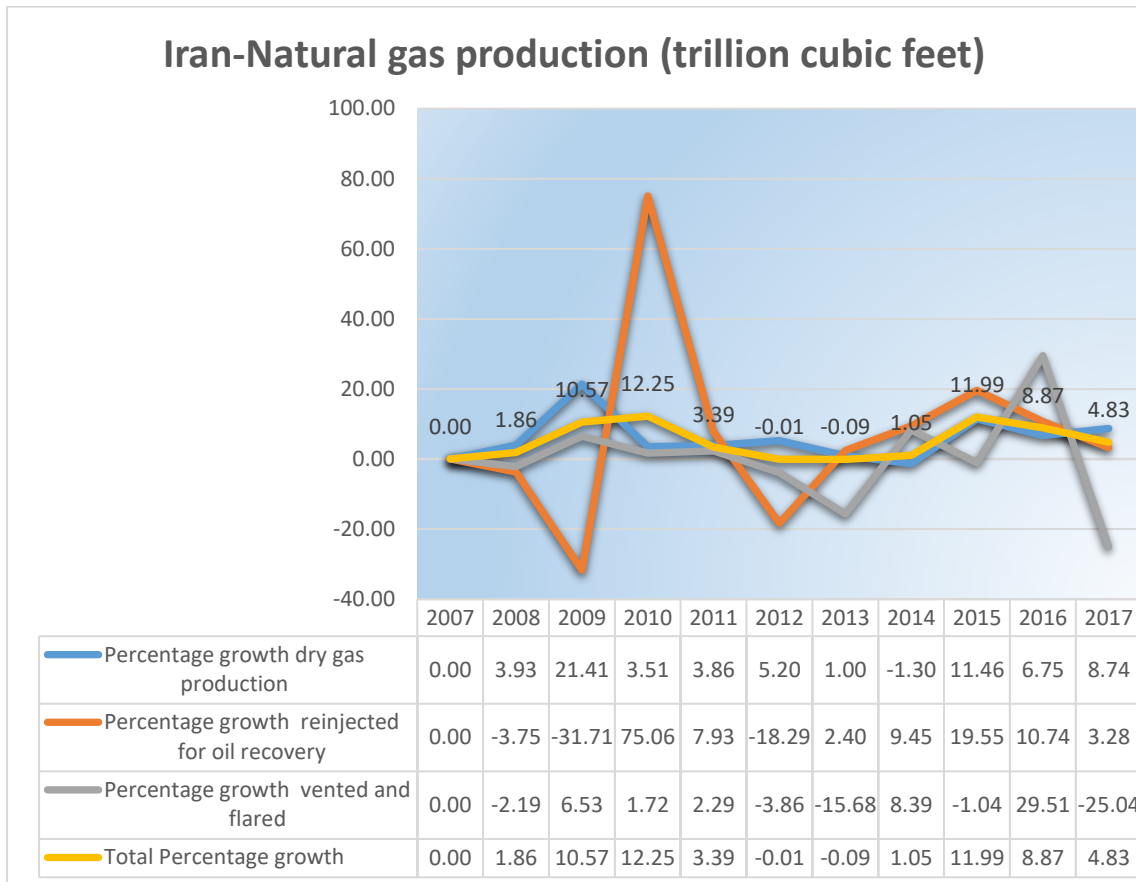
Source: EIA U.S energy information administration (2019), “Iran; executive summary”, Accessed on 18 January 2019, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis.php?iso=IRN>

Table 2.11

| Average growth rate across different across vectors between (2007-17) | | | |
|---|-----------|-------------------------------------|-----------|
| The average growth rate in dry gas production | 5.8702746 | Average growth in vented and flared | 0.0575383 |
| The average growth rate in reinjected for oil recovery | 6.787338 | Average Total growth rate | 4.972741 |

Source Ibid.

Table 2.11



Source: Ibid

These three charts summarize the period of 2007 to 2017 of Iran’s natural gas production. The percentage growth of dry gas production in 2008 was 3.93% that grew to 21.41 % in 2009, which was the highest in the decade. Between 2010-2011, it was stagnant, but in 2013, production was decreased whereas in 2014 it reached its lowest point. In the reinjected oil recovery, the growth rate was extremely low in 2008, 2009, and 2012 due to the economic crisis as well as U.S sanction policies. It suddenly grew around 75.06% in 2010, again decreased in 2017. Apart from this, the period of 2008, 2012, 2015 and 2017 marked as de-growth in percentage growth invented and flared gas production. If we see the total percentage growth of natural gas production, then we find that the years of 2008, 2009, 2010, 2015 and some extent 2016 marked the highest percentage growth.

Geostrategic Importance of the Caspian Region

The involvement of foreign investors in the energy economy of the region is not only because of the abundance of due to the natural energy resources but equally also because of political, security and geostrategic importance of the area. It must also be noted that the Caspian Sea is not only a waterway for international trade and movement people but also it is a significant source of food-related products for the Central Asian and Caspian states. Therefore, the fundamental objective of each of these states is to gain easy access to as much of the resources of the sea. In this regard, fishing and shipping have continued to play a significant role in the economies of the Caspian states. Since time immemorial, the Caspian Sea has been used for transportation of goods and fishing purposes. Even today, it served as an alternative transport route between China and Europe that could circumvent the Russian territory, some of the major goods transported through this route are oil and gas, wood, grain, cotton, rice, etc. The following are the most important ports of the sea: are Astrakhan, Makhachkala (Russia), Aqtau (Kazakhstan), Bander -e-Anzali (Iran), Turkmenbashi (Turkmenistan) and Baku (Azerbaijan)⁵.

Some observers believe that even today, two powers, i.e. the U.S and Russia, have vital geostrategic interests in the region. In all likelihood, they will determine the fate of the Caspian and shape the dynamics of the “New Great Game” in the 21st century. In this context, the security of the Caspian Sea is vulnerable to instability and fragile due to the confrontation between Russia and Western countries including the U.S, Russia, EU, and Turkey and not to discount emerging China. Given the multiplicity of actors and pre-existing complexities, Russia has been deploying its military fleet in the sea because of the prospective conflict situation in the future. For instance, Russia had launched cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea, which flew over Iran and Iraq, to hit terrorist camps in Syria. Russia has demonstrated that it would not deter from using military means in order to protect its interest in and around the Caspian Sea more than other states (Terterov et al., 2010).

It is apparent that oil is a commodity that will remain crucial in the future. Therefore, in this context, Caspian region in all likelihood would remain the main focal point of direct competition mainly between Russia and the U.S but any drastic change in the global economy could potentially invite more actors into the ‘New Great Game.’

⁵ Caspian Sea; Encyclopaedia Britannica, Accessed on 19 November 2016, URL: <https://www.britannica.com/place/Caspian-Sea>

Geostrategic Importance of the Caspian Region from a Theoretical Perspective

The concept of geopolitics was first advocated by Friedrich Ratzel (1844-1904) and Rudolf Kjellen (1864-1922). According to them, the importance of geopolitics of any given region changes along with the changes like global forces and circumstances. Rudolf Kjellen, a Swedish professor of geography, used the term 'Geopolitics' first time in 1899. Therefore, he is known as a "Father of Geopolitics." The concept of geopolitics broadly encapsulates the relationship between political science and geography. More specifically, geopolitics is the study of the relationship between politics and geography, demography and economy, and how this relationship determines the behavior of states in implementing its foreign policy. In other words, the concept, accounts geographical factors, i.e., topographical features or say strategic location, types of natural resources endowment, and composition of the population, which affects the relations between states and thus shape the dynamics of the struggle for world domination.

Definitions of Geopolitics

"Geopolitics is a concept that is frequently used to explain or analyse foreign policy issues of various countries. It is also a way of analysing international relations which has its own history, theories, and distinct aspects". (Kardan, 2010)

Kjellen defined "geopolitics as the theory of the state as a geographical organism or phenomenon in space."(Efferink, 2015)

Karl Haushofer (1869-1946), "Geopolitics is the new science of the state ... a doctrine on the spatial determinism of all political processes, based on the broad foundations of geography, especially of political geography". (Ibid.)

S. B. Cohen (2003) "Geopolitics is the analysis of the interaction between states, on the one hand, in the context of geographical settings and, on the other hand, political processes. (...) Both geographical settings and political processes are dynamic, and both influences each other. Geopolitical analyses address the consequences of this interaction". (Ibid.)

Colin Flint (2006) "Geopolitics means the struggle over the control of spaces and places; it focuses upon power. (...) In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, in geopolitical practices, power was seen simply as the relative power of countries in foreign affairs. In the late twentieth century, (...) definitions of power focus on the ability of a given country to wage war with other countries. However, recent discussions of power have become more

sophisticated.” He notes, “...geopolitics is a way of ‘seeing’ the world and he disagrees with geopolitical analysts who pretend that one individual can fully understand the world. He further remarked that feminists disapproved the partial, coloured world views of male, white and rich theorists”. (Ibid.)

Gerard Toal (2006), “Geopolitics is a discourse about world politics, with a particular emphasis on competition among states with geographical dimensions of power” (Ibid.).

The concept of geopolitics could be applied in understanding the nuances of the imperial age, wherein attributes of being land or a sea power influenced the competitions between Britain and Germany, and Britain and Russia, etc. The U.S Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan (1890) emphasised that sea power is preferable than being a land power. In reference to Suez and Panamas canals, he argued that “sea power plays an important role to facilitate trade and peaceful commerce.” In his book “Influence of Sea Power upon History” (1890), he persuasively argues that geopolitical factors play a significant role in taking decisions on strategic policies and understanding of contemporary world politics. The period starting from the late 19th century to the early 20th century is considered as of the golden age of ‘classical geopolitics,’ Helford John Mackinder is one of the leading scholars of geopolitics. In 1904, he presented a paper titled “The Geographical Pivot of History” at the Royal Geographic Society, wherein he formulated the ‘Heartland Theory.’ Unlike Alfred Thayer Mahan, Mackinder’s proposition insisted on the superiority of land power in determining the outcome of struggles among states. However, in the light of the disintegration of Soviet Union, Mackinder’s ‘Heartland Theory’ as a tool to analyse the competition among major powers to control over the Eurasian, Heartland got slowly sidelined from the discourse on contemporary international politics. In fact, in the post - Second World War period, the term of ‘geopolitics’ seemingly went out of fashion. Nonetheless, the relevance of topographical attributes still continued in the discourse of international politics in the contemporary world in various theories of international relations especially Realism which attempts to grapple with the new realities of international politics that emerged after the Second World War. He also points out fallacies of the theory of Idealism, which failed to explain the causes of both the world wars. (Patnaik, 2016:1-3).

Nicolas Spykman, a leading strategic American thinker, has adroitly wedded elements of geopolitics with that of realism to chart a roadmap for the U.S attain hegemonic leadership in

the world. He argues that the globe is divided according to strategic importance. Based on this conception of the world, he identified the “Old World,” which includes, the Eurasian continent, Australia, and Africa as important in a strategic sense. According to Spykman, to become the leader of the world, the U.S should tailor a balance of power in the Old World, in such a way that any form of challenge to the U.S supremacy is prevented right at its inception. Spykman identified the western, southern, and eastern edges of the Eurasian continent as “Rimland.” According to him, Rimland is also a key geopolitical arena wherein the U.S has to especially contain any rival powers (Ibid). Besides Mackinder, Karl Houshofer also greatly contributed to the theory of geopolitics. They stated that “the state of the world is permanent instability; therefore, there would always be a struggle between two leading political elements- land and sea power” (Mirzaev, 2005: 98).

Taking inferences from the world-historical process, Mackinder argues, that the world is naturally divided into many isolated areas, each of which has a special function to perform. He contends that the European civilization is a result of many centuries of struggles against the invasions from Asia. Eurasia was earlier known as the ‘Pivot Area,’ in his proposition, he reformulated the name of the region as the ‘Heartland.’ The idea behind the importance of Eurasia, it is centrally located and serves as the pivot of all geopolitical transformation of historical dimensions within the world island (Ismailov and Papava, 2010: 84).

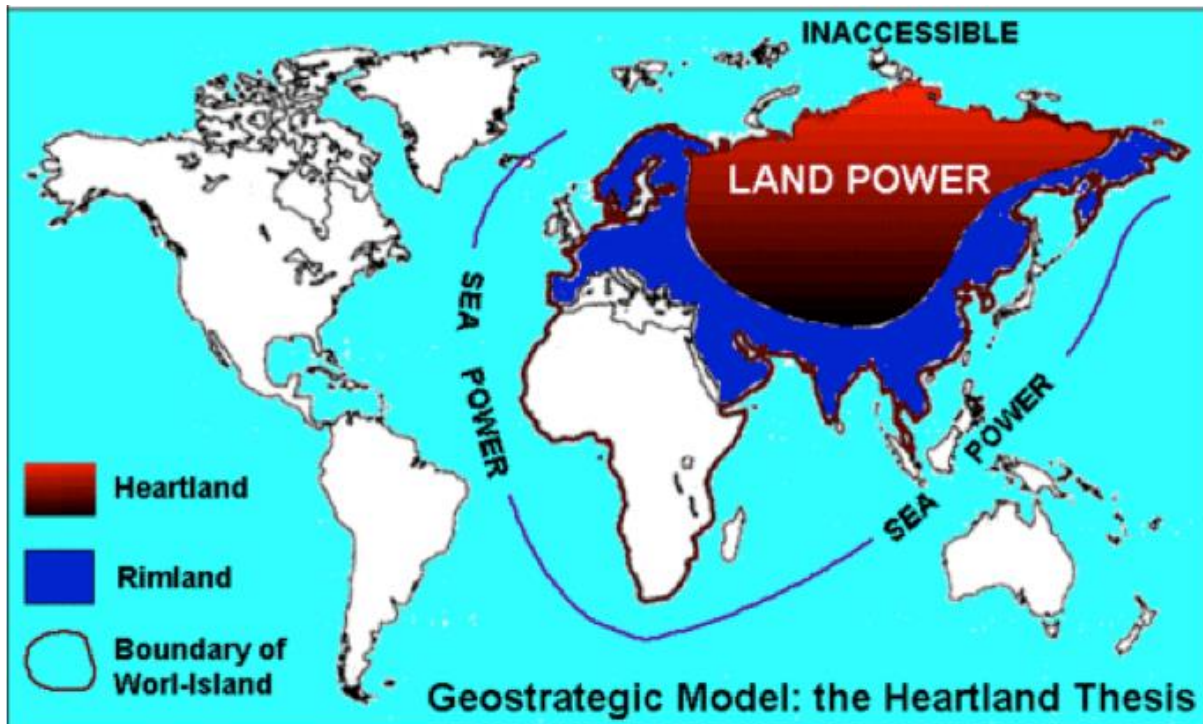
Mackinder emphasised that ‘Pivot Area’ as the center of the planet, which includes the river basin of the Amu Darya, Syr Darya, Volga, Yenisei and the two seas (the Aral and the Caspian). The heartland includes most of the parts of Russia and parts of Southwest Asia. He further divided the world into three parts: “the pivotal region, the inner and outer crescents.” According to him, the pivotal region means Midland Eurasia, i.e., mainly Russia. He also identified the “inner crescent” with the Eurasia coastal areas as very important for the civilizational development. It includes Europe and southern, eastern and south-western Asia. Whereas the “outer crescent” included North and South America, Britain, Japan, Australia, Southern Africa zone which are culturally and geographically alien to inner Eurasia (Ibid.). It must be noted that Mackinder’s views on geopolitical landscapes or say his ‘Heartland Theory’ is based on the centrality or relevance of the Caspian /Central Asian region. He defined the “heartland as the center of the European landmass, inaccessible by sea and thus it is considered as the ‘Pivot

Area' of world politics" (Dekmejian and Simonian, 2001:6). In short, Mackinder's hypothesis stated that:

Who rules East Europe commands the heartland, who rules the heartland commands the world island (Eurasia), who rules the world island commands the world (Mackinder, 1904: 125).

The heartland theory gained especial relevance when Russia and Britain started to compete over control the Mackinder's heartland and inner crescent. Thus, beginning the next phase of the great game in the context of the cold war between the U.S and the USSR. (Dekmejian and Simonian, 2001: 6). Simultaneously, during the Second World War, the Soviets and Germans struggled to gain control over the heartland.

Map 2.1



Birmingham war studies: unofficial blog by University of Birmingham War Studies undergraduates. Accessed 18 March 2018 URL: <https://birminghamwarstudies.wordpress.com/2012/06/04/215/>

Meanwhile, the U.S followed the containment policy towards the USSR. Mackinder's theory was challenged by Nicolas Spykman (1893- 1943), who introduced the "Rimland Theory" wherein he argues that the history of the world has fundamentally determined by political, economic and cultural exigencies arising out other Pivot of the Eurasian continent. He criticised

Mackinder for overrating the heartland as the center of all strategic calculations, due to its vast size, geographical location, and presumably the superiority of land power over the sea power. He argues that “the dynamics of the geopolitical history of the ‘inner crescent,’ i.e., the Rimland and the coastal zones resulted due to the inner development rather than the external pressure” as Mackinder has asserted (Ismailov and Papava, 2010:89). He said that the heartland is the geographical expanse, and it is the Rimland where the actual struggle for world domination is played out. In short, Spykman states:

Whoever controls rules the Rimland commands Eurasia and whoever rules Eurasia commands the world (Ibid).

In other words, access to oceans and seas is the key factor in determining which of the state could become a global power. The Rimland countries include except for Russia, most of the newly formed republics after the disintegration of Soviet Union, especially the coastal states of the Caspian and a large number of Asian countries as China, Japan, India, Europe, and West Asia. Spykman believed that the United State occupies the central place in the pivot because the U.S has been dominating over two oceans- the Pacific and the Atlantic (Mirzaev, 2005: 98).

As a realist thinker, Spykman argues that international politics is all about the endless struggle for power in which the U.S and Britain have been trying to control the Rimland to prevent the expansion of other powers in the world island. After the Second World War, the Rimland theory gained importance in American strategic thinking wherein the concept of heartland had become synonymous with the USSR. Some scholars argue that Spykman has deliberately emphasised on ‘Rimland’ rather than heartland to prevent the future expansions of the USSR or at least to justify the containment politics. Because the U.S had been strengthening its presence in the so-called ‘Rimland’ by promoting a pro-Western regime, preferably liberal democratic states. (Patnaik, 2016: 4).

Spykman claims that due to Mackinder, “we can now take up in detail, the specific regions into which we have divided [the world] and analyse their meaning in terms of the power potential and context of the politics of global security. We must, therefore, evaluate the role played by each of these zones in the past in the evolution of international society”⁶. George Kennan, who is credited for the development of the Marshall Plan, was also one of the principal advocates

⁶ Defining geopolitics & strategy in Central Asia (2010): A century of Western Geopolitics, (Online web), Accessed on 18 September 2018, URL: <https://geopoliticsdefined.wordpress.com/tag/spykman/>

of a policy of containment of the Soviet Union. His ideas also influenced the creation of bilateral and multilateral alliances such as “ANZUS treaty (Australia, New Zealand, and United States Security Treaty), SEATO, NATO and CENTO” that successfully lined up against the Soviet coalition, known as the Warsaw Pact (O’Hara, 2004: 145).

As far as the relevance of Mackinder’s Heartland Theory, which influenced the understanding of geopolitical development. As mentioned above, this theory reckoned the geopolitical importance of the Caspian region that “covers much of today’s Russia, Siberia, Central –East Europe and Central Asia.” In the context of the decline of British naval power, which predominantly controlled the open seas for centuries, Mackinder emphasised that the vast Eurasian landmass has strategically become very important. He identified the newly independent states formed after the dissolution of USSR in 1991 as the modern core of the competition among states. Though Mackinder’s ideas otherwise gave more importance to the political rivalries over the Heartland. This means Mackinder viewed the competition among the great powers as not only for political and security reasons but also for economic reasons, i.e. control over the energy resources. Mackinder’s strategic thoughts have become particularly relevant to the Central Asian region as well as the Caspian basin. (Shujaat, 2015: 29)

In the 19th century, Mackinder’s theory not only contributed to the understanding the nuances of “the Great Game” between Russia and Britain but also influenced the policies of both the countries. The “New Great Game” which would be discussed in detail in the section below, means the competition among states 1after the dismemberment of the USSR, i.e., Russia and others mainly Western powers over the energy resources located in the heartland(Ibid). Therefore, the emergence of NATO in Eastern Europe to stop the expansion of communism, the annexation of Crimea by Russia the emergence of the SCO in Central Asia and West Asia are examples of the relevance of Mackinder’s idea of the ‘heartland.’

New Great Game

The geopolitical rivalry among states, also known as the “Great Game” emerged in the 1830s. Rudyard Kipling, in his novel ‘Kim’ first published in 1901, popularised the idea of the Great Game. However, Arthur Conolly, who served as an officer in the British East India Company, is rightly deemed to be the “Father of the Great Game.” The term describes the competition for power among the states to control the Eurasian landmass. Specifically, the great game refers to the political and diplomatic confrontation between Russia and Great Britain in between 19th

and the early part of the 20th century. Central Asia was the gateway to Afghanistan, which connects with India via Khyber Pass (Cooley, 2018).

The great game could be understood in three phases: first, during 19th and the early 20th centuries, the game started when British East India Company, then a de facto power in India counter the Russian expansion towards the Caucasus and Central Asia. (Edwards, 2003:184). As a matter of fact, worried about losing control over key potential trade routes to the Russian, the Company sent its officers to explore prospective land routes that could connect the northern border of India. However, the then ruler of Afghanistan was hostile to the officers and forced them to return. At the same time, the Afghans were more favourable to the Russian. Thus, Afghanistan became the epicenter of the conflict wherein the British fought in the “first Anglo-Afghan war (1839- 1842) and the second Anglo-Afghan war (1878-1880)”. The second phase of the “Great Game” lasted from 1907 to 1917, this phase includes the rivalry between German Empire, on the one hand, Britain and Russia on the other hand, until towards the end of the First World War; in another extended episode of the second phase of the great game the British again went to war with Afghanistan also known as the Third Anglo-Afghan war (1919). Both the first and the second phase of the Great Game was motivated by the same objective; “control of the land route to India.” The third phase began after the Russian Revolution (1917) the Bolsheviks under the leadership of Lenin embarked on setting the whole of Asia free from imperialist domination by means of ideologically motivated left-wing armed uprisings (Edwards, 2003:184). The key factors for competition in the third phase also remain the same, i.e. to gain territorial control or hegemony over a given territory for geopolitical reasons.

The New Great Game is, however, understood more in term of control over strategic resources. In the geopolitical context, it is defined by the competition among various states to get access to black gold in the Caspian region as well as energy resources located in Central Asia. Zbigniew Brzezinski, Jimmy Carter’s National Security Advisor (1977-1981) termed this region as “the Axis of the world” (Duarte, 2013: 28). However. It must be noted in the Great Game, the main rivals’, i.e., British and Russian empires, never directly confronted each other in open war. Instead, the rivalry was “silently and secretly” played out in the heart of Central Asia or more precisely in Afghanistan. The ‘New Great Game’ effectively began after the disintegration of the USSR. Many erstwhile Soviet territories became independent republic mainly in “Central Asian region, plus the littoral states of the Caspian Sea” which also have abundant oil and natural gas resources. In the context of the ever-increasing demand of energy around the world and the unforeseen power vacuum created due to the dissolution of USSR

drew the interest of other major powers. The ensuing competition between them is known as the “New Great Game.” (Ibid, 32).

The “New Great Game” describes the ongoing competition and rivalry to gain influence in the region, mainly between Russia, China and the member of the “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation” on the one side and the U.S, Britain and other member countries of NATO on the other side. The key factors for the rivalry are hegemonic interests, relative gain or loss of power and making profit all based on the expansion of control on the energy economy and also securing the reserves in the Caucasus and Central Asian region for future exploitation. Indeed, energy resources of the Caspian basin are the focal point of the ‘New Great Game’ and what transpired in this struggle would essentially decide which of the major powers in the contemporary world politics would continue to remain a major power and which one would get marginalised. Therefore, in the new phase, the competition is primarily focused on securing control of the energy resources, i.e. ‘regional oil policies rather than on geographical areas. In this regard, Shareen Brysac and Karl Meyer rightly argue that “the pipelines and tanker routes, profit-driven international petroleum consortiums and private companies, and prospective contractual relations, are the prizes of the new great game” (Ibid).

Energy-hungry countries, especially India and China, are also vying for access; along with America, Russia, Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey. Each of these states mentioned above has their own set of economic, political, and cultural priorities in the “Central Asian Republics (CAR)” (Edwards, 2003: 84). Non-state actors such as, private international oil companies with only profit-making motives and international consortiums which represent the interests of the given countries are the other key actors. Given these, it is clear that several developments have unfolded Basin. Like the Great Game’ in the 19th century, the ‘New Great Game’ is a competition between Russia and Western countries to outsmart each other in the Caspian region, so to say, the competition is due to the clash of interests of outside powers with that of Russia (Jonson, 2001: 12). After the terrorist attack of 9/11, and the consequent, U.S-led military action in Afghanistan indicates that the New Great Game has seen its first military conflict. Though, the new phase practically began and was again played out ‘silently and secretly’ since the early 1990s and it is still ongoing. The new phase of the competition is carried out in multiple arenas, mainly political, economic, social, and cultural (Edwards, 2003: 87). It must be noted here that, if not more, military means is an equally important tool of foreign policy to secure and enlarge the interests of the actors involved. In the context of the analyses

given above, the following section briefly examines Russia, the U.S, China, and the European Union's role in the Caspian region.

Russia

Throughout history, Russia remained a crucial actor in the Caspian region. In fact, the area is considered as a 'traditional zone' of Russian national interests. Hence, maintaining the geopolitical position in the area is the principal objective of Russian foreign policy. Russia occupies a huge territory in Eurasia and the region being a bridge between east and west, gives Russia with the freedom to trigger geostrategic maneuverer (Mirzaev, 2005: 102). Even after the dismemberment of USSR, concerning energy, the Central Asian states have remained attached to the old Soviet structures and are still dependent on electrical grids installed during the erstwhile regime of the Soviet Union. Besides, more importantly, the dependence on the exportation of oil and gas through Russian pipelines. One reason for this dependency is because these states are landlocked, which means, they have to rely heavily on the pipelines that pass through foreign territories to export the energy resources. In early 1990, mostly because of internal conflict and also not being able to anticipate the political dynamics of the Central Asian region, Russia was distinctively not interested in the affairs of Caspian Basin and Central Asian region. For instance, a section of the Russian leadership, such as Aleksandr Livshits, justified that it was incumbent to follow "a policy of benign neglect" to Central Asia for implementation of economic reforms in Russia' (Kubicek, 2013:173).

For practical reasons, in the immediate run after the dissolution of Soviet Union in 1991, Russia was not able to compete with Western firms in terms of numbers of ownership of oil fields and oil refining infrastructures and also an investment in the Caspian region. Nevertheless, Russian owned firms were not totally out of business, for example, gradually Lukoil managed to gain 32.5% share of Azerbaijan's offshore Karabakh field, 10% shares in the Shah Deniz fields and also gained control over the Tengizchevroil and Kumkol-Lukoil projects in Kazakhstan. Moreover, Gazprom had an investment in the exploitation of the Karachaganak field in Kazakhstan and also in exploring and exploitation of other natural resources. In a practical sense, for Russia, Kazakhstan remained as a 'loyal bridgehead' in the region. After signing an oil-gas alliance with Russia in 2003, the Kazakh President Nazarbayev stated: "Kazakhs and Russian are brothers in blood." Besides, Turkmenistan is internationally isolated because of being a land locked country, and this has allowed Russia to continue to import most of the Turkmen gas. (Ibid)

On top of these, Russia was the topmost buyer of a maximum of the Caspian Sea energy resources. However, post-1991, the Caspian states had to confront a myriad of difficulties in expanding the oil and natural gas industry. As a matter of fact, the Caspian states had no alternative than to pay the Russian Gas Companies for acquiring technological know-how as well as equipment needed to explore and develop the gas fields. This dependence has, in turn, compelled them to sell the same at lesser prices to Russia. This situation curtailed the prospect of economic growth and lead to severe losses to their economy. For instance, with the exception of a small ongoing pipeline project with Iran, Turkmenistan completely relies on Russian pipeline networks for exporting gas. Prior to the independence of the Central Asian states, Russia, due to its geographical, historical as well as cultural connections, was able to exercise tremendous influence and still continues to be a key player in the region. Broadly, Russian foreign policy objectives are to protect the Russian territories, its national interests, population, controlling the region's transport routes and to limit the influence of the external powers. In the contemporary time, through regional organisation and alliances, major powers of the world have been eying to gain influence in the region either directly or through indirect means to providing regional military and economic security assistance. These International organisations or alliances includes "Commonwealth of Independent States, Partnership for Peace Program of NATO, GUAM group (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova), the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), US-Turkey-Azerbaijan Axis and Russia-Armenia-Iran Axis and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Pact". (Malikov, 2007: 217).

All these given entities are vying for dominance in the region for different strategic reasons. For example, Russian backed organisations have tried to keep the Post-Soviet Central Asian states under the Russian influence to protect the status of being a predominant power in the region. In counter, Western-backed organisations have focussed on enhancing the sovereignty of these newly independent states and simultaneously have also been promoting the liberal-democratic form of governance or say electoral democracy. Whereas, Russia has strongly opposed the formation of new international oil consortium with the involvement of external states, particularly U.S and EU. In the light of the Caspian new developments in the geopolitical game, i.e., the new realities of having to accommodate the interest of the Central Asian states, Moscow had to realign its policy for the whole region. In fact, Russia began to cooperate with the littoral states in spearheading mutually beneficial energy projects. (Kaliyeva, 2004: 3).

The terrorist attack of 9/11 and the subsequent U.S led war against the Taliban in Afghanistan has opened a free door for Western powers to exert their influence on Central Asia and the Caspian region. Given the economic lacunae of the region arising out of excessive dependence on Russia and the renewed interest of the Western powers, the new phase of the great game was set only to become more intense. Evidently, under the Putin presidency, Russia started to reinforce the traditional structures of connection in the region, especially security and energy policies. Subsequently, Russia began to focus on security policies, which led to the expansion of military cooperation, the establishment of larger naval bases in the Caspian, and also to gain access to military bases of the Central Asian states. To secure a pole position in the energy sphere, Moscow began to play ‘gas cards’ to influence the pro-Western governments in Ukraine and Georgia. In this context, the Russian military incursion into Georgia in 2008 is evidence of the Russian efforts to reassert itself again in this region. Russia, through the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) has been upgrading alternative routes to Kazakh oil into the near future. In fact, Russia has taken charge of developing the Burgas-Alexandroupolis pipeline, which could enable the Russian to transport the Caspian oil across Bulgaria and Greece bypassing the Turkish Straits. Moreover, Russia and Kazakhstan have finalised an agreement to expand carrying capacity of the CPC pipeline by routing the Kazakh oil through Burgas-Alexandroupoli pipeline. Besides, other production-sharing agreements have also been signed between them on prospectively large oil fields such as Tscentralnoye, Kurmangazy, and Tyubkaragan (Kubicek, 2013:178).

With respect to energy relations between Russia and Turkmenistan, Russia concluded a 25-year agreement in 2005; this agreement stipulates that Russia would buy the for the given period and also increase the transport of Turkmen gas over tenfold through Russian pipelines. Moreover, in 2007, Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan agreed to sign a trilateral agreement to upgrade the Prikaspirski Gas Pipeline. Through these undertakings, Russia has seemingly ensured complete domination in the export of Turkmen gas for the near future. In Uzbekistan, Lukoil and Gazprom, both Russian companies have been investing in Kendym and Ustyurt gas fields. To modernize these gas fields, Lukoil signed for 35 years and \$ 1 billion worth deal to share a load of production with Uzbek Government in 2005. With agreements to resume the construction gas pipelines from Uzbekistan in 2007, Russia will be well-positioned to become a key customer for Uzbek gas. The former President of Kyrgyzstan stated that “God and geography gave us Russia.” This statement reflects the realities of Russian dominance and

dependence of the Central Asian states to Russia. To put it otherwise, Russia's historical preponderance in the region is not easy to challenge.

Besides, given the Russian and Chinese interests in the region, the U.S is also not enthusiastic to get into complicated geopolitical engagements because of the unpredictability of the corrupt leaders of the authoritarian regimes and in the region. For example, from 2001 up till 2005, Uzbekistan was once considered to be the top ally of the U.S in the region in 2001. In 2005 however, a violent protest erupted in Uzbekistan, and the government decided to militarily crackdown and more than hundreds got killed in Andijan. After this incident, Uzbekistan has moved closer towards Russia. The Western countries have criticised the highhandedness in dealing with the protestors and have demanded an international investigation, which in turn was rejected by Uzbek President. (Ibid: 177-178).

The United States

The U.S has multiple engagements with energy-rich countries in the Persian Gulf, Latin America, the Caspian, and Central Asia. Given these, the U.S still perceived the Caspian region as a zone of special strategic interests. Thus, it is not only interested oil and natural gas found in the Caspian Sea and Central Asia, but the U.S is also equally interested due to the geostrategic location of the region, i.e., closeness to Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan and more importantly to Russia. Throughout the cold war era, the Caspian region was geopolitically, and economic stable or rather the USSR had almost absolute control over the affairs of the region. Therefore, it was not easy the Western countries gain any sort of influence in the littoral zones of USSR. However, the conditions began to change in the late 1980s, One of the main reason for the change is the coming of Mikhail Gorbachev in power in 1985, he liberalised Soviet system by introducing the policies of 'Perestroika and Glasnost' which provided a window to the Western firms to get access in the Caspian region. Subsequently, Chevron the U.S based private oil company in order to develop the giant Tengiz field entered the Caspian region at the end of the 1980s (Akiner, 2004: 8-9).

After the dismemberment of the USSR, the Kazakh Government invited private investments in the oil sector. The largest investment was made in the Tengiz project. In order to harness the Tengiz and Korolev oil fields, located in the north-western Caspian Sea, the Chevron Corporation and Kazakhstan concluded a joint venture agreement on 6 April 1993. After this deal, Chevron has constantly been increasing the scale of investments in the oil and gas economy of Kazakhstan. As a result, a US\$20 billion worth and an understanding for 40-year

joint ventures, known as the Tengizchevron partnership was formed (Lovei and Gentry, 2002: 61). Also, Western firms have also signed several deals with Kazakhstan to explore the possibilities for developing Karachaganak, oil, and gas field located in western Kazakhstan. The Tengiz field was discovered in 1979; however, it was not fully developed during the Soviet period. Therefore, in order to develop these fields, in 1992, British Gas (BG) and Eni (Italy) and five others; and in November 1997, BG and Eni partnership with Lukoil (Russia) and Texaco (US) signed a Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) (Akiner, 2004: 8-9).

After the 9/11 terror attacks, the U.S has been channelizing its efforts to expand political engagements with the Central Asian states, primarily to enhance its security and economic interests. Thus, the strategic aim of the U.S foreign policy is to gain control over the territory and its natural resources. In President Barak Obama's energy doctrine, it was made cleared that "the Caucasus, China, and Turkey were strategically important for the U.S in increasing its clout in the Caspian region as well as Central Asia" (Garashova, 2014). In pursuit of enhancing the political and economic influence over the region – firstly the U.S has continued to assist the process of nation-building in each of the Central Asian states with the primary objective of ensuring that these states are freed from the shackles of dependence on Russia. In doing so, the U.S has attempted to promote democracy, human rights, and conduct of free and fair elections in the region. Secondly, the U.S has sought to reduce its dependence on the Persian Gulf by cultivating a new source of energy. Thereby, the U.S has gotten more and more involved in exploration and development of the Caspian region by way of seeking new avenues to diversify the transportation routes so as to limit the dominance of regional powers, i.e., China and Russia. Thirdly, U.S has relied on sanction policy specifically against Iran. The motive behind this policy is to undermine Iran's role in construction energy infrastructures in the region. Besides, the sanction policy towards Iran is too not only curtail the Iranian nuclear programs but also to contain Islamic fundamentalism in Iran. Finally, with regard to security, the U.S continues to have cordial relations with Turkey currently a member of NATO, to protect its security interests and at the same time in the further development of U.S controlled energy infrastructures in the Caspian region. Given the reasons mentioned above, the long-term goal of the U.S is to gain control over the hydrocarbon resources of the region and also to keep Russia at bay. As Stephen Blanks argues that, the main aim of all the big and small powers in the Caspian region is to gain control over the export routes of the energy resources. (Kubicek, 2013; 178).

In short, the primary objectives of U.S foreign policy is to contain Iran and Russia and also reduction of dependence on West Asia. Furthermore, of all the energy-producing countries, Azerbaijan is the closest to America, and the U.S has considerable interests in this country. However, Azerbaijan, which has been one of the most vital transit points of oil and natural gas, may likely fail to fulfill the U.S agenda of reducing the dependence on Gulf countries. But, many major investors were disappointed as the Western-sponsored exploration and drilling exercises failed to find any notable oil and gas deposits in Afghanistan. For instance, Alec Rasizade points out that, “Of the remaining 16 projects, only five are actually in the works”. In fact, so far, out of the total funds pledged by the Western investors, i.e. \$42 billion, no more than \$8 billion was invested in Azerbaijan. As a matter of fact, “out of the five currently operating international consortia, only one, the AIOC (Azerbaijan International Operating Company) led by British Petroleum produces considerable amount of crude oil, not only incomparable with the Persian Gulf levels, but even not justifying the construction of a new main export pipeline [BTC] ” (Ibid). Consequently, the focus tuned out to Kazakh’s energy fields to fulfill its potential energy demand. As per the U.S National Security Strategy, one of the paramount strategic priorities of the U.S is energy security.

Consequently, the U.S has especially focused on Kazakhstan so that that the Kazakh would continue to supply oil to BTC bypassing Russia. However, in order to harness the reserves, Kazakhstan would require much more foreign investment. On the downside, Kazakhstan has recently introduced new laws, which has disappointed many foreign investors. In 2005, Kazakhstan formulated a law applicable on production sharing agreements, which would require all foreign investors only to own 49%, the rest 51% must be owned by Kazmunaigaz, a Kazakh state-owned company (Ibid,179). Given this, it is hard to imagine any U.S companies to become dominant in the energy sector of Kazakhstan in the near future unless there is a new change in the Kazakh law on energy. Besides, due to the fragile nature political situation in Caspian states, the U.S is reluctant to commit in long term ventures in the Caspian and the Central Asian region.

China

China is mainly interested in the energy resources found in the eastern part of the Caspian region, i.e., Central Asian states. In fact, China is geographically directly connected with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan. China views the Central Asian states as not only a vital zone for security in Xinjiang province located in south western China but also views the

region as a big market for its goods. Moreover, China also reckons the region as a passageway to Europe and West Asia (Aghaie Joobani, 2013:53). Therefore, apart from curbing the Islamic terror groups in the Central Asian states from having a connection with Islamic separatist groups in Xinjiang, the primary strategic aim of China in the region is to expand its economic interests. By the early 1990s, China became one of the major economies in the world economy which in turn has increased the ability of China to undertake large scale investment abroad and also a prospective big consumer of oil and gas of the region. For historical reasons, relatively China made a slow entry in the region. For instance, during the Soviet period, the Silk Road was made dysfunctional. Apart from this, distance-wise, the Chinese Dragon in a relative sense, is not the nearest from the main energy fields of the Caspian region. Nonetheless, in the context of the need to sustain the economic growth rate, China's energy requirements rose consistently throughout the 1990s. This situation demanded China's foreign policy to be proactive in Central Asia. As a result, China has managed to arrive in a various understanding with the Central Asian states, both bilateral and multilateral agreements which include illegal immigration, settlement of boundary disputes, arms control, religious extremism, fights against international terrorism and drug trafficking, etc. (Kubicek, 2013:176).

Given the U.S engagement in Afghanistan and the growing threat of international terrorism. China initially priorities on security, particularly to prevent Islamic fundamentalist and terror groups the among Uighurs in its Xinjiang (autonomous region of China) which share boundary with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. The Uighurs also spelled as Uyghurs people are spread certain pockets in Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Due to fear of the Taliban, which has been a major source of volatility in the whole region. In order to meet the challenges of any eventual military conflict arising out of Islamic international terrorist groups, China has created the "Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)" with like-minded countries. In 1996, except Turkmenistan, the Shanghai Five was established with China as the main protagonist along with Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan. In 2001, Uzbekistan joined this organization, and it was renamed. Currently, it is known as the SCO. The main objective of the organisation is to maintain peace and stability in the region and has identified- terrorism, separatism, and extremism as the 'three evils.' On 15 June 2001, the six-member states of the SCO have signed the various agreement against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism. Professor Sarah O' Hara points out that "China sees the SCO as a means to counter the U.S influence in the region" (O'Hara, 2004: 147-148).

Currently, the SCO has taken up several significant confidence-building efforts in Eurasia to improve the security environment by decreasing armed forces deployed in the borders of the member countries. Besides, understanding has been reached on the expansion of inter-state cooperation in diplomatic, military, commercial, technological, combating trafficking of drugs and arms and other fields that pertains to regional security and stability. In this context, Kaushik points out that, “SCO is determined to resolve disputes over border resources such as energy, water, and transport infrastructures” In view of the expanding role of SCO, currently China has been accorded the credential and legitimacy as one of the major actors in the Central Asian region. In a summit meeting in Tashkent, in 2004, this intergovernmental organisation, has established an energy-working group. As a result, China committed to giving \$ 1 billion in aid for the development of trade in the region. The main aim of this organisation is to the creation of a multilateral forum so as to compete with the U.S. For example, China provided a loan of \$600 million to Uzbekistan to upgrade energy infrastructures. China in the meanwhile also has managed to gain 12% control over Kazakh oil output and has become one of the largest importers of oil, gas, and other natural resources of Kazakhstan. (Kaushik, 2011: 9-10).

Chinese foreign policy towards the Caspian region has primarily revolved around the two factors: energy and security, energy for its growing economy and security to ensure its western border of Xinjiang province from coming into contact with Islamic groups in the Central Asian states. In the context of Chinese energy requirements to fuel the process of industrialisation, the Caspian Basin has been identified as a top priority of Chinese foreign policy. In fact, China has become “one of the largest consumers of energy.” For instance, during a span of ten years (1985 and 1995), Chinese demand for oil increased significantly from 1.7 to 3.4 million barrels per day. This has seemingly further increase, for example, in 2009, the volume of the crude oil import of China increased by more than 50% (Abilov, 2012: 50).

Evidently, China imports around 80% of oil from West Asia. Therefore, China is also aiming to reduce the dependence on West Asian energy, and like the U.S has similarly resorted to the diversification of its energy sources. Economically, the Caspian region and the Central Asian states are big markets for Chinese finished products and also a source of cheap raw materials. In keeping with the reality of ever-increasing energy requirements, China in January 1992 established its first diplomatic relationship with Central Asian states. However, the actual Chinese involvement in the energy sector began in 1997 when “Chinese National Petroleum Company (CNPC) signed bilateral agreement to construct an 1800-mile pipeline that runs from Kazakhstan crossing over the Tianshan mountain range to Xinjiang” (Kubicek,2013:76).

Moreover, in the same year, the Kazakh government signed another deal with CNPC to export 60% of Kazakh gas. In order to build pipelines, since 2004, China has been investing billions of dollars in Central Asia. In 2005, Kazakh 6-Chinese oil pipeline Atasu-Alashankou was opened. In 2007, CNPC again signed an export deal with KazMunayGaz, Kazakhstan National Oil and Gas Company wherein five bcm of gas was stipulated to be exported to China annually. In order to build a pipeline, China has invested. In August 2007, CNPC again signed a deal with KazMunayGaz for lengthening the “Atasu-Alashankou Oil Pipeline” by another 700 km so as to directly link up the Caspian Basin with China. After the extension of this pipeline, China has started multiple negotiations with other Central Asian states for additional pipelines projects (Abilov, 2012: 52). In September 2013, CNPC managed to acquire 8.33% stake in the Kashagan Consortium (German, 2014: 12).

China has 16% of the total trade in Kazakhstan. The CNPC invested more than US\$12 billion in petroleum production and US\$6.2 billion to construct oil and gas pipelines in Kazakhstan so that energy resources could be supplied to China from Central Asia. The Chinese firms control about one-quarter of Kazakhstan’s oil production. On the other side, Kazakhstan also interested in strengthening its trade relations with China through BRI (Belt and Road Initiative. Kazakhstan connects Western Europe to Western China international transport corridor. In such a scenario, the country could play a significant role in boosting Chinese trade transit through its territory. (Vakulchuk, and Overland, 2019: 119).

Given the vast hydrocarbon reserves, Kazakhstan has attracted many international interests and entry of external actors is set to increase, which could potentially undermine Russian and thereby could have a negative impact on Kazakh-Russian relations. However, so far the Kazakhs have successfully managed to balance its relations with the West, Moscow, Beijing, and other states while at the same has been successful in protecting its interest in the Caspian Basin. China has also cultivated ties with Turkmenistan and energy ties between China and Turkmenistan have reached a higher level in comparison with China’s involvement with Kazakhstan. In fact, in 2006, China has signed a “thirty-year agreement with Turkmenistan to buy 30 bcm of gas a year” and also to provide assistance in developing a pipeline from Turkmenistan. Evidently, by 2016, Turkmenistan has become the largest supplier of natural gas to China, and “exported 25.6 bcm” via the Central Asia- China pipeline, which was formally inaugurated on 14 December 2009. For the first time, this pipeline connected China to Turkmenistan and other Central Asian states (Blank, 2010).

At present, China imports more than half of the natural gas from Turkmenistan. The country exported around 136.6 billion cubic metres of natural gas to China by May 2016. In accordance with BRI's objective and China's economic development goals, Turkmenistan is expected to play a crucial role in China's energy supply and energy security over the next decade. By 2030, China wants to import 270 billion cubic metres of natural gas, which was 53 billion in 2015. Thus, it shows the high dependence of Turkmenistan on China. (Vakulchuk and Overland, 2019: 125). Besides these, in April 2007, China also signed "an agreement with Uzbekistan to construct a 300-mile gas pipeline that would export 30 bcm of gas to China annually". However, whether Uzbekistan could keep up with the agreement or not is doubtful because at the same time Uzbeks have pledged to sell gas to Gazprom. Moreover, around 80% of the total gas production is domestically consumed (Kubicek, 2013: 179).

It must be noted here that the above-mentioned Chinese deals with the Central Asian states are already challenging rival Indian Oil and Natural Gas Company (ONGC), the U.S as well as Russian companies in the region. Thus, above-mentioned discussion shows that China has been consistently increasing its presence in the Central Asian as well as the Caspian states. The trade turnover between China and Central Asia increased 60 times between 1991 to 2016 from \$ 500,000 million to US\$ 30 billion except informal trade of small-scale entrepreneurs. During the decade from 2008-2018, China became the most important players in Central Asia. (Vakulchuk and Overland, 2019: 115-116). Recently, the Caspian region has become a focal point of political, security, military, and trade and energy interests for great powers after introducing the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China in 2013. The region is a center point of this policy, which connects Eurasia, Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Through this, China intends to gain control over the major energy reserves. The BRI is a large scale of an infrastructure project. It would improve railroads, pipelines, roads, industrial parks, and special economic zones. The Five Central Asian countries are the centerpiece of this project. Due to the BRI project, China is likely to remain the largest investor in the region in the future even more than the possible economic footprint of the U.S and Russia.

The European Union

In meeting the rising demand for energy, the European countries have primarily relied on the Caspian states for oil and gas supplies. Thus, EU's relations with Caspian states have been largely determined by the issue of transportation of energy resources. In order to augment transportation routes, European companies have been enlarging their engagements in the

region. For instance, British Petroleum Company has invested in several projects in Azerbaijan, including BTC and Shah Deniz fields. Other European companies such as “Agip and Eni (Italy), Royal Dutch Shell, British Gas, Total (France)” have also invested in oil and gas fields of Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. However, Western companies have not made many inroads in Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. On the contrary, the Trinity Energy agreement arrived in 2001 between UK and Uzbekistan broke down in 2005. (Kubicek, 2013: 176). In order to gain access to the oil and natural gas in the Caspian and Central Asian states, the EU governments have supported the private companies and allied themselves with the U.S. However, as mentioned earlier, changes in the laws for foreign investors made by Kazakhstan has hurt the interests of the EU companies. Besides environmental card has been played to sideline the foreign investors in the Kashagan field, particularly, Eni (Italy). With regard to Kazakhstan, oligarch groups aligned to the Kazakh President Nazarbayev control much of the wealth of the country, and they are unwilling to entertain too much influence of foreign investors and thus have created problems for Western private investors.

The European Union has launched several programs to facilitate cooperative relations with the Caspian and Central Asian states. For example, the “Interstate Oil and Gas Transportation to Europe” (INOGATE) program, which is meant to identify prospective investment projects to diversify the transportation routes for of hydrocarbon resources from Central Asia to Europe. Another of such programs is “Transportation Corridor Europe-Caucasus-Asia” (TRACECA) was initiated to cater assistance to develop the “Central Asia-Caucasus-Europe transport route.” Further, INOGATE is another such program to increase the level of cooperation on energy between the EU countries located around the Black Sea, Central Asian, and South Caucasus region. The primary goal of the INOGATE program is to address various issues to increase the energy security of EU member states by diversification creating more avenues for export/import, energy transit, and supply routes. Given this goal, the European Union would need to increase further the level of engagements in the energy economy of the Caspian region (Ibrahimov, 2014: 107-108).

It is imperative to mention here that the U.S imports its energy resources primarily from Canada, the Gulf of Mexico, and Gulf countries. This means the U.S in a practical sense is not compelled to necessarily expand its relations with the Caspian and the Central Asian states. To put it otherwise, U.S involvement in the energy politics in the region though driven by long-term strategic calculation, in the short term, is to secure energy security for its global ally European Union. Time and again, European countries have been a reliable political and

economic partner for the U.S, and without this partnership, it is not easy to maintain the predominance of Western countries in global politics. Russia and West Asia are the core energy suppliers to the EU. In fact, the EU is one of the largest energy importer and consumer. In 2007, the EU imported approximately 30% of its oil and more than 50% of the gas requirements from Russia. On top of this, in the foreseeable future, most of the eastern European nations would remain completely energy-dependent on Russia. In this regard, the European Commission stated, “By 2030, Europe will be extremely dependent on others and would have to imports 94% of its energy needs”. (Abilov, 2012: 36).

In this context, the monopoly and control of Russia over energy resources would provide the Russian with a strong card to play against the energy needy countries. Given this reality, which would no doubt have an immense impact on European economies for geostrategic reasons. The EU member states are very keen to gain access to oil and natural gas in the Caspian region, the obvious reason being the necessity to diversify energy sources. In doing so, the EU with the support of “Azerbaijan, Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine” has lobbied to for the creation of a pipeline. As a result, a new pipeline has been created which runs from “the Ukrainian port of Odessa northward to the Polish border.” Currently, EU also supports the so-called “Nabucco’ gas pipeline (also known as Verdi Opera) that allows to ship gas from the Caspian region, particularly from Azerbaijan to Central Europe via Turkey” (Kubicek, 2013: 176).

Besides, the Southern Gas Corridor (SGC) has become the highest energy security priorities of the EU. Turkmenistan is a key part of the “Southern Gas Corridor” which was developed by the EU. The document defines the SGC as “the supply of gas from Caspian and The West Asiaern sources” and as “one of the EU’s highest energy security priorities.” The Trans-Caspian Pipeline’ (TCP) is a part of this corridor. The EU introduced this project after the gas supply disrupting in 2006 and 2009 by Russia. (Kabouche, 2018). However, Russia has opposed this ongoing infrastructure project by citing the environmental hazards the project has caused so far. Whereas, The EU contended that ‘the pipelines have led to prosperity and stability in the region. Leaving this aside, in 2011 TANAP deal was signed in order to directly bring natural gas from the Caspian to the EU. Therefore, for the U.S and EU, the realities of energy politics have compelled them to seek new avenues to diversify the sources of energy and more importantly creation of pipelines for ensure transportation of the Caspian region energy resources to the Western markets by bypassing Russian and Iranian territory has become a top priority (Abilov, 2012: 36).

Summarising the whole chapter, we could say that the geostrategic location of the Caspian Sea and plus its natural resources have continued to attract the great powers towards the region. As mentioned earlier, and this has primarily determined the foreign policy of various major powers, especially the Russian foreign policy towards the Caspian states. To put it differently, availability of abundant mineral resources and given the geostrategic location, the region has become a 'chessboard' to try out all sort of gambit among great powers and this ongoing competition to outwit each other is understood as the "New Great Game." This ongoing game has no doubt provided the Caspian and Central Asian states to maximise their national interests by playing the actors involved against each other a per the changing dynamics of the game that will determine who remain and become a global power and who will lose out in the "New Great Game."

Chapter III

Russia's Objective and Policies in the Caspian Region

The Central Asian states, including Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan formerly a part of Soviet Union, continues to occupy a prominent position in Eurasia and more importantly in the global affairs due to an abundance of energy resources and geopolitical location. Until the dissolution of USSR, in 1991 despite being in a strong position, Russia did not pay attention to the affairs of Caspian and Central Asian region- 'a policy of benign neglect.' Moscow was instead embroiled in internal contradictions, especially in the late 1980s onwards, wherein it had to adapt westernization, which ultimately resulted in the disintegration of the Union. In fact, in the entire Soviet era, Russia did not make any notable effort to foster mutually beneficial political and economic relation. Russia's interest in the region was thus limited to oil and gas transported through Russian pipelines on which it a total monopoly. In this context, Aleksandr Livshits points out that: "Some members of the Russian leadership believed that it was necessary to dispose of Central Asia as soon as possible since it would supposedly retard the implementation of economic reform in Russia". However, the Russian foreign policy changed in the mid-1990 from the policy of 'benign neglect' towards a "Monroeski Doctrine, or "Near Abroad" which advocates assertion of exclusive rights in the former Soviet republics. As a result, Moscow undertook various proactive measures such as supporting t the Armenians on the issue of Karabakh- against Azerbaijan, providing aid to separatist Abkhazia against Georgia, Russia supported a "coup against the pro-Western Azeri President Abulfaz Elchibey" in 1993, Russia militarily intervened in support of the pro-Russian Eastern Ukrainian in 2014 unrest and annexation of Crimea . All of these actions prove beyond doubt that the Russian "bear" is back. (Kubicek, 2015: 2-6).

An expert Romaniuk (2015) also points out that the term 'Near Abroad' refers to the fourteen former Soviet republics, which are seen as a "special area" of interests by Moscow. Nonetheless, it must be noted that the Russian influence in the region could potentially be a challenge because of the inherent instability of some of these newly independent republic. So far, Moscow has indicated clear resolve to implement the 'near abroad' policy. For instance, in Abkhazian-Georgian conflict, the Armenian minority in Georgia helped Moscow to keep its troops stationed in Ahalkelek, capital of Javakheti province. Armenia considers Russia as a

powerful friend and natural protector of the country. Thereby, Russia was able to apply pressure on Azerbaijan in the “Nagorno-Karabakh conflict.” However, because of late Georgia has increasingly tilted towards the U.S, EU, and NATO, whereas Azerbaijan has prioritised to closer relations with Turkey. Given this scenario, Armenia has become the fulcrum for Russia’s ‘Near Abroad’ policy, which aims to continue maintaining its traditional influence in the South Caucasus (Romaniuk, 2015:117-130). Evidently, since 1993, Russian policymakers including President Boris Yeltsin, former Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev, and Yevgeny Primakov have emphasised that Caspian and the Central Asia region are of vital interest to Russia and have advocated to legitimise Russia intervention in the region. Griffith points out that oil and gas represent vital Russian security and economic interests in the Caspian Basin (Griffith,1998:426). In other words, Russian policymakers view the Caspian region and its natural resources as tied directly to Russia’s national security interests. Therefore, the current orientation of Russia’s foreign policy has brought the Russian into direct competition with the U.S in the region.

Bahgat points out that after the disintegration of USSR in 1991 and the consequent “power vacuum” thus created in the region has reignited the new round of geopolitical rivalry between the neighboring states and superpowers also known as the “neo-cold war or neo-great game.” The power vacuum generated widespread interests among the regional as well as international organisations aiming to secure regional economic and security cooperation through the” Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), Black Sea Economic Cooperation pact (BSEC), Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova organisation (GUAAM), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organisation and Partnership for Peace programme of NATO”. Some of these organisations have similar strategic goals, while others compete with each other. (Bahgat, 2002: 313).

Some scholars and analysts argue that regional and international organisations are important for the security of the Caspian region for various reasons. Firstly, Central Asia and Transcaucasia is surrounded by four nuclear powers such as China, Russia, Pakistan, and India – Turkey is a NATO partner, while Iran remains antagonistic with the U.S since 1979. The ongoing instability in Afghanistan as the Taliban continues to threaten the overall regional security. Secondly, the unfolding great rivalry among the regional and international powers to gain control over the Caspian’s hydrocarbon wealth. The third one is a corollary to the second;

the exploration and full development of the energy resources has been very slow due to the fiery competition between the international and regional powers (Ibid, 314).

All in all, the ongoing political, economic, and military rivalry between regional and international organisations has the potential to disturb the environment of security of the Caspian and Central Asian states. This scenario has no doubt continues to determine Russia's foreign policy towards this region. Alexei Fenenko, a security analyst and a leading scientific collaborator at the RAS Institute of International Security Issues, points out "Russia has always given great importance to the Caspian region." Further, he contends that Russia's interest in the region and only grow "especially in the 1990s when Moscow was under the impression that the region has enormous hydrocarbon reserves. Though, as a matter of fact, it turned out that there are not that many hydrocarbons in the area after all. Nonetheless, with regard to security, Chulkovskaya argues that Russia had always been active in the area, so it is incorrect to say that it has renewed its activity only now (Chulkovskaya, 2016).

Though the nature of Russian interests in the Caspian Sea did change with time, the recent focus on natural resources began around 1993-94. The shift in the nature of Russian policy towards the region in all likelihood is a reaction to the increasing involvement of the plethora of external powers in the region. For instance, the "State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR) and Western companies spearheaded by the British Petroleum signed a deal known as 'the contract of the century' worth of \$8 billion on 20 September 1994 for 30 years". Given the context of age-old the rivalry among major powers in the region, the deal appeared like a precursor to isolate Russia, as Russian was not consulted at all. Thus, this deal in a way set the rivalry with Russia on the one side and the Western countries on the other side. Unlike the Persian Gulf, the energy resources of the Caspian Sea region does not have any direct access to major sea routes, as the region is landlocked except for Russia. In fact, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan have no direct access to the open sea. Therefore, during the Soviet period, the oil had to be transported via the Black Sea. This means for economic progress; these newly independent states had to turn to the developed countries, particularly the Western countries for transportation of the oil and gas reserves (Nirmala Joshi, 2000: 30-33).

The former Soviet territories and also Russia is a "multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society" and maintaining security is one of the foremost priority, and Russia in doing has not hesitated to employ military means. For instance, Russia has a military

presence in the Western part of the Caspian Sea region, particularly Georgia”(Abkhazia and South Ossetia)” and has signed the Collective Security Treaty to preserve peace, stability, friendship and relations of good neighborliness with most of the states in the region. In the meanwhile, Azerbaijan and Georgia have been trying to reduce the Russian influence in the region by maintaining strong ties with the U.S, Turkey, and other external powers. With regard to Nagorno-Karabakh and Abkhazia, respectively, Azerbaijan and Georgia both blamed Russia for provoking the ethnic conflicts in their territories. Azerbaijan has accepted Russian supports to ethnic Armenian as an attempt to occupy the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave. Similarly, the Georgian leadership claims that the Abkhaz separatists’ problem has arisen because of Russian support (Ibid.).

Leaving aside the veracity of both of the claims, it is evidently clear that Russian energy diplomacy in the Caspian region has become more assertive. In the context of the “New Great Game,” the U.S has been trying to secure its own national interests in the region by provoking or offering assistance, which has led to a tug of war situation between two global powers often, carried out with subtle methods. For example, the U.S was able to involve in the political processes of Ukraine and Georgia and has managed to affect successful regime changes. In this respect, the Western press has reported on how the U.S has been successful in manipulating the electoral process of Ukraine. The UK Guardian reported that the U.S spent \$14 million in Ukraine elections to install a man of its choice in power. The paper reported:

While the gains of the orange-bedecked chestnut revolution are Ukraine’s, the campaign is an American creation, a sophisticated and brilliantly conceived exercise in western branding and mass marketing that, in four countries in four years, has been used to try to salvage rigged elections and topple unsavory regimes”. Further, the report claims that “Funded and organised by the U.S government, deploying US consultancies, pollsters, diplomats, the two big American parties and US non-governmental organisations, the campaign was first used in Europe in Belgrade in 2000 to beat Slobodan Milosevic at the ballot box. Richard Miles, the U.S ambassador in Belgrade, has seemingly played a key role in Milosevic’s electoral defeat. Similarly, in 2003 US ambassador in Tbilisi repeated the trick in Georgia, coaching Mikhail Saakashvili in how to bring down Eduard Shevardnadze. (Traynor, 2004).

Russia’s Interests in the Caspian Region

Historical antecedents show that Russia has been traditionally involved in the Caspian as well as in the Central Asian region since the time of the Czars. In fact, Russia was the biggest

regional power in these regions during the imperial age, and it continues to exercise considerable influence till date. For example, former Russian President Dmitry Medvedev stated: “the Caspian region is a zone of privileged interests of Russia” (German,2014: 2). Currently, Moscow has strategic and commercial interests in Caspian and Central Asian region, energy being the primary interests. Accordingly, Moscow in recent time has been using economic and military leverages to reiterate its domination and also by attempting to curb the western influence in the region. Likewise, Russia has also been playing the role of a mediator in military conflicts between and within the Central Asian and Transcaucasian states (Bahgat, 2002: 316).

As a matter of fact, the region’s unique location of the region largely defines Russia’s relations with its neighbour’s particular in the ‘south.’ Armenia, Georgia, and Azerbaijan are located in the southern border of Russia, and except for Armenia, the others are unwilling to remain wholly dependent on Russia. In this regard, Moscow and Tehran have maintained good relations with Armenia as a ploy to counterbalance Azerbaijan’s growing proximity with the U.S and Turkey. However, despite of maintaining good relations with the West, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have also sought to maintain cordial relations with Russia in order to safeguard its own independence. Given the landlocked of the country, amidst the nitty-gritty of the unfolding “New Great Game” Turkmenistan has adopted a ‘Positive Neutrality’ in their foreign policy which in theory provides a window to get the best out of all the concern powers. In the “New Great Game,” Moscow and Tehran are collectively opposing the Western influence in the region (Hasan Nuri, 2000). In short, Russian 1strategic interests in the Caspian and Central Asian region are concentrated mainly in three states; Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan because of the commercial hydrocarbon reserves. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan apparently do not have commercially viable quantities of hydrocarbon reserves. At the end of 2007, Russia had invested \$ 4 to 5.2 billion in the oil and gas sector of Central Asia. Of the total investment, approximately 80-85% was invested in Kazakhstan (around3.4 to 4.1 billion dollars), followed by Uzbekistan (00.5 to 1 billion dollars) and so far, an insignificant amount in Tajikistan and Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan put together (50 million dollars) (Paramonov and Stokov, 2008: 1). In this context, Putin has stated, “the volume of trade between Russia and the Caspian states constantly grows. In 2017, foreign trade increased by over 20 percent and amounted to \$22 billion”. Further, he said that “the ‘Caspian five’ states focus on cooperation in the digital economy, actively introducing information and communication technologies and e-commerce, and engaging in the digitisation of foreign trade operations,

cargo transportation, and logistics.” There are some priorities of the Russian policy such as geopolitical interests, economic and ecological interests are discussed below:

- First, Moscow aims to create a friendly buffer zone in order to ensure its geopolitical interests, i.e., securing the energy resources in Caspian which is a vital tool to boost the Russian economy especially because Russia continues to face financial sanctions imposed by the European Union and the international community. In terms of security, the Caspian region is also important for Russia in its efforts of countering the growing religious pressure from the Wahhabis on regional security. Geo-politically, Russia views the exercising control over and maintaining peace and stability in the post-Soviet space as very important for the future sustenance Russian statehood (Thomas, 1999).
- Second, in the geo-strategical context, Russia had always reckoned the Caspian Sea region as the bridge connects Central Asia, Europe, the Caucasus, and West Asia. The region not only provides oil and gas but also food and related products. Geo-strategically, Russia needs to remain influential and be able to maintain regional stability in the Caspian by controlling the CIS countries and thus ensure the security of its southern border. In this context, stability in Armenia and Georgia is vital for Russian because volatility and the ongoing insurgency in Chechnya could easily prove to be a threat to the Dagestan, a Muslim populated province of Russia that also has shared borders with the Caspian Sea (Malikov, 2007: 221). Another concern for Russia is the Lezgins; an ethnic group inhabiting in southern Dagestan and northeastern Azerbaijan, evidently, the Lezgins have already shown their intention to unite with Azerbaijan (Hasan Nuri, 2000).
- Third, Russia aims to foster cooperation in the energy economy, i.e., extraction of natural resources and the development of mutually trade relations. This is vital if Russia is to become one of the major economies in the world. Indeed, Moscow’s energy relations with Caspian states have a direct impact on its national economy. Russia has insisted on observing safe ecological rule and norms for exploration of both energy and exploitation of fishing resources in the Caspian Sea. The Caspian’s Sturgeon products constitute 90% of the global market of the finest large fishes (Chamroeun et al. 2015: 5).

The discussion above indicates that Caspian and the Central Asian region are indispensable to Russia's economic interest and security. It seemingly appears that the entire Russian foreign policy hinges on these regions. For instance, Russian President, Putin has not hesitated in using all the ways and methods available even military means to secure its strategic and commercial interest of Russia in the Caspian region. On 31 August 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev declared five themes of Russian foreign policy, and it is known as "Medvedev Doctrine" (Friedman, 2008, quoted in Varol, 2013: 78).

- ❖ "First, Russia recognises the primacy of the fundamental principles of international law, which define the relations between civilised peoples. We will build our relations with other countries within the framework of these principles and this concept of international law
- ❖ Second, the world should be multipolar. A single-pole world is unacceptable. Domination is something we cannot allow. We cannot accept a world order in which one country makes all the decisions, even as serious and influential a country like the United States of America. Such a world is unstable and threatened by conflict
- ❖ Third, Russia does not want confrontation with any other country. Russia does not intend to isolate itself. We will develop friendly relations with Europe, the United States, and other countries, as much as is possible
- ❖ Fourth, protecting the lives and dignity of our citizens, wherever they may be, is an unquestionable priority for our country. Our foreign policy decisions will be based on this need. We will also protect the interests of our business community abroad. It should be clear to all that we will respond to any aggressive acts committed against us
- ❖ Finally, fifth, as is the case of other countries, there are regions in which Russia has privileged interests. These regions are home to countries with which we share special historical relations and are bound together as friends and good neighbours. We will pay particular attention to our work in these regions and build friendly ties with these countries, our close neighbours".(Ibid).

The "Medvedev Doctrine," emphatically states that Russia views the 'Near Abroad,' as Russian backyard and it would not entertain any sort of activities of any external powers, which are directed towards undermining the Russian predominance in this region.

Energy Diplomacy of the U.S and Its Objectives in the Caspian Region

The U.S has been apparently engaged in the Caspian region to undermine the not only Russian influence but also other rivals, mainly China and Iran. In Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) conference held on 7 December 1998 in Washington, former U.S Ambassador Richard Morningstar to Azerbaijan stated that “the fundamental objective of U.S policy in the Caspian, therefore, is not simply to build oil and gas pipelines. Rather, it is to use those pipelines, which must be commercially viable, as tools for establishing a political and economic framework that will strengthen regional cooperation and stability and encourage reform for the next several decades”. He further illustrated four foreign policy goals of the U.S in the Caspian region:

- to reinforce the sovereignty of the new Caspian states and promote economic as well as political reforms.
- to mitigate the regional conflicts through strengthening of economic relations amongst the newly independent states of the region.
- to promote commercial avenues for the U.S and other Western companies.
- to secure reliable energy sources for the U.S and its allies and also to encourage free exports energy resources of the Caspian region to world markets⁷.

Given the goals mentioned above, the U.S has apparently recognised the role Turkey could play in realisation of these goals. For instance, given the centuries-old heritage ethnic ties between Turkey and Caspian countries, Turkey could be considered as the commercial, geographic, and cultural bridge between Europe and the Caspian region. To put it otherwise, Turkey is like a commercial locomotive, indispensable for regional economic prosperity. In due course of time, Turkey has become a financial and business hub for the entire Caspian region⁸.

President Carter first underscored the importance of geopolitics in U.S foreign policy; he clearly stated that the hegemony of the U.S in international politics is intertwined with the nature of political domination and access to natural resources. The Carter Doctrine, which was

⁷ Ambassador Richard Morningstar, Special Advisor to the President and Secretary of State, for Caspian Basin Energy Diplomacy, Address to CERA Conference, Washington, DC, December 7, 1998 URL: <https://www.mtholyoke.edu/acad/intrel/morning.htm>

⁸ Ibid.

announced in 1980, thus aimed to gain control over the oil resources in the Persian Gulf. In 1997, President Clinton further extended it to other energy-producing areas of the world, especially the Caspian and Central Asian region, etc. Therefore, under the Clinton administration, the Carter Doctrine began to be globalised in order to reduce the dependence on the Persian Gulf. Thus, the Caspian area became the main priority of the U.S. In this context, when the U.S President Clinton visited Afghanistan in 1997, told the Afghan President, Heydar Aliyev,

Our nation cannot afford to rely on any single region for our energy supplies.” Clinton further reiterated, “By facilitating Azerbaijan’s oil export, we not only help Azerbaijan to prosper, but we also help diversify our energy supply and strengthen our nation’s security⁹.

As a result, given the BTC pipeline, the U.S has extended this formula to Kazakhstan, which is one of the important sources for petroleum, and Georgia has been seen as a major way station of the proposed pipeline. Consequently, Clinton replicated the U.S foreign policy towards the Persian Gulf countries with regard to the Caspian states, i.e. military-to-military ties between the Pentagon and the new Caspian states. He initiated a new military assistance program to sustain its presence and influence in the Caspian region. Subsequently, these ties developed during the Clinton administration was later utilised by the Bush administration when the U.S intervened in Afghanistan after the 9/11 terror attacks. In this regard, some analysts believe that ‘the U.S aims to increase its influence in the region was originally motivated by concerns over the safety and security of the energy supply rather than dealing with the threats posed by international terrorism.’ A close reading of the Pentagon and State and Defense Department documents suggest that “the protection of oil infrastructure remains a paramount concern” (Klare, 2009: 49). Given this, the U.S Department of State has officially affirmed that “U.S national interests in Azerbaijan center on our strong bilateral cooperation in the war on terrorism, the advancement of U.S energy security.” Further, it noted that “the involvement of U.S firms in the development and export of Azerbaijani oil is key to our objectives of diversifying world oil supplies, promoting U.S energy security and U.S exports” (The U.S Department of State, 2003: 322).

⁹ Visit of President Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan,” statement by the White House Press Secretary, 1 August 1997. Quoted in Klare, M.T (2009), “Petroleum anxiety and the militarization of energy security” in Russell, J.M & Moran, D. (eds.) Energy Security and Global Politics: The militarization of resource management, Newyork: Routledge

Given the rivalry between USSR and the U.S during the heyday of the Cold War, understandably the U.S under the Clinton Presidency, the U.S aimed to marginalise Russia in the Caspian region. Consequently, Washington attempted to increase its presence in the “Caspian, the Caucasus, and Central Asia.” The primary motive of the U.S is to find alternative pipeline routes and also exploring the future possibility of expansion of NATO in the region. Given the Medvedev Doctrine, Russia views such manoeuvre by the U.S as directly undermining its interests. Besides, it also undermines the Iranian and Chinese interests. The U.S in fact, since 1997, has been conducting military exercises under the joint NATO-PfP program. The eastward expansion of NATO in 1999 indicates that the U.S wants to create a new order of the U.S primacy. For example, the Baltic States became members of NATO in 2004 and also enlargement of engagement with Ukraine and Georgia all points towards making these states a buffer zone against Russia. Given the U.S agenda, the Eurasian states suffer from its own internal contradiction that provides an opportunity to external powers to intervene, such as “Abkhazia conflict in Georgia and Armenian-Azerbaijani conflicts over the Nagorno-Karabakh region.”

Leaving aside the U.S agenda, the Central Asian states have adopted a “multi-vector foreign policy” that makes them unpredictable to external powers including Russia or say predictable only in the context of their national interests. Whereas, Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Georgia have been moving closer towards Europe and western countries. These inherent conditions of the states in the region have provided an opportunity for the U.S to formulate its foreign policy to affect a strategy of containment of Russia (Patnaik, 2016: 64-66). In this context, the U.S policy aims to integrate the Central Asian and Caucasian states into the Euro-Atlantic zone. Subsequently, the U.S has increased its engagement, including military cooperation, in promoting free-market economy, and Western investments. Therefore, U.S aims to promote regimes and policies that are the U.S friendly. In doing so, securing energy resources that is an essential strategic commodity has become paramount in achieving the larger objectives of influencing/controlling the ‘Eurasian Heartland.’ Thus, building multiple pipelines has become a key priority or an instrument to achieve the above mentioned U.S strategic goals in Eurasia. As a result, the U.S has pushed for a “southern corridor of Caspian gas export routes that pass through Turkey and connects Europe, i.e. the BTC and the South Caucasus pipeline.” It has also endorsed a future pipeline known as the “Trans -Caspian Pipeline (TCP).” Although, TCP project has not moved forward as per the expected timeline. Therefore, in December 2012, a “U.S Senate Foreign Relations Committee Minority Staff Report points out that Turkmenistan

need to have a resolve to take concrete decisions on this project and the report also called upon the major Western and international firms to make funds available.” Particularly after the completion of BTC and South Caucasus Pipelines in 2005 and 2006 respectively, so far the U.S diplomacy has succeeded in wooing away Azerbaijan and Georgia from the sphere of Russian influence and dependence. Given the importance of energy politics in the overall agenda of U.S foreign policy, the role of Kazakhstan has become crucial in the competition securing control over Eurasia (Nichol, 2013 cited in Patnaik, 2016: 68).

Moreover, U.S sanctions policy against Iran aims to isolate and undermine Iran’s role in the development of energy infrastructures in the region. Given the divergence of interest between Russia and Iran, Russian has positively responded to this assertive nature of U.S strategy while having strategic cooperation. However, in October 2007, Russian President Vladimir Putin warned Washington that “Russia would not tolerate any sort of military action against Iran.” During the Caspian summit in 2007, he impressed upon the Presidents of Iran, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan that “We need to agree that using the territory of one Caspian Sea (state) in the event of aggression against another is impossible.” The heads of all the Caspian states have supported Putin’s call and reiterated “under no circumstances will they allow (the Use of their) territories by third countries to launch aggression or other military action against any of the member states” (Hafezi, and Shchedrov, 2007). This understanding between Russia and Caspian states could be considered as a big victory for Russia and Iran in term of future of prospects of stability in the region.

Major Phases of Russian Foreign Policy

The Russian Foreign Policy has two broad trends or approaches; “Euro-Atlanticist and Eurasianist.” Yeltsin administration and the members of the Foreign Ministry such as Andrei Kozyrev and so on are the proponents of the first approach. They believed that “Russia should adopt western principles and institutions as a way to liberalization and integration of the region into the world system.” No doubt, Yeltsin had been criticised for his foreign policy that presumably accommodated the U.S agenda. For example, he supported the U.S in NATO’s enlargement towards the Russian borders. The second, Eurasianist perspective is known ‘Neo-Eurasianism’ was the preferred approach, especially, Russian foreign policy in late 1992 when Russia- United States relations were at a difficult stage. In Kremlin circle, the Eurasianist approach found its buyer among individuals and army generals who are associated with the military-industrial complex – to name a few – they are General Pavel Grachev, the Russian

Defense Minister,; Yuri Skokov, Russian Security Council Secretary,; General Shaposhnikov, the Commander of the CIS Joint Armed Forces,; Ruslan Khasbulatov, the Speaker of the Parliament, and others, political constituents mobilized under the umbrella of the “civic union”. These influential proponents of ‘Neo- Eurasianism’ emphasizes on “Russian should maintain a tight relationship with the Caucasus and Central Asia.” (Malikov, 2007: 218, 219).

According to Graham Smith, Izo Curatis, and Tofienr, the Eurasian approach is based on prioritisation of five aspects in Russia engagement with the rest of the world: culture, performance typology, international identity, a general approach for maintaining of internal stability and lastly, maintaining the stability of geopolitical borders. In short, the concept of Eurasianism views Russia as a separate civilization, not similar to the West. Unquestionably, Russia, as a Eurasian power, has been simultaneously playing a significant role in Asia as well as in Europe. It has been trying to maintain regional stability, particularly in the trans-boundary region. The Russian President Putin in an addressing to the Federal Assembly stated that “collaboration with the CIS countries is the main priority of Russia’s foreign policy. These countries are dependent on external funding, and they prefer Russian help for major infrastructure projects, energy, and transport”. (Mottaghi and GharehBeygi, 2013: 55).

With regard to the understanding Russian policy towards the Caspian Sea, Mottaghi and GharehBeygi have divided Russian foreign policy into five phases: the first phase (1992-1992) covers the period of the fall of communism and the consequent creation of a geopolitical power vacuum in the Caspian Basin. Given the internal political and economic crisis because of the disintegration of USSR, Russia found itself being deactivated in the region. This state of affairs opened the door to trans-regional, regional and interventionist powers in the region. In the second phase, (1993-1997) major discoveries of energy resources were made in the Caspian and Central Asian states. No doubt, U.S utilises this opportunity, and many western investors began to be active in the region, and Western presence was potentially becoming a serious challenge for Russia. Subsequently, in this phase, Russia adopted new approaches of foreign policy, also known the “Near Abroad policy,” which aims to curtail the Western influence in the region. This policy was applied to the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus, and the Caspian Basin. In this context, in 1994, Russia declared the Caspian Sea as an inland Sea to discourage Western oil companies from further investments. However, this was challenged by Azerbaijan, a pro-western country. Partly because of the paucity of funds to do themselves, Azerbaijan supported the Western oil companies for the exploration and exploitation of energy resources in the Caspian Basin. In the second phase, Russia had also initiated cooperation with

countries such as Iran, India, and China, mainly to scuttle the expansion of the West. Similarly, Russia has been providing economic and military assistance to the Caspian states, deploying military bases, and more importantly signing as many oil contracts possible. In short, in the second phase, Russia began to intensify its relations with the coastal states (Mottaghi and GharehBeygi, 2013: 55).

The third phase (1998-99) witnessed the rise of Islamic Radicalism, political and ethnic problems began to flare up in the southern republics such as Chechnya, Nagorno, Dagestan, Ingush, and Balkarya. In the meanwhile, Putin became the Russian President, in response; he began to prioritise to stabilize the economic and political situation in order to secure strategic interests, i.e., creation of energy corridors at the same time. The fourth phase (2000-2001) or the advent of the Putin era. Under Putin leadership, the Caspian Sea became the top priority of Russian foreign policy. Putin emphasised on the utilization of energy resources and expanding the productive collaboration and also simultaneously to oppose western influence reciprocally. The fifth phase (after September 2001): the 9/11 attacks significantly changed the geopolitical scenario in the Caspian and Central Asian region. Given the wider context of the ‘war on terror,’ Russia temporally accepted the presence of US soldiers in Central Asia in their war efforts against Al-Qaida. However, Russia was unwilling to negotiate with the status of being the sole power to have military bases in the Caspian Basin. As a result, in the context of the legal status of the Caspian, Putin declared during a speech “in the absence of a comprehensive agreement on the Caspian Sea, Russia will enter into bilateral negotiations.” (Shuri, M. 2003 quoted in Mottaghi, and GharehBeygi, 2013: 56).

In ascertaining the general orientation of Russian foreign policy, Professor Kumar, R. discussed three phases of Russian foreign policy: the first phase (1991-1995) known as neo-liberalism and West-centric policy under the leadership of Yeltsin. The main thrust of this phase was to establish a pro-capitalist liberal democratic form of government in the place of the fallen socialist institutions. Evidently, this phase was marked by rapid privatisation of the economy triggered by shock therapy, government’s loans – for shared schemes and political reforms, i.e. a super-presidential system was introduced by the new constitution. In this phase, Russia was inclined towards the West. The Second phase acknowledged as Eurasianism pertains to the search for multipolarity (1996- 2006). This phase is marked by the reversal of the first phase, i.e., a gradual shift from the Western-centric approach as witnessed during the Yeltsin era towards a more pragmatic and balanced foreign policy. Yevgeny Primakov, who replaced Andrei Kozyrev as the Minister of Foreign Affairs, initially advocated this shift in the

approach. Under him, Russia veered towards creating a multipolarity world order and is inimical the U.S hegemony. It also prioritises Russian interests in Asia and the CIS. Further, the second in the phase, Russia began to adopt a balanced foreign policy by forging partnerships in the ‘Near Abroad’ and the East in general. Thereby, the neighbourhood became a top priority of the Russian foreign policy. Currently, nearly 25 million ethnic Russians continue to live in the former Soviet states. Besides, Russia has to deal with the large-scale migration of ethnic Russians from Central Asia. Currently, ethnic Russian's conclaves in Estonia are presumably considered to be stateless people. In its vision to create a multipolar world order, the Russian Federation (2000) has emphasised the importance of the CIS countries for Russia. In fact, all the subsequent foreign policy doctrines formulated in (2008, 2013, and 2016) have highlighted the importance of this vision (Kumar, 2018: 210-211).

Last, the third phase is marked by ‘protestation and intervention’ (2007-2017). This phase effectively started with Putin’s “anti-American speech at Munich in 2007”. In this phase, Russia became more cautious towards the West and started to blame the U.S and NATO for creating instability in West Asia. Further, Moscow began to accuse the U.S of having provoked a nuclear arms race and also setting the undesirable precedence of bypassing international institutions, particularly the UN. Russia, in this phase, chooses the path of an independent foreign policy. In doing so, Russia openly dropped the façade of cooperation with the U.S. For example, Russian intervention in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria, wherein the US wanted to affect changes as per their agenda. Understandably, the Western countries were taken clueless and shocked by each this intervention. Given with no options, the U.S led Western countries has been enforcing economic sanctions on Russia. Kumar argues that these events point definitively that Russia has come around again as a key and unyielding actor in international politics. Some scholars have even described these changes in Russian foreign policy as the beginning of a new round of cold war (Ibid).

While Trenin, D. (2018) points out that the year 2017 was marked by both major success and also bitter disappointments for Russian foreign policy. In the context of Syria, Russia not only fulfilled the immediate objective to keep the Bashar Assad regime in power but also defeated the forces of the Islamic State organisation, which is now officially banned in Russia as a terrorist group. This evidently, proved that Russia has again become an influential player in West Asia and thus confirmed its status as being one of the great global powers. On the downside, relations with the West remained placid with no progress, but only disappointments. The American Congress continued its sanctions against Russia due to the supposed interference

of Kremlin in the U.S election. In fact, the media depicted Russia as a greater enemy of the U.S than the USSR. With regard to the armed conflict in the Donbass region of Ukraine. Europe also further created disappointment with Russia (Trenin, 2018).

Basic Principles of Russian Caspian Policy

Besides the projection of ‘hard power,’ the success of a given policy has to rely on the ability to project power, to borrow Joseph Nye concept of ‘soft power,’ as well. Economic power constitutes as one of the aspects of ‘soft power.’ In this context, Russia is one of the world’s largest producer of oil and gas. It has been estimated that Russia holds around 15 % more proven reserves of oil and gas than Saudi Arabia¹⁰. Therefore, it is obvious that Russia’s strategic interests in the Caspian cannot be just limited to securing access to oil and gas resources. Moscow deems close cooperation and coordination with Caspian littoral states such as Kazakhstan, Iran, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan and with gas-rich Uzbekistan is important, if Russia has to exert dominance over the energy economy, both transportation and production. This, in turn, also enhances Russia’s ability to maintain regional security. Although Moscow has adopted different tools to prevent outside powers from establishing political and military control over the Caspian region. However, with regard to energy economy, the Russian strategy in the Caspian region goes well beyond Moscow’s relations with littoral states- to a certain extent, Russia has sought to maintain constructive and cooperative ties with outside powers whose participation in the Caspian energy economy is significant (Chufrin, 2004: 3).

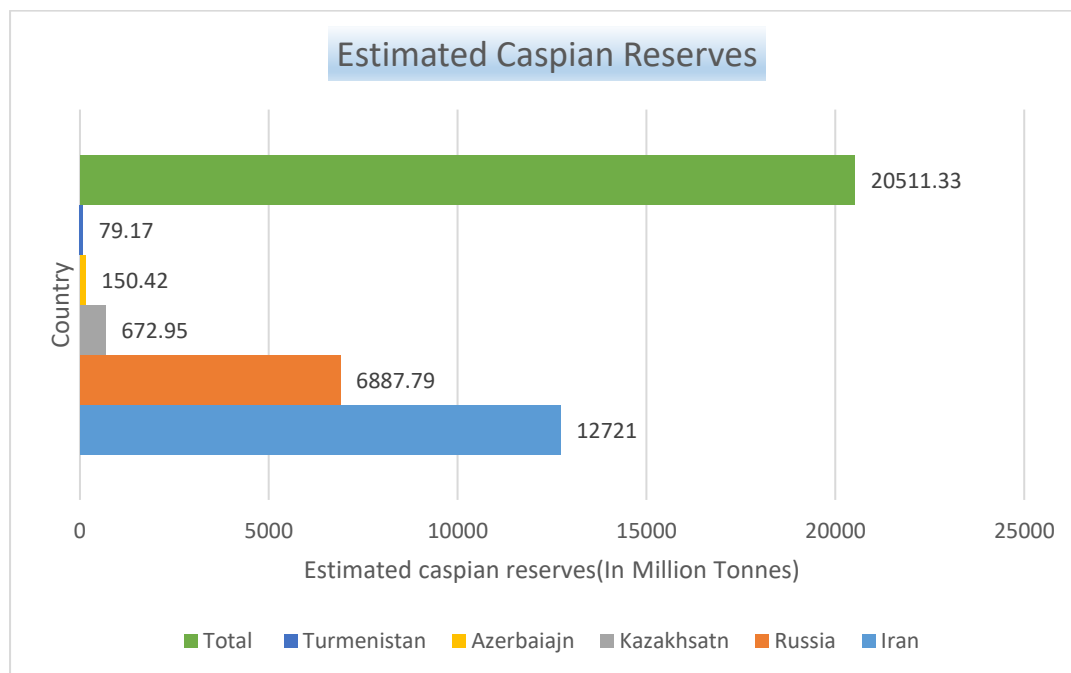
During the 1990s, Russia’s policy in the Caspian was reactive rather than proactive due to its own internal political and economic crisis. As mentioned earlier, too, this allowed external players to build up their own political and military base in the region. Russia has been trying to rectify this by becoming proactive in the region again. Under the Putin Presidency, Moscow’s self-styled “active policy” was rolled out with key objectives such as to promote business deals for Russian provinces and firms, fostering the integration of the regional markets and security. The main objective being the integration of Russia into the international system. Lastly, and more importantly, given the aim of Russia to become one of the leading power in the world, Russia should play a proactive role in the race for control over energy i.e. in locating the deposits, in extraction of the natural resources and also be able to exercise monopoly on the pipelines routes to world markets (Blum, 2000: 1).

¹⁰ Energy in Russia: Facts and Details, Accessed on 14 June 2018, URL: http://factsanddetails.com/russia/Education_Health_Transportation_Energy/sub9_6c/entry-5148.html

The Economic Significance of the Caspian Sea

The importance of the Caspian Sea is determined by its geo-strategic location and, oil and gas reserves. The quantity of prospective and proven oil reserves of the Caspian Sea region has varied as per the different estimates. One such estimation has earmarked the region's oil reserves to be somewhere between 17-33 billion barrels. More than the oil reserves, the Caspian Sea's natural gas resources are considered as significant to the region's economy.

Table 3.1



Source: "The strategic importance of the Caspian Sea (2014), [Turkish Defence Forum](https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/the-strategic-importance-of-the-caspian-sea.315645/)', Accessed on 3 Nov.2017 URL: <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/the-strategic-importance-of-the-caspian-sea.315645/>"

For instance, the natural gas reserves of the region are almost as much as that of Saudi Arabia, which has been estimated at 232 TCM. However, the potential natural resources of the 20 littoral states of the Caspian Sea varies. Among these countries, "Iran has top rank in terms of estimated reserves of 12721.00 million tons, followed by Russia with 6887.79 million tons, Kazakhstan with 672.95 million tons, Azerbaijan with 150.42 million tons and lastly, Turkmenistan with 79.17 million tons". Thus, "the combined reserves of all the Caspian states

stands at 20511.33 million tons, lesser than Saudi Arabia's reserves of 35321.00 million tons"¹¹.

Russian Economic and Energy Policies in the Caspian Region

Currently, natural gas has become a key source of energy source for the global industrial sector and also in electricity generation worldwide. The advantage of natural gas is that it creates less carbon dioxide than coal or petroleum. In the context of global warming and the need to cut down emission rates stipulated in environmental agreements, more and more countries preferably want to reduce greenhouse emissions and thus are switching to natural gas if possible. Heavily dependent on the export of oil and gas, energy is very important to the stability, security, and development of Russia. In 1995, the Russian government approved the Russian national energy policy known as "The Energy Strategy of Russia." Under the Putin Presidency, the government amended the previous energy strategy formulated during the Soviet era, the new energy policy is supposedly meant to remain effective till 2020, and it also has set some targets to be achieved. The new energy policy was approved in 2003, and it recognised that energy is the mainstay in the economic development of Russia. On top of this, energy is so crucial that it guides the country in formulating its internal and external policies. To put it otherwise, the role of Russia is very important in the world energy market. The primary goal of ES-2020 is "to maximize the efficient use of natural energy resources and the potential of the energy sector in order to sustain economic growth, improve the quality of life of the population and help strengthen its foreign economic position." (Campos, 2018: 51-52).

Another energy strategy was adopted in 2009, and it lays out the Russian plan on energy for the period up to 2030. It stipulates the same goals of the previous strategy. Another such official document on Russian energy strategy is "Energy Strategy of Russia for the period up to 2035 that underlines internal and external challenges, new dynamics in economic parameters and resource-technological potential of the Russian energy sector". Further, it also stresses the need to make changes in the model of its development, by speeding up innovative development and structural adjustment. Its main goal is to bring about structural and qualitative changes to take Russia's energy sector to a new stage so that it is able to, contribute to its socio-economic development. One of the key differences between ES- 2030 and the ES-2035, ES- 2035 no longer views fuel and energy as the only driver of the Russian economy. Instead, the

¹¹ The strategic importance of the Caspian Sea (2014), *Turkish Defence Forum*, Accessed on 3 Nov.2017 URL: <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/the-strategic-importance-of-the-caspian-sea.315645/>"

contribution of energy to the Russian economy has to be calibrated in such a way that it stimulates infrastructural developments to create the necessary conditions for integration, diversification, and development (Ibid). Like Russia, energy resources also largely determine the economies of the Caspian states. For example, in 2000, oil from Azeri industrial production contributed 50%, Azerbaijan's total export, followed by Kazakhstan 45.5 %. Further, during the same period, natural gas production in Turkmenistan reached 47 billion cubic meters that contributed 17 % to the GDP (Kalyuzhnova, 2002: 65). It determines even till today.

Energy economy affects the foreign policy of any given country To elaborate on this, some analysts argues that 'energy has become a significant part of Russia's foreign, high revenues generated through energy sector enhances the economic power and this, in turn, has been used as an instrument of power' (Chirkova, 2012: 6). The 2013 Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine clearly states that

Russia's approach to comprehensive interaction with its partners in the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea regions is based on goals and principles of the Charter of the Black Sea Economic Cooperation Organisation and takes into account the need to strengthen the mechanism of cooperation among five Caspian states on the basis of collectively taken decisions.¹²

Given below is the Russian energy policy objectives:

- To enhance its position in global energy markets,
- To maximize its economic interests in the oil and gas sector.
- To enhance Russian energy companies' ability to partake in regional projects and also forestall Western competitors in the energy politics of the region,
- To coordinate with littoral states (Penkova, 2014: 114),
- To demand a non-discriminatory regime for foreign economic activities, so that Russian companies can access foreign energy markets and financial resources (Evstafiev, 2007:).

Under Putin's presidency, largely based on a contribution from the export of oil and gas and also helped by the increase of prices of energy, the Russian foreign policy became assertive. In fact, in 2000, Putin "created a new post of Special Presidential Representative for the Caspian

¹² The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation (2013), "Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation", URL: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptICk6BZ29/content/id/122186

and Viktor Kaluzhny” was the first one to be appointed to this new office to enhance Russian presence in the region. Consequently, Kaluzhny visited to each of the littoral states and stated: “Russia supports the sectoral division of the Caspian Sea bed, but not the surface waters.” Furthermore, Putin also came up with the idea to establish a “Centre for Strategic Economic Planning for the Caspian,” to ease the problems pertaining to joint exploitation of the energy resources. Besides, he also forwarded a new proposal that urges the Caspian states to jointly develop the oil and gas fields located in the disputed areas (Saivetz, 2000: 58). This means the Putin proposal has made the consents of all states as compulsory for any deal in the Caspian Sea. Recognising, the Greater Mediterranean as a transportation hub of energy from “the Caucasus, Caspian Sea Basin, the West Asia, and the Black Sea region – Moscow has vouched to make it into a zone of peace, stability and good neighborliness “_which in turn would push forward the Russian economic interests mainly as the energy export pipeline routes. Even after the disintegration of the USSR, Russia almost controlled all the export routes and thereby making the Caspian, states entirely depended on Russian transport systems. However, unlike the Western companies, Russian companies were not able to cater the need of the Caspian states by offering sufficient scale of investment and also avail modern technological inputs needed to harness of the region’s oil and gas fields. Given this, initially, Putin had to focus on upgrading Russia’s energy expertise (Stegen and Kuszniir, 2015: 95).

In the energy field, Russia adopted very targeted soft approaches with the Caspian and Central Asian states. Despite the competition of Kazakh oil (backed by Western companies) with the Russian oil in the world market, Lukoil, Gazprom and Rosneft, and other Russian companies were able to expand the numbers of important projects in Western Kazakhstan (Caspian side) and also signed a long-term agreement with Kazakhstan. Noting this development, some commentators on Russian affairs suggested that “Kazakhstan remained bridgehead in the region” and is closer to Moscow. Kazakh-Russian cooperation has grown in the energy sector. In 2007, under a signed agreement on oil transit in 2002, “Kazakhstan was able to export more than 60 million tons of oil through Russian pipelines”. Moreover, with regard development of three oils fields, Tsentralno, Kurmangazy, and Khalynskoe, located in the northwest of the sea, both countries agreed to the partnership. Another major breakthrough was made in 2010, Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan agreed upon jointly developing the pipeline networks in the region. (Patnaik, 2016: 71).

Moreover, Russia has formed numerous organizations related to the energy sector and also in other economic domains, in order to strengthen cooperation with and also among the post-

Soviet states. Retrospectively, in 2000, Russia formed the “Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC).” This international economic organization served as a precursor to the formation of the “Customs Union among six CIS states such as Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan.” There are major three stages of the history of the EurAsEC’s establishment. In the first stage, the CIS countries launched this for economic union among member states, but in reality it could not fully be implemented. In the second stage, some CIS countries sought to deepen economic integration pattern applied to a small group rather than the entire CIS. Thereby, Russia, Kazakhstan, Belarus, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan decided to create a customs union in order to develop into a single economic space. Their intentions came out in reality by setting up the Customs Union and the Single Economic Space. The third stage is linked to the emergence of the EurAsEC. The Presidents of above-mentioned five states, except Uzbekistan signed the “Treaty on the Establishment of the Eurasian Economic Community” in Astana on 10 October 2000. It entered into force on 31 May 2001. In 2006, Uzbekistan joined it. (Shadikhodjaev, 2008: 10-11).

Further, in 2002, Putin proposed another significant inter-governmental organisation, the “Eurasian Gas Alliance” between Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. The expected outcome of this event broadly is an enhancement of Russia’s domination and especially the ability to coordinate the regional energy dynamics (Penkova, 2014: 120). This alliance aims to provide security for the domestic political regime while at the same time, diminishing Chinese influence. In 2010, another step was taken towards the same direction, Russia, along with Kazakhstan and Belarus, created a Custom Union (CU). In 2012, to foster further economic integration, the CU was upgraded to a single economic space, also known as the “Common Economic Space.” Furthermore, in 2015, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan officially became a member of the Eurasian Custom Union. In this regard, Putin stated, “We are certain that with the new members Kyrgyzstan and Armenia, serves the fundamental interests of this country and we are confident that this will open wider horizons for socio-economic development.” The Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and the alliance (Common Economic Space) are to a single market, which would allow the free movement of goods, capital, labour, and services. Russia views the creation of the prospective single market (CU/EEU) as a political project. To put it otherwise, it is political as Moscow seemingly is trying to re-embodify the Soviet Union through economic integration of the former Soviet republics (Stegen and Kuszniir, 2015:94). However, Kazakhstan and other member view this mainly as an organisation to promote their own economic interests.

Under the leadership of Putin, Russia aims to become a global energy superpower. In striving towards this goal, he concluded an agreement with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In 2003, Turkmenistan signed, “a remarkable and financially 25-year export agreement with Russia, according to this, Turkmenistan agreed to keep price 50-60 % lower than Russia received from exporting gas to European countries” (Penkova, 2014: 121). In October 2006, Gazprom and Turkmenistan agreed that Russia would be supplied with 50 million cubic feet of natural gas from Turkmenistan and it will charge 100 dollars for each. Interestingly, in the same period, Gazprom was selling the natural gas for 235 dollars to the west European countries, thus making a hefty profit out of the deal. Nevertheless, as of 2007, the Russian investment in the oil and gas fields in Turkmenistan was very low; barely 25 million dollars mainly limited to the gas sector (Paramonov and Stokov, 2008: 5). On top of this, Russia signed another joint venture agreement with Kazakhstan; the agreement stipulates that the natural gas drilled from Karachaganak region by Gazprom will be delivered to the European markets through the Russian territory. Thus, the gas has been first transported from Central Asian countries to Russia, and then it is distributed to other markets (Sonmez and Cobanoglu, 2016: 94-95).

Given the Russian influence in this above mentions states, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have developed close energy relationship with the U.S and EU and have been playing a crucial role in energy supply to the European markets. However, given the potential of Kazakhstan to become one of the key energy suppliers, Russian companies such as Gazprom, Lukoil, and Rosneft are active in Kazakhstan. In fact, it is estimated that Kazakhstan already possesses 30 billion barrels of proven oil reserves. Besides, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan both are more concerned with developing the Caspian region oil reserves. For instance, two major oil fields Tengiz and Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli have produced 410,000 barrels of oil per day in 2002. From 2002 onwards, Gazprom, a Russian gas company, has been the main transporter of gas from Central Asian states. In fact, it plays the role of a mediator between sellers and buyers of gas. Another evidence of Kazakhstan growing ties with the Western countries is that despite Russia’s unwillingness, Kazakhstan joined the BTC that in a practical sense directly erodes Russia’s position in the region. However, given the large Russian population and also having a shared geographical boundary, Russia was compelled to adopt a balanced foreign policy, which is termed as ‘multi-vector’ foreign policy (Bardakçi,2003:14). Two aspects particularly define the energy relations between Moscow and Astana: Kazakh exports it's oil and gas through Russian territory, and both have agreed to ‘joint development between two countries of three oil fields (Tengiz, Kashagan, and Karachaganak) in the Caspian Sea. (Oslo, 2009: 6).

Similarly, Russia-Azerbaijan relations have also not been much better too. Both the countries have accused each other of fuelling separatist groups in the South Caucasus. To the contrary, of the objectives of Russian foreign policy as mentioned above, Azerbaijan has continued to maintain close ties with Western countries. For example, in 1994 Azerbaijan concluded an agreement also famously known as the “contract of the century” which allows Western actors (particular British Petroleum oil consortium) to explore three offshore fields in the Caspian Sea. Moreover, three main pipelines, i.e. “Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum, and Baku-Tbilisi- Supsa, which starts from the Azerbaijan side of the Caspian Basin to Turkey, bypassing Russia is supported by the U.S” (Mikhelidze, 2010: 6).

Given the strategic location of Azerbaijan, it has opted to allow foreign-financed energy projects and also further diversification of the main east-west pipeline routes at the expense of Russia. Despite the problems in the relations, the volume of trade between Baku and Moscow has consistently grown. For instance, in 2008, Russian imported goods and products, mainly oil and gas worth \$411.4 million from Azerbaijan, whereas Azerbaijan’s import from Russia was about \$2 billion. As a matter of fact, in 2008, Russia invested around \$12.4 million in Azerbaijani economy (Cherniavskiy, 2010: 34). In January 2010, Russia began to import gas from Azerbaijan, and since then economic ties between the two countries only expanded steadily. According to the Azerbaijani State Customs Committee, in late 2014, “the trade turnover between the two countries exceeded \$4 billion, but in January-October 2015, this amount was reduced by 30 % less as it was \$2.3 billion for the same period in 2014”(Gadimova, 2016). Also, in 2016, the President of Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan met in Baku to discuss the framework of trilateral economic ties and specifically on the options to exploit potential hydrocarbon reserves in the Caspian Sea. Among the states who have a stake in the Caspian Sea, Azerbaijan, Iran, and Russia are the richest in terms of energy reserves and thus are in a position to take a collective decision regarding the energy resources of Caspian Sea. For instance, Putin has stated that the three states could work together in the Western trade corridors. Further, he reiterated that “in the energy industry, priority should be given to the implementation of projects for the exploration and development of oil and gas deposits, first of all in the Caspian region.” Putin also reiterated that Russia is willing to explore “mutually beneficial projects on the joint use of pipeline infrastructures for the transportation of raw materials” (Graeber, 2016). In the context of the overall size, Russia and Iran are the two largest economies of the region. In a practical sense, given the antecedent of rivalry between Iran and Russia during the ‘Age of the Empires,’ the relations between both the countries is not

necessarily smooth. However, after the U.S sanctions, Iran, and Russia, the relationship has witnessed an unprecedented level of cooperation than the U.Sual competition that marked most of the recent past. Currently, Russia has become an economic and political partner of Iran. As a result of the sanctions, in 2014, Iranian-Russian trade was only \$1.68 billion. (Wheeler and Desai, 2016).

There are four major powers vying for securing the energy resources in Central Asia are: “Russia in the North, Turkey and Europe led by America in the West, China in the East and Iran in the South.” Besides, the Asian energy-hungry countries, for example, India, South Korea, and Pakistan are also gradually getting a foothold in the region energy economy. The growing interest of external powers in the region energy market is a result of the Ukrainian gas crisis in 2009, Ukraine and Russia were at loggerheads about gas prices, Russia terminated energy supplies to Ukraine in 2014. This event forced Europe to rethink its energy policy, put them on a trail looking for diversification of European gas supplies, and thus reduce the imports from Russia. In this context, the Caspian has become a focal point for not only European energy security but also for other major economies of the world. In other words, broadly, the Caspian region has also become a potential zone for conflict on energy, mainly between the Russian Federation and the U.SA led conglomerates of states wanting a share of the energy pie. Therefore, the EU has taken an interest in creating pipelines that exclude Russia, such as the Nabucco Pipeline Project and Trans-Caspian Pipeline. Given this, one of the primary objectives of Russia’s energy policy in the region is that Iran does not become a competitor in the EU gas markets. Incidentally, due to its presumed nuclear weapons program, EU companies and the U.S do not trade gas with Iran, and this has benefited Russian government-owned gas companies, especially Gazprom. Russia, in the meantime has also urged Iran to expand its gas exports to the Eastern countries, particularly India, China, and Pakistan. (Azmukhanova, et.al, 2017:127-130).

Moreover, in the Caspian summit 2018, Putin with the heads of all the Caspian states have emphasised on the development of the digital economy. Putin stated “Russia calls on the Caspian littoral states to focus on cooperation in the sphere of the digital economy, to introduce information and communications technologies and electronic commerce, to digitalize foreign trade operations, the shipments and logistics sectors” Further he tried to impress upon the Caspian leaders that cooperation is necessary on an inter-governmental level. This means that the concern states need to arrive at an agreement on the development of a common integrated infrastructure for the transportation energy resources of the Caspian Sea. Lastly, he stressed,

“Transport links are a key factor for sustainable growth and close cooperation between our states, adding that Russia is implementing a strategy for the development of seaports in the Caspian Basin till 2030” (Metzel, 2018).

Energy as a Political Weapon of Russian Foreign Policy

As discussed earlier, energy is a strategic resource and thereby could enhance the power of a given state’s ability to influence the geopolitical competition among states. In this context, given also the other attributes, Russia could be considered as an energy superpower. In fact, “Russia is the second-largest coal reserves and eighth largest crude oil reserves and also natural gas reserves.” Given these, it is a key player in the global energy market, and the Russian economy thus strongly relies on energy resources. However, due to the decrease in oil prices and the world financial crisis, in 2009, energy contributed only around 8% GDP of the country, a dramatic decline in comparison to previous years. State-run companies mainly manage the Russian energy sector, Gazprom is one of such company, and it looks over almost the whole of Russian operation on natural gas reserves. As a matter of fact, it controls approximately 90% of the Russian natural gas reserves and over 25% of the world. Moreover, Gazprom and Rosneft another state-run company control around 30% of Russia’s oil production operations (Bumpers, 2012).

During the Soviet era, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan made a significant contribution in boosting the Russian national economy. Except for a brief period, right after the disintegration of USSR, by the mid-1990, several state-run Russian multinational companies enabled Russia to again reasserted dominance in the Caspian Sea region. Given the long historical and cultural relationship with these states, and in all likelihood, Moscow’s influence is set to become stronger. Currently, Russia is involved in a major way in building the transportation system, i.e., pipelines, for transporting the energy resource of the region. The catch in Russia’s relations with the post-Soviet republics is that Russia is able to purchase at a low price and sell it to the European markets for more than double times, thus making it very profitable (Sonmez and Cobanoglu, 2016: 94).

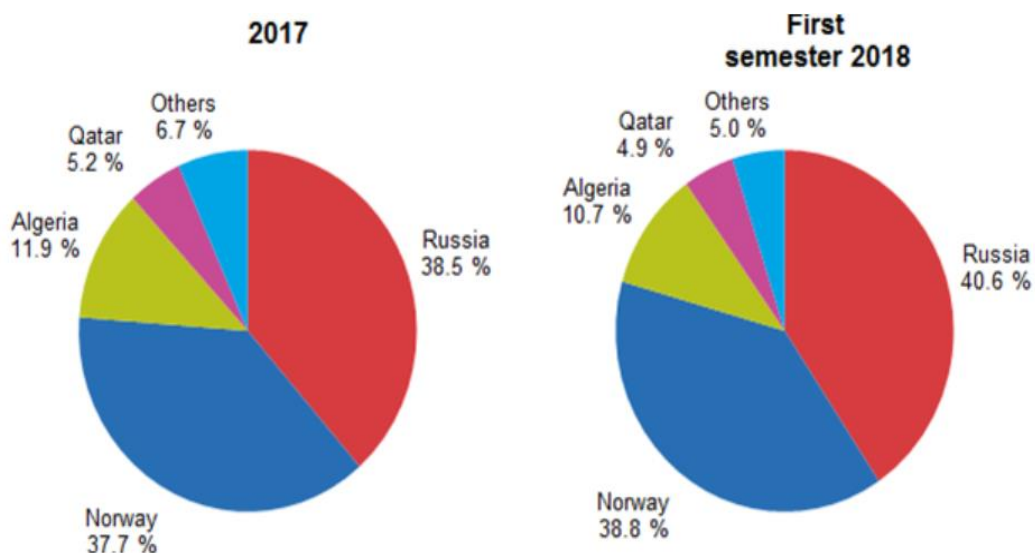
Given the dependence of the newly independent states to Russia, by shutting off the pipeline to the region on which Russia has the monopoly, no doubt, Moscow has been using energy as a weapon to force newly independent states of the former Soviet republics to adopt a pro-Russian approach. For instance, Turkmenistan economy that is entirely dependent on gas export to Europe was put under duress in November 1993, when Gazprom interrupted Turkmen

gas exports to Europe. Additionally, in May-August 1994, Russia had blocked almost all of Kazakhstan’s oil export routes and thus forced Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to reduce the prices of oil and gas. Besides, in 1997, Moscow levied a higher transportation fee and also concluded an agreement with Astana to lower the natural gas price. (Bardakçi, 2003: 7).

Imports from Russia

The European Union is a key energy market for Russian energy export. As a matter of fact, Russia is a major oil and gas supplier to the CIS and also to the European Countries. It controls both the markets and Russia has used this situation in making these states take political and economic decisions that are favourable to Russia. This has kept most of the eastern and central European countries anxious about Russian energy policy. Notwithstanding this, Georgia, Ukraine, and Moldova had adopted a pro-western orientation, and this has similarly made Moscow uncomfortable. Given this, Russia has managed to play an essential role in their energy sectors in the Baltic States thought they are EU and NATO members. Whereas, Armenia is a strong ally of Russia, while Belarus has been a loyal supporter of Russia in Europe (Woehrel, 2009: 7).

Table 3.2 Extra-EU imports of natural gas from main trading partners, 2017 and first semester 2018 (share (%) of trade-in value)



Source: “EU imports of energy products –recent developments: statistics Explained, (Online web), accessed on 12 August 2018, URL: <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/statistics-explained/pdfscache/46126.pdf>”

According to the European Commission, the EU imports around 69 % of its natural gas and 38.5 % of the gas import is from Russia, followed by from Norway (37.7%) and 11.9% from Algeria (Kottasová, 2018). Besides, the Baltic States import approximately 89% of its gas requirements from Russia, similarly, Belarus (99%), Georgia (88%), Austria (72%), Greece (85%) and Ukraine (69%) (Newnham, 2011: 137). As evident from the data, all these countries if not fully, are highly dependent on Russia for their gas supplies.

Energy as a Political Weapon: Selected Cases

Energy politics is an integral part of global power politics, and in this Russia is especially empowered by the abundance of energy resources under its control. Thus, in this context, Moscow could afford to adopt aggressive policies. As discussed earlier, after Gorbachev and Yeltsin period, Putin era marked as a resurgence of Russian power, and under him, Russia’s energy policy has become seemingly aggressive. In theory, energy, as a foreign policy tool could be used in two ways, i.e., Russia has utilised this asset to reward its friends sometime and also to punish its enemies. For example, during 1994-2005, when Leonid Danylovykh Kuchma was the President of Ukraine, Russia sold gas to Ukraine at a cheap price of \$ 50 per thousand cubic meters (TCM) because he maintained a pro-Russian stand. Similarly, the same strategy was adopted for Belarus in 2006, Russia, exported gas at a concessional price of \$ 47 per TCM. However, the strategy was radically altered and turned into a major dispute when Ukraine began to adopt a pro-western attitude (Bilalova and Zeynalli, 2014). For example, after the ‘Orange Revolution’ in 2004, Victor Yushchenko, who prefers to maintain a pro-west position, succeeded in Kuchma leadership. Consequently, the relationship between the two countries since then has deteriorated (Newnham, 2011:139).

Table 3.3

Natural gas prices charged to Russian customers (\$/TCM).

| | 2005 | 2006 | 2007 | 2008 |
|---------|------|-------|-------|-------|
| Armenia | \$56 | \$110 | \$110 | \$110 |
| Belarus | \$46 | \$46 | \$110 | \$125 |
| Georgia | \$63 | \$110 | \$235 | \$235 |
| Moldova | \$80 | \$110 | \$170 | \$190 |
| Ukraine | \$50 | \$95 | \$130 | \$160 |

Source: “Newnham R.(2011),” Oil, carrots, and sticks: Russia’s energy resources as a foreign policy tool”, *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, 2(2). Pp 139”

The case of Ukraine clearly shows that Russia has not hesitated in using energy as a foreign policy tool by way of by subsidizing the price and assistance in constructing new energy routes to regain its status and influence in Europe as well as in former Soviet republics. In other words, Russia has utilised energy in determining its strategic allies and enemies. In fact, Bush, as well as the Obama administration, realised the Russian strategy and urged the European countries to curb their dependence on Russian energy. In this context, the U.S and the European countries have strived to build multiple pipelines from Central Asia to Europe. However, currently, particularly the Central and Eastern European countries and the Baltic States are fully dependent on Russia for natural gas. In such a scenario, economically weak states are vulnerable to easily become a soft target of Russian energy policy – the predicament is that another alternative can not replace oil and gas products. Evidently, Russia continues to exercise a monopoly over the pipelines built during the Soviet era. As a result, the Central Asian states remained dependent on the Russian pipelines for exporting their energy products. Obviously, such a scenario has given Russia an enormous control over the pricing of oil and gas, and thus, Russia is able to exert political influence over its buyers (Newnhan, 2011: 134 -135).

Map 3.1

FIGURE 1 – KEY EUROPEAN COUNTRIES' DEPENDENCE ON RUSSIAN GAS



Source: “Collins, G. (2017), “Russia’s use of the ‘energy weapon’ in Europe”, Baker institute for public policy, Accessed on 18 May 2018, URL: https://www.bakerinstitute.org/media/files/files/ac785a2b/BI-Brief-071817-CES_Russia1.pdf”.

Furthermore, in 2006, the gas supply to Moldova was suspended for 16 days, and Belarus was subjected to the constant threat of cutting off the natural gas or oil supplies in 2002, 2003, 2010 and 2011. With regard to Belarus, in 2002 and 2010, the natural gas supply was drastically reduced, and in 2004, Russian actually stop the supply. Similarly, the same strategy was used against were meted to Ukraine was threatened with cut-off in 2005, 2008-2010, 2013 and 2014 and with an actual cut-off of oil in 2008. In 2014, Gazprom increased the price of natural gas for Ukraine (Lopez, 2014). Due to a dispute overpricing, the supply of oil to Ukraine was cut-off during the period of 1999-2000, and the natural gas supply was cut off in 2006, 2009, 2014 and 2015 (Česnakas, 2016: 20).

In June 2014, Russian state-run giant Gazprom had accused Ukraine of not paying debts, estimated at \$5.3bn. As a result, Gazprom turns off the taps badly affecting eighteen European countries who were 90% dependent on the gas coming through Ukraine and supplied by Gazprom supplies whereas half of the Ukraine requirements were coming from Russia (Kirby, 2014). Notwithstanding this, the problem of payments remains unresolved, and Gazprom has threatened to build pipelines bypassing Ukraine. Most importantly, after the Ukraine crisis, the EU declared to reduce its dependence on Russia. In contrast, recently Europe has actually increased its imports from Russia; for example, Austria, Germany, and France have increased, their energy imports (rose up 6% compared to 2016). In this context, the head of Gazprom Alexei Miller said: “it had completed record deliveries towards Europe and the southern Mediterranean in 2017 at a total of 193.9 billion cubic meters _8 percent higher than its previous record, set in 2016” (Kudryavstev, 2018). However, Andrey Ilarionov, the economic advisor to Kremlin claimed, “Russia doesn’t use energy resources as a weapon in its foreign policy.” (Sonmez and Cobanoglu, 2016: 92). Thus, Russian energy influence continues to remain a major concern for the EU and the U.S. Some analysts point out that Russia has effectively used the energy card under the Putin administration. During the first year of Putin’s administration, when the energy price increased at a global level, Moscow consequently also increased its energy exportation. This is considered a part of the Putin effort to regain Russia’s status in world politics.

Russian Strategic and Security Policies in the Caspian Region

During the initial period of Putin’s Presidency, the Russian Security Council on 21 April 2000 prioritised the Caspian Sea with its vast energy resources as one of the main objectives of Russian foreign policy. The Security Council instructed the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to take

initiatives of consultation with the Caspian countries. Putin himself stated that the Russian Federation is determined to cooperate with the Caspian states in their projects and interests, but any such undertakings will not be at the cost of Russian national interests¹³. Further, Putin emphasised to reaffirm Russian influence in the Caspian region by countering the growing presence of the external powers such as the U.S, UK, and Turkey. Lastly, he also stated that “the growing interests and presence of the other countries, i.e. Turkey, UK and the U.SA towards the Caspian Sea is not accidental. It is because we are not active. We are not in favor to convert the Caspian Sea into another area of confrontation. This is a matter of competition, and we are ready to be competitive”. (Saivetz, 2000).

Moreover, Putin adopted three key doctrinal documents regarding the future direction of Russian foreign as well as security policy: “the National Security Concept (10 January 2000), the Military Doctrine (21 April 2000), and the Foreign Policy Concept (28 June 2000)”. These documents define Russia’s relations with the post-Soviet countries should be guided by the prerogatives of Russia’s own national security, especially with regard to fighting international terrorism and extremism. Besides, the documents define the modalities of economic cooperation with the Caspian states, and it also identifies the legal status of the Caspian Sea as one of the top priority. (Kazantsev,2009:1075). During the period between 1991-2001, the security scenario in Central Asia was highly volatile, mainly because of Afghanistan, wherein the Taliban, one of the factions in the civil war, which more or less began right after the Soviet withdrawal, managed to capture power in 1996. The Taliban regime remained until 2001 when the U.S started to its campaign of ‘war on terror.’ Before this, the increasing influence of the Taliban was perceived as a direct threat to all the neighboring countries such as the Russian North Caucasus, Central Asian states, and Chinese Xinjiang. The Taliban financially support the Islamic extremists in these above-mentioned regions. Understandably, Al-Qaida became very active in the Central Asian states. In fact, Turkmenistan had had friendly relations with the Taliban). Furthermore, the ”Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)” one of the most active extremist force in the region professed establishment of an Islamic Emirate all over the region. (Malikov, 2007: 220).

Moreover, during the period from 1994 to 1996, the Chechnya war became internationalised, and Muslim fighters from many countries came in to support the Chechens people. In the

¹³ President of Russia, Acting President Vladimir Putin chaired a Security Council meeting, which approved Russia's Military Doctrine, 21 April 2000, URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/1101>

course of the military conflict, a series of apartment buildings were bombed and attacked in Dagestan, and that had forced Putin to protect the Russian troops. Putin was very concerned with the Chechenya war, and he wanted Russia to mediate to resolve the conflict. In trying to do so, Russia applied for membership in the “Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC).” Consequently, in the capacity of a guest and exploring the possibilities to become an observer in the future, Russia participated in the OIC summit in Malaysia in 2003. At the summit, Putin stated, “20 millions of Russian Moslems are the part of the Moslem world,” and thus Russia is looking out to get support from Muslim countries, and at the same time he also urged some of the Muslim countries to stop the assistance to rebels groups in Chechnya (Ibid). Apart from this Putin also mentioned that Russia recognises that terrorism has become a major problem for the country. In 2000, during the delegates’ summit, the Commonwealth of Independent States accepted an anti-terrorism program (Hall and Grant, 2009: 120). Moreover, in June 2002, the SCO Charter officially framed by China with the cooperation of Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also had provisions to deal with the problem of international terrorism (Naumkin,2001:121). Moreover, Russia has also been exploring options for developing new pragmatic relations with NATO to combat against ‘international terrorism and religious extremism (Antonenko, 2004: 257).

Russia approved a maritime doctrine in 2001 that would remain effective till 2020, in anticipation of defending the Russian as well as its allied interests in the region, this doctrine defines “navy as the instrument of Russian foreign policy”. The objectives of Russian maritime policy: protecting the marine environment, establishing the “legal status of the Caspian” with the cooperation of other littoral states, defending its interests, create better conditions for the utilisation of all naval/maritime potential, etc. (German, 2014: 8). The Russian maritime policy clearly indicates that the Caspian region is very important in terms of the economy its own national and economic security, i.e., the military aspect of security and also security of the natural resources. In 2009, Russia’s National Security Strategy (NSS) identified extremism, illegal migration, and transnational criminal organisations spread across from Central Asia to Europe as major threats to Russian national security (Ibid,31).

Under the impetus provided by Putin’s leadership, the security and economic cooperation in the region have been enhanced through the “Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a new CIS Rapid Deployment Force and European Economic Community (EEC)” (Kubicek, 2004:211). In 2000, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) also created an Anti-terrorist Program; the headquarter is located

in Moscow. The CSTO constituted by Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Armenia, and Belarus, has about 1,500 strong Collective Rapid Deployment Force. In this regard, Vladimir Putin declared that “the CSTO and its instruments are directed against international terrorism not against other states” (Hessbruegge, 2004:5-6). This organisation emphasizes military and defense cooperation, especially with regard to the development of common counter-terrorism force, military training exercises, and assistance with requirements of military equipment (Zurich, 2010). According to Putin, major goals of the CSTO were cooperation in defense, training of military personnel, manufacturing of weapons and peacekeeping activities against international terrorism and narcotics. The CSTO has focused on three military areas: “the European, Central Asia and the Caucasus region.” However, Uzbekistan along with Georgia and Azerbaijan have withdrawn their membership from the CSTO in 1999. In 2006, Uzbekistan re-joined CSTO but again withdrew in 2012. In the context of the indecisive position of Uzbekistan, Vadim Kozyulin, an analyst for the Moscow-based think tank PIR-Center points out that “The United States will make Uzbekistan its strategic ally, will provide financial and military assistance, assume some security guarantees, close its eyes to human rights violations.” (Kilner, 2012).

Prior to the 9/11 terror attack, the geopolitical status of the Caspian region and Central Asia was primarily defined mainly by one factor, i.e., abundance of energy resources mainly hydrocarbon. However, after September 9/11, the region came under the radar of the U.S searching for Islamic fundamentalist, which was declared to be a “new global threat.” Given this, the local governments have agreed to work with outside powers to combat this threat in the region. It is evident from the discussion above that in comparison to Soviet-era Russia has become more proactive in the region’s security matters, even more so than natural resources. (Chulkovskaya, 2016). Undoubtedly, among the leading powers of the world, the 9/11 terror attack has changed the strategic perception of the Caspian region. In short, the U.S, along with China and Russia, has become very aware of the threat of international terrorism, which could potentially destabilise the whole region. In fact, reckoning the danger, Putin even showed readiness to cooperate the U.S in Central Asia, which in practical term serves as a base for U.S operations against the Taliban that started on 7 October 2001. As a result, Moscow played a crucial role in establishing contacts for American forces with Uzbek and Tajik forces of the Northern Alliance, which helped in a long way to effectively conduct the military operations in Afghanistan. In due course of the conflict, the U.S came to realise the level of Russian influence over energy and security issues in the (Hall and Grant, 2009: 122).

The Russian had initially viewed the U.S led anti-terrorist operations as a short-term contingency plan. However, the military conflict has become protracted, and thus, the political situation of Afghanistan has become an integral part of Russia's new strategy for the Caspian region. In the Fiscal Year 2002, the U.S in context of the then ongoing military operation in Afghanistan provided \$74 million to following countries including, Georgia (\$ 32 million), Uzbekistan (\$12 million), and Kyrgyzstan (\$11.6 million) in form of security-related assistance for helping the U.S in the 'war on terror' (Chufrin,2004:5). Despite being a neutral state, Turkmenistan also received two high-speed patrol boats. All these events pointed towards a new security model in the Caspian region, which hinges on the balance of power between the U.S and NATO allies on one side and Russia and China with the mechanism of SCO and CSTO on the other side. The southern border of Russia is considered a source of several conflicts. Some of the major conflicts which mostly has persisted are: between "Georgia and Abkhazia, Georgia and South Ossetia, North Ossetia and Ingushetia, Nagorno-Karabakh (between Azerbaijan-Armenia), Chechnya in Russia, Iran with its Kurdish population and Turkey with its Kurdish population and so on" (Naumkin, 2001:120).

Thus, these conflicts are taken into account when Moscow formulates its policy in the Caspian region. Consequently, Russia began to focus on preventing the region from being used as a transit route for financial, military, and human support for Chechen rebels. This has also entailed that Russia has to be the guardian of the military infrastructures build in the region during the Soviet era, such as space, air defense, and early warning facilities. Moscow is trying to retain its military presence in Armenia and Georgia in order to prevent conflict between the two countries could potentially turn into regional conflicts that undermine stability and security in the North Caucasus. Russia's North Caucasus region located on the western coastline of the Caspian is still affected insurgency, especially in Dagestan. Russia deems the ongoing insurgency in Dagestan has led to the deterioration of security condition throughout the region. Since 1997, Moscow has executed a large number of documents as 'National Security Concepts.' A second version was accorded to some of the documents in 2000 and 2009 known as "the Strategy of National Security of the Russian Federation" which is meant to remain applicable until 2020. Russia has also introduced an "Information Security Doctrine, a Concept of Participation in International Development Assistance, and most recently, a Concept of Participation in BRICS." (Light, 2015: 13).

As mentioned earlier, one of the main objectives of the Russian foreign policy is the creation of a multipolar world. In this regard, Russia views that this could be done through by securing

the country's geopolitical interests in different vectors, and under Putin leadership, Russia has incorporated the 'southern vector' which covers the Caspian region and the Caucasus, as one of the most crucial vectors. Putin, on many occasions, has clearly stated that reclaiming its position in the former Soviet space is the way to bring Russia back to the spotlight. As a result, the blueprint to achieve this objective was laid out in some of the recent Russian strategic documents such as "the Foreign Policy Concept 2008, National Security Strategy 2009 and Military Doctrine 2010, all three documents highlight the importance of the multipolar world order". Evidently, Russia is unwilling to accept the complete dominance of the U.S over the international system (German, 2014:35). The Russian Foreign Policy Concept 2008 contents that "Russia has its privileged interests in the former Soviet space where we have traditionally and historically friendly warm relations." This document calls for the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation with the CIS countries as a top priority of Russian foreign policy. The documents clearly state:

Russia will increase cooperation with the CIS Member States in ensuring mutual security, including joint efforts to combat common challenges and threats, primarily international terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, transnational crime, and illegal migration." In particular, the documents also underscore the "elimination of terrorist and drug trafficking threats emanating from the territory of Afghanistan and prevention of risks of destabilization of the situations in Central Asia and Transcaucasia."¹⁴

To achieve these goals,

Russia will actively interact with Belarus and Kazakhstan within the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC) in order to establish a customs union and common economic space and encourage the other EurAsEC Member States to participate in this work. Further, strengthen EurAsEC as a core element of economic integration, a mechanism to support implementation of major water-energy, infrastructure, industry and other joint projects; promote in every possible way the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) as a key instrument to maintain stability and ensure security in the CIS area focusing on adapting the CSTO as a multifunctional integration body to the changing environment, as well as on ensuring capability of the CSTO Member States to take prompt and effective joint actions, and on transforming the CSTO into a central institution ensuring security in its area of responsibility"¹⁵.

¹⁴ The Russian president (official site) (2008), "*The Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation*", URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>

¹⁵ Ibid.

In pursue of the aim to create a multipolar world order, in 2009, Russia adopted a new document “National Security Strategy.” This document could be considered as a landmark in the field of regional security because it calls for Russia to play a decisive role in the Caspian region. Subsequently, Russia’ Caspian flotilla has been reinforced with more troops and equipment. On 18 November 2010, Russia with Caspian littoral states signed a ‘Security Cooperation Agreement,’ this agreement emphasises that the security of the region is the sole prerogative of Russia along with the member states (Patnaik, 2016: 195). Also, the Russian President Putin also approved “Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation in 2013 and the Russian Military Doctrine” in December 2014 (Light, 2015:13).

The Militarisation of the Caspian Sea

Since the 17th century, Russia has been experimenting with different ways to control maritime trade in the Caspian. For instance, at the beginning of the 18th century, the first standing flotilla was deployed in the Caspian, and Russia developed a navy-base in Astrakhan. In 1867, Baku became a key center of the naval bases for Russia, comprising approximately 80% of the total Russian fleet, 15% of the fleet was stationed in Russian territory, and the remaining 5% was divided between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. After 1991, in addition to Russia, four new naval powers have appeared in the Caspian Sea, i.e. Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Iran, and Turkmenistan. However, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan were in favor of complete demilitarisation of the Caspian Sea. Eventually, a new arrangement arrived with the signing of an agreement in March 1992; this allowed the division of the Soviet Caspian Flotilla among the Caspian states (Goribov, 2014: 45). However, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan discarding their previous position of wanting complete demilitarisation of the Caspian Sea started vying for developing their own separate military base in the Sea. The plausible explanation of the changed position of both the states is that they wanted to increase their military contingent in order to preserve their autonomy in the context of the rivalry – which seems more political than military – between two historical powers, i.e., Russia and Persian in the Caspian.

Besides, after the 9/11 attack, under the overarching banner on “war on terror,” the U.S has apparently legitimized its military presence and power projection in post-Soviet states. On 12 April 2005, U.S Defence Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld visited Baku, for the second time within a period of four months, in order to discuss the acquisition of a U.S military base in Azerbaijan. The agenda of acquiring a military base in the region was just a part of the larger U.S strategy to do the same in Europe, Asia, and West Asia, so that U.S military is more or

less deployed all across the globe. For example, the Pentagon assisted \$100 million to build “a Caspian Guard of Special Forces military meant to protect the BTC pipeline.” Moreover, some scholars point out that America always wanted to establish airbases in Afghanistan so that it could monitor Moscow and Tehran. With regard to the southern Caucasus, the U.S, in March 2002, initiated a \$64 million worth program of military assistance. One such initiative is known as the Georgian Train & Equip Program under which 2000 elite Georgian troops were to be given specialised counter-terrorism training (Giragosian, 2004: 57-58). As a result, in 2005, there were approximately 250-300 American troops on numerous missions. Besides, catering logistics, aircrafts, and also special operation forces in Azerbaijan were stationed under the direct US supervision.

Amidst the rivalry among various powers, the Caspian states are developing and modernising the own naval fleets with the cooperation of external powers such as Russia, U.S, Turkey, China, and Israel. The “New Great Game,” has no doubt led to an increase in militarisation of the Caspian and the Central Asian region. In January 1996, Russia signed a military cooperation agreement with Kazakhstan, wherein Russia proposed to assist in strengthening a Kazakh maritime force. In fact, Kazakhstan has inherited two important factories from the Soviet era: Zenith and Gidropribor where boats for its fleet are built. During 2005- 2006, Zenith shipyard had produced 240 tonnes capacity patrol boat *Sardar*, and *Shagala* Cutter was commissioned in Gidropribor meant to be used by the Kazakh naval forces. Moreover, Zenith also produced missile and artillery ship named *Kazakhstan*. In 2015, Kazakhstan received Su-30SM fighter aircraft, Mi-35 combat helicopters, and Mi-171Sh military transport helicopters from Russia. Kazakhstan’s Defence Minister Imangali Tasmagambetov stated that “we signed an agreement that opens new frameworks, new frontiers for further work in the sphere of military-technical cooperation” (Kucera, 2016).

Kazakhstan is the main importer of military equipment from Russia. For instance, both the countries have been cooperating with each other through more than sixty bilateral agreements in the defence and military fields. In 2015, the two countries agreed to construct a joint regional air defence system. Given the intensity of the relations, Kazakhstan has been receptive to Russia’s institution building, whereas Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have not welcomed such initiatives from Russia. As far as Turkmenistan is concern, it has adopted a policy of neutrality in the ‘New Great Game’ and thus has not joined any kind of collective organisations especially related to military and security. Whereas Azerbaijan has not joined any economic and military organisations initiated by Russia. The reasons behind Azerbaijan approach is mainly due to

Armenia's receptive membership or observer status in the SCO and CSTO. However, in 2010, Azerbaijan signed a deal worth about \$ 75 billion to purchase the 186'Uran-E' shipborne missile system from Russia. In addition, notwithstanding Russia's close relationship with Armenia in 2013, Russia sold weapons to Azerbaijan worth not less than US\$4 billion (Stegen and Kuszniir, 2015: 94).

Some observers claim that during the Caspian summit in Kazakhstan in 2018, Russia had approached Azerbaijan to pursue CSTO membership. Concerning the security of the region, the CSTO – a Russian led military alliance in Central Asia along with SCO has been working on a share common aim to prevent the Taliban from getting a foothold in the Caspian and especially in the Central Asian states. In October 2007, the CSTO and SCO signed a “Memorandum of Understanding (MoU),” and this has paved the way for military cooperation in Central Asia. Also, in 2005 and 2007, the SCO conducted large military exercises, known ‘Peace Mission.’ It focused not only on counterterrorism but also to show others (West) that Russia would not shy away from employing military means in the protection of its national interests. These drills were dominated by China and Russia, who are the main champions of the organisation (Marcel de Haas, 2010:43-44). In this context, Ali Huseynli, the head of the Azerbaijani-Russian Inter-Parliamentary Group, in an interview to Turan News Agency in 2018, stated that:

The statement in early 2016 by the Azerbaijani President concerning the Eurasian Economic Union probably stemmed from the issue of whether to belong to the CSTO. Now there is no other problem pushing Azerbaijan to become a member of this organization. Azerbaijan is conducting a balanced policy, trying to build relations with the West, Russia, and other countries. With this policy, joining a block is not really a matter of discussion. Remember that Azerbaijan used to belong to the CSTO. When this organization was created, it had nine members; later, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan left the organization. Sometimes, this structure reminds me of the CIS. When the Commonwealth was first created, many thought that joining meant a virtual loss of independence. However, later, it became clear that it was created to speed up the process of USSR disintegration. Eventually, even Moscow realized that the idea of turning the CIS into some kind of serious international organization, to create in it an extraordinary national structure to manage the republics previously represented in the USSR, had failed. Very interesting developments are also evident in the CSTO itself. Some members say that it is not a military bloc, but rather an international organization - a small regional form of the OSCE envisioning not only military security but also environmental, informational and other aspects of security. The U.S and NATO military bases operated in some cases in countries not allowed in the CSTO, for example, in Kyrgyzstan. Most CSTO member countries also operate in conflict regions as part of NATO-led peacekeeping forces. However, the CSTO cannot be called a military bloc, an alternative to

NATO. For example, after the Crimean events, none of the CSTO members supported the Crimea's accession to Russia; they did not officially accept it. Therefore, the fate of CSTO is still unknown. CSTO members Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan support close cooperation with the West. Nazarbayev's visit to the United States and the results of his trip clearly demonstrated this. Therefore, the CSTO's fate will repeat the fate of the CIS, and perhaps it will turn into a regional copy of the OSCE. Meanwhile, all this is speculation¹⁶.

This statement elicited a heated public discussion abroad about the potential membership of Azerbaijan in the CSTO. Due to its geopolitical location and economic potential, Moscow has been trying for Azerbaijan's involvement in the CSTO. However, due to remaining "Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," the future membership of Azerbaijan in the military organization seems impossible. In the context of the naval power, the Azerbaijan navy was formed since the country's independence. In June 2001, the U.S first delivered two patrol boats to Azerbaijan, and by the end of March 2002, Azerbaijan and the U.S signed a military agreement for modernization of the fleet. Under this agreement, the U.S provided US\$4.4 million to Baku. The deal stipulates cooperation in three main areas: "coastal security, peacekeeping and the up-gradation of Azerbaijani airfields to NATO standards" (Katik, 2004: 302).

Azerbaijan has become an important ally of the U.S and since 1990, has been a beneficiary of NATO training programs. Besides, the American has created a Centre for the Caspian Guard at Baku and also increased its aid to the Azerbaijani army. Moreover, joint military exercises have taken place in 2003, called the *GOPLAT*. However, these exercises incited violent criticism from Iran because it was conducted in the vicinity of Araz-Alov-Sharg deposits. Iran had evacuated the Azeri boats from this disputed area in 2001. In the meanwhile, Azerbaijan military cooperation with the West continued to grow. For instance, in 2005, Azerbaijan received five patrol boats from the U.S and Turkey. As a result, of a new understanding of Azerbaijani-American military cooperation, three more patrol boats were given to Baku in 2006 (Peyrouse, and Laruelle, 2009: 17-18). With military assistance, particularly from the U.S and Turkey, Azerbaijan has been modernising its fleet. Further, three of the airbases of the country, i.e. Nasosnaya, Qala, and Lenkoran, are located on the Caspian coast (Garibov, 2014: 51).

¹⁶ "Ali Huseynli, head of the Azerbaijani-Russian inter-parliamentary group (2018), *Azerbaijan: Balancing on the Verge of NATO-CSTO*, URL: <http://turan.az/ext/news/2018/8/free/Interview/en/74431.htm>".

In reference to Turkmenistan, of all the Caspian and Central Asian states, it was the last one to commission independent naval forces in the Sea. It has three Caspian ports, Turkmenbashi, Bekdash, and Cheleken. In 2008, Turkmenistan received three guided-missile patrols and three-guard ships equipped with remotely operated missiles from Russia and in 2009, two Sobol class patrol boats. Further, in 2010, Turkmenistan ordered for the ‘*Uran-E*’ naval missile; in 2011, bought two 12418 *Molniya* class missile corvettes, *Edermen* (Valiant) and *Gayratly* (Bold). In the context of the growing military ties between Turkmenistan, a Russia, In September 2012, Turkmenistan was able to conduct its first military exercise in the Caspian Sea (Goribov, 2014: 56-57). In the exercise, Turkmenistan showcased 30 battleships in the Caspian, which showed that its navy is larger than that of Kazakhstan (20 battleships) and almost equal to Azerbaijani naval strength (Shlapentokh, 2013: 157). Moreover, in 2017, when Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited Turkmenbashi, two ”Coast Guard patrol boats SG 111 *Arkadag* and SG 113 *Merdana*” were spotted for the first time¹⁷.

The effect of the changing military dynamic in the region because of the ‘New Great Game’ has its impact on Iran too. As a consequence, for several reasons, the Iranians have also started to build a strong navy as a deterrent. Of these, the appearance of the new naval powers in the Caspian Sea, ongoing disputes over oil fields and the maritime borders and the growing western influence are some of the major reasons. Since 2000, the Islamic Republic has begun to modernise its ports including, Bandar-e Torkman, Babolsar, Anzali and Nowshahr. In 1997, Iran first tried to modernise its C-802 anti-ship cruise missile with Hudong class fast-attack crafts (Katik, 2004: 298). Iran has approximately 3,000 personnel entrusted with taking control of more than 50 combat ships and support vessels, Sea aircrafts, the Marine Corps and also serving as coastal guard forces (Cordesman and Kleiber,2007:125). In 2012, Iran deployed domestically made destroyer Jamaran-2 in the Caspian Sea and also operated maritime mine laying and minesweeping exercises which gave a clear signal to enforce its claim of having control over 20% of the Caspian Sea (Harmer, 2013). According to Capt. Kirill Taranenko, the head of the Russian fleet “Iran and Russia are sharing a close military tie and will expand their maritime relations in the future and will also hold joint naval exercise.” In 2015, Russia delivered two Russian warships: the Volgodonsk and Makhachkala to the Anzali port of Iran

¹⁷ Naval Forces News – Turkmenistan, (2017), “Turkmenistan's Coast Guard Patrol Boat Spotted with SIMBAD-RC Short Range Naval Air Defence System, Accessed on 27 November 2018, URL: <http://www.navyrecognition.com/index.php/news/defence-news/2017/january-2017-navy-naval-forces-defense-industry-technology-maritime-security-global-news/4846-turkmenistan-s-coast-guard-patrol-boat-spotted-with-simbad-rc-short-range-naval-air-defence-system.html>

(Keck, 2015). As a matter of fact, “Iran is the second-largest navy after Russia in the region,” and both countries have been selling their weapons to Turkmenistan (Shlapentokh, 2013: 157).

The Russian President Dmitry Medvedev declared in 2011 that over US \$700 billion would be spent for modernisation of Russian's defense sector over the period of 2011-20. Strategically, the Caspian region gained more importance for Russia as it has become the launching pad for a series of missile attacks on targets in Syria. In this regard, the Russian newspaper Izvestiya reported, “the sea has been converted into a swimming pool with missiles” (Kucera, 2017). Meanwhile, there are signs of decreased tensions on the Caspian by visiting official visits. In April 2017, Iran made its first-ever naval visit to Kazakhstan with the aim to establish cooperation between the two navies to bring stability in the region, particularly in the Caspian Sea. In one of the many of the recent mock war games, that has taken place in the Caspian Sea. In July 2017, Russia, Iran, and Kazakhstan took part in the ‘Caspian Cup,’ a naval sporting competition organised by Russia, interestingly held at Azerbaijan’s coast in the Caspian Sea, Baku is notable because Azerbaijan is presumably the pole where Western powers have been exerting its influence in the Caspian region. In September 2017, Kazakhstan navy paid a visit to Iran, and both countries have agreed to increase their naval relations (Kucera, 2017). On the same day, on the other side of the Caspian, the Russian President Putin visited Turkmenistan, wherein both countries agreed to cooperate in the spheres of economic, political, scientific-educational, tourism, etc¹⁸.

Given its position of neutrality, Turkmenistan stayed out of from navy mutual cooperation and instead has focused on strengthening its own naval force. Thus, even after the Aktau convention, the militarization of the Caspian Sea will remain in the future due to disputed areas in the southern Caspian. Also, Azerbaijan shares close defense ties with the U.S as well as Israel, which automatically threaten the security of Iran because Iranian interests in the Caspian Sea are focused on security issues rather than economic.

Russia’s the Caspian Sea Flotilla

The Caspian Flotilla is meant for the defence of the southern border of Russia. It is stationed at Astrakhan. Thus, the flotilla’s role is to protect the Russian national interests in the Caspian Sea and also to deter terrorist activities, to keep the region stable and ensure the safety of the trade routes and oil fields. Peter the Great first established the first flotilla in 1722, and then it

¹⁸ TASS: Russian News Agency, (2017), “Putin arrives in Turkmenistan”, URL: <http://tass.com/politics/968435>

was comprised of several brigades and divisions of surface ships as well as units of coastal troops. The headquarters of the flotilla moved from Baku to Astrakhan in 1992. Initially, the Caspian flotilla was comprised of only two frigates, i.e., around 12 patrol boats and some smaller vessels equipped with if not redundant outdated technology. However, the whole picture changed when Putin came into power. One of his first priorities on taking power was to increase the numbers of troops in Russian armed forces, at the same time initiated a process to modernisation of the army by making them flexible, more affordable, and lastly trained them to fight low-intensity regional conflicts as well as high-intensity global wars. As a result, the Caspian Flotilla had been increased to around 20,000 troops by August 2001. More importantly, Russia also upgraded the flotilla with new technologies, which included patrol boats, radar picket ships, minesweepers, missile-landing hovercraft, auxiliary vessels, combat, and supply ships. Consequently, after revamping the flotilla, Moscow launched a large-scale military exercise in the northern Caspian Basin on 1 August 2001. Additionally, two new patrol boats, a PSKA-107 that “has a top speed of 37 knots and a Sokzhoy, which has 30 knots”, were respectively added in January and March 2002 (Haghayeghi, 2003: 37).

As a result of the measures undertaken under Putin, currently, Russia’s Caspian Flotilla has become the strongest fleet in the region. Russia has continued to increase its Caspian naval presence, and in the meantime, Iran and Turkmenistan have also been similarly strengthening their navy. At present, the Caspian Flotilla has been operating missile warships of the latest version such as twin sisters *Tatarstan*, *the Dagestan* (project 11661), small missile ships, the *Stupinets* missile boat, the *Veliky Ustyug*, *the Uglich*, *the Grad Sviyazhsk* corvettes (project 21631) armed with Caliber cruise missiles complexes¹⁹. According to the Russian Defence Ministry, Russia is planning to move its Caspian flotilla from Astrakhan to *Kaspisysk* (Republic of Dagestan) by 2020, and it will be Russia’s most technically advanced naval base. The Makhachkala, Astrakhan, and Volgodonsk are the small artillery ships of the Caspian Flotilla. It is reported that Russia will deploy “Bal-E coastal missile systems” (120 km range) in the Caspian to protect its coastlines. Sergei Mikheyev, a defence expert, points out the reasons for the increasing Russian military capabilities in the region, he stated that “the Caspian Sea is situated close to West Asia and directly borders with Central Asia. Therefore it is a valuable asset for the Russian military.” In fact, the Russian operation in Syria proved that the Caspian Sea is a convenient launching pad for cruise missiles (Kucera, 2017). In November 2015,

¹⁹ Ministry of Defence of the Russian Federation, “*Caspian Flotilla ship formation participates in several drills in the Caspian Sea*”, URL: <http://eng.mil.ru/en/structure/okruga/south/news/more.htm?id=12071116@egNews>

Russia displayed capabilities of Caliber missiles when Russia attacked terrorist targets in Syria from the Caspian Sea region. The launches also demonstrated the zone of effective destruction of the Caspian Flotilla; it can easily hit targets in the entire of the Central Asian region as well as West Asia. (Sudakov, 2017).

At the end of August 2018, the Caspian Flotilla tested a new strategic formation that combines aviation and coastal air defence groups to detect and neutralize low-flying missiles or planes in the Caspian Sea. This exercise was conducted just after the Caspian Five summit in Kazakhstan wherein the participants signed a “Convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea.” One of the key decisions made in this convention is that the Caspian states declared that entry of non-Caspian states in the Sea is prohibited, indicating the U.S and other members of the NATO are unwelcomed. Article 3, paragraph 6 and 7 of this convention states that:

the Caspian states explicitly call for the non-presence in the Caspian Sea of armed forces not belonging to the parties” and further “forbid the signatories from allowing their territory to be used by other States to commit aggression and undertake other military actions against any party.

(Aliyev, 2018)

Putin has described the convention as an example of successful collaboration in times of difficult global conditions. The main issue is the security for the littoral states, and it has been underlined that the focus on the Caspian eliminates the dangers coming from the hotbed of West Asia and Afghanistan. Putin further contends that “our country intends to strengthen in every way the interaction of our special services and border protection forces, as well as to intensify the foreign policy coordination.” Thus, the Convention did not only legitimise the Russian military occupation of the Caspian but also prevents external forces from gaining military presence in the area. Besides, the reasons cited above with regard to the increase Russian military presence in the Caspian, the Caspian Basin has been continuously used as a weapon test ground, as well as used as Russian military base. Meanwhile, given their very weak military footprints in the Caspian Basin, the littoral states continue to inspect the evolving balance of power in the region, mainly between Russia and the West (Ibid.).

The militarisation of the Caspian Sea and Extraction of Energy Resources: Impact on the Environment

For various reasons mentioned above and others to be discussed in this section, the security of the region, especially in the context of geo-politics has become fragile. For instance, there has been a growing concern about drug trafficking from Turkmenistan or Iran to Russia. Poaching

and illegal trade of Sturgeon creating enormous pressure on the already impoverished stocks due to overexploitation. The increasing numbers of oil tankers and pipelines might easily become terrorist targets. Lastly and more importantly, the growing intensity of the competition over the Caspian energy resources among the great powers is threatening to disturb the balance of the ecological system. Confronted with these large numbers of myriad issues, the Caspian states have been constantly reworking out their strategy. For instance, in 1990, the majority of the Caspian states were totally against the militarisation of the Caspian Sea. However, in the context of increasing military presence of external powers, this position has changed. Currently, they are convinced that there is a necessity of military supervision in their respective areas. For example, in 2002, Russia conducted military anti-poaching combats and anti-terrorist exercises in the Caspian Sea. Iran has viewed the Russian exercises as a demonstration of Russian naval superiority in the region. In 2003, the United States also initiated a training program known as the Caspian Guard, for special police forces of the Caspian and the network of, which will enable a rapid and effective response to emergencies especially against terrorist threats on oil fields. The ultimate aim of this ambitious program is to establish a unified rule of air, sea, and border control. (Peyrouse, and Laruelle, 2009: 17-18).

The period 2006-2007 marks a new phase of the military history of Central Asian countries because their military budget increased by more than 50%. As mentioned above, the changing international environment has also triggered the idea of forming a Caspian fleet – particularly in the context of the U.S declaring that the Caspian region is a zone of its vital strategic interests. Consequently, the U.S started to provide aid to Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. The growing presence of NATO has provoked the two historical powers of the Caspian, i.e., Russia and Iran, have been opposing the U.S military presence. In such a scenario, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan have also begun to develop their national navy so as not to be outplayed in the power struggle of the region. As evident from the reasons discussed above, the militarisation of the Caspian Sea has been affected by multiple competitive strategies between the U.S and Iran, as well as between the U.S and Russia. Lastly, China has also entered the ‘New Great Game’ in order to counter the increasing western influence in the region (Ibid).

Out of all the reasons for the unstable security of the region, the dispute over the energy resources, in the long run, could become the most volatile. But in the short run, the power rivalry has had an adverse impact on the environment, which in all likelihood in the future could become even more worse. The superpowers had been enticing the littoral states with

economic, political as well as security assistance, which in turn has affected the domestic and government policies of the littoral countries. Currently, the 'New Great Game', has been more about building pipelines in order to direct the transportation of oil and gas from the region to their respective storage point or market the superpowers control mainly Russia and the U.S. Currently, most of the oil and gas pipelines are operational from north to south and east to west. Till now, the environmental hazard of the energy economy has been mainly caused by pipelines split/ruptures, which releases rust and mainly the oil into the soil and water, thus polluting the environment. On numerous occasion, the pipelines have ruptured though they are fixed but not always properly. Therefore, oil leaks and spills are not rare in the Caspian region. For instance, in September 2003, near Sozram, 700 km east of Moscow, a tanker caught fire and oil leaked into the Volga River (Hays, 2008). Also, two Caspian pipelines (one oil, one gas) ruptured and leaked in September 2013, which start from Kazakhstan's offshore Kashagan site (Pannier, 2018).

Pipelines from the new oil fields of Central Asia that runs through the Black Sea and to the European markets as well as the ones that connects the Eastern markets have affected the environment of the region. For instance, in Kazakhstan, a thick layer of oil has polluted groundwater and soil, approximately covering around 600,000 hectares of land. The Kazakh government estimated that "2.8 million cubic meters of toxic 'sour gas' had been flared off, causing the local air and water to turn acidic" (Chatterjee: 2014). Besides, Greenpeace estimates that every year, the Russian pipeline system leaks at least 15 million tons of crude oil. (Hays,2008).

Putin's Policies towards the Caspian Region

Vladimir Putin has completed three terms as the President of Russia (2000-2004, 2004-2008, and 2012-2018). Currently, he is on the fourth term from which started from May 2018 to present as President of Russia. Before becoming the President, after Yeltsin resignation, he took up the role of acting President during the period (1999-2000). Under Putin's Presidency, Russia has been pursuing a markedly aggressive policy. It became more proactive in the Caspian region. Several factors have influenced the Putin's policy with regard to the Caspian region. Putin has been using soft and hard power in terms of economic, military, and cultural levers to protect and also promote Russia's hegemonic role in the region. Unlike the former Russian President Yeltsin's 'oligarchic capitalism,' Putin has adopted a more diplomatic, multilateral approach to the region and has emphasised on economic development and national

security. With regard to combating international terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism and to control the narcotics trade by improving border security, he has sought for cooperation of the Caspian and the Central Asian states²⁰.

The Yeltsin Presidential era (1991-1999) marked political, economic, and social chaos in the country. Boris Yeltsin was elected as the President of Russia in the first democratic elections that took place after the disintegration of USSR; he served from 1991 to 1999. His rise to the highest position of power in the Federation of Russia could be accredited as an outcome of Perestroika reform policy initiated by Mikhail Gorbachev – after initial support, Yeltsin emerged as one of the most influential political opponents of the reform citing it was restrictive, and he championed for full multi-party democracy. After becoming the President, he steadfastly transformed the socialist economy into a capitalist free-market economy, eliminated most price control, privatised the major state assets and legalised ownership of private property.

As a result of the sweeping changes, a large percentage of the national property and wealth has been cornered by a handful oligarchs. Consequently, unchecked accumulation of wealth did ruin the living standards of the many Russian populations, GDP decreased, hyperinflation increased, poverty, unemployment, corruption, and crime all went up. Besides, the situation of the Chechnya war was beyond the Russian control. Under such pressing circumstances, on December 31, 1999, Yeltsin suddenly announced his resignation and appointed Vladimir Putin as the new Prime Minister²¹. In the context of legacies of the Yeltsin era, the priorities of Putin's policy were; challenge the power of Russia's oligarch, the need to emphasise on the internal security, taking control of the increasingly terrorist ridden Chechnya and also at the same time to pursue rapid economic liberalisation. The Russian "oligarch" as a new class emerged after the disintegration of USSR. In order to contain the negative impact of the oligarch Putin decided to hold a meeting with twenty-one oligarchs in July 2000 in the Kremlin and in the meeting he sent out his message "you stay out of politics, and I will not revise the results of privatization." (Varol, 2013: 76).

In effect, Putin discarded the approach of Yeltsin's foreign policy and prioritized to build strategic relations with the Western countries, though not at the cost of major Russia's national interests. Thus, Putin approach has emphasised on maintaining an independent and also at the

²⁰ [History.com Editors, \(2009\), "Boris Yeltsin", A & E Television Networks, \(online web\) Accessed on 22 November 2017, URL: https://www.history.com/topics/russia/boris-yeltsin](https://www.history.com/topics/russia/boris-yeltsin)

²¹ ["Encyclopædia Britannica, "Boris Yeltsin: President of Russia", \(online web\) Accessed on 22 Nov 2017, URL: https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boris-Yeltsin](https://www.britannica.com/biography/Boris-Yeltsin)

same time pursue an active multi-vector policy. After the 9/11 attack, Putin quickly pointed out that the rebels in Chechnya were connected to Osama bin Laden. Further, he opined that radical Muslim fundamentalism is a major threat to the West. Subsequently, he supported the U.S 'war on terror' campaign in Afghanistan. He held his position to support the American despite opposition from Russia's Security Council and thus approved the entry of American troops in Central Asia. (Varol, 2013: 71). During his speech in Bundestag in 2002, he insisted that

Russia's destiny is a European one, and this was borne out later when a fundamental choice had to be made between the European and the American versions of the West during the Iraq crisis of 2003. (Sakwa, 2004 quoted in Varol, 2013: 71-72).

Putin had adopted a much stronger foreign policy, emphasising Russia's interest in the Caucasus and the Caspian region. As in June 1993, Moscow-supported a coup against Azerbaijan's President, Abulfaz Elchibey who withdrew Azerbaijan from the CIS and advocated building close ties with the West and Turkey for political as well as economic support. Under him, Azerbaijan also rejected Russia's efforts to solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict (Kubicek, 2004). Hence, in 2001, Putin paid a visit to Baku (the first-ever by a Russian President), signed an important deal to resolve the disputes which have become deadlocked, even though Putin was not able to resolve the problem the deal highly strengthened Russia's regional profile (Pavel: 2001: 96). Thus, Baku signed a declaration with the Russian dominated "Commonwealth of Independent of States (CIS)" in early 2001. This meant that Baku officially accepted Russia's dominance on the region, including the Caspian, and thus, Putin had a vital victory to reinforce Russian influence in the region (Bardakçi, 2003:13).

From Putin's perspective, the key achievement of the deal with Azerbaijan was on the "legal status of the Caspian" in 2001. In the meanwhile, Russia continued to engage in negotiations with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan on the U.S.e of oil and gas pipeline across Russian territory to transport their energy resources to the world market. Moreover, Russia has been strengthening consultations with Central Asian states and South Caucasus (Armenia and Azerbaijan) and also with Iran on the issues of bilateral and multilateral cooperation on security. As mentioned earlier, under Putin, Russia became very concerned in terms of security and advocated that it is always willing to cooperate with partners, which are usually reluctant. For example, the CSTO and NATO are two military blocks in Central Asia, but they do not talk to each other. (Kazantsev, 2009: 1078). Moreover, the character and situation of the

Central Asian countries are very complicated, for instance, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan are simultaneously members of the CSTO, and at the same time, they are also cooperating with NATO.

In the second term of Putin, anti-American sentiments in Russia gathered momentum because the U.S supported 'Orange Revolution.' Since the end of the Cold War, this event could be considered as a landmark in the renewed competition between the two big powers in world politics. Some experts considered Putin's February 2007 speech in Munich, as the start of "New Cold War." The act of supporting the 'Orange Revolution' was perceived by Russia as an attempt of the U.S to get access to natural resources in Caspian and Central Asian region by promoting the "slogan of democracy." In other words, the U.S is seeking to reinforce the 'status quo' or to put it otherwise to 'construct a unipolar world' through enlargement of NATO, deployment of U.S defense missiles in Central Europe and unilateral intervention on the pretext of promoting democracy. The speech was an implicit warning to the U.S as "don't try to become one boss, one sovereign and it should stop interference in the Russian domestic politics." Significantly, the Munich speech indicates that the Russian foreign policy has entered a new phase. Putin is one of the foremost advocates of the necessity of multi-polar world order. In the economic front, during Putin's presidency (2000-2008), the Russian GDP grew at the rate of around 7%. (Varol, 2013:75).

Putin apparently assured them that with economic progress and growth, Russia would be able to reclaim its warranted position in world politics. Putin emphasised the necessity to integrate with Western institutions as the only way to achieve economic growth. Consequently, he launched new market reforms and opened the economy for global competition and while trying to get a membership in the WTO. In an article authored by himself, Putin has argued that:

Without [integration into international economic structures], we simply can't raise ourselves to the level of economic and social progress, which developed countries have achieved. . . . Only this path, as experience the world over shows, opens a real perspective for dynamic economic growth and improvement in the quality of life. There is no alternative to it. (Wong, J., 2009 quoted in Varol, 2013:.70).

After the 18 years of start-stop negotiations, Russia joined the WTO on 12 August 2012 and became 156th member country. This accession will play a vital role in enhancing trade between EU- Russia. In this context, EU Trade Commissioner Karel De Gucht said that

Today's WTO accession is a major step for Russia's further integration into the world. It will facilitate investment and trade, help to accelerate the modernisation of the Russian economy, and

offer plenty of business opportunities for both Russian and European companies. I trust that Russia will meet the international trading rules and standards to which it has committed. (European Commission, 2012: 1).

Apart from this, some critics argue that becoming a member of the WTO is not an end in itself, but Russia would need to make efforts to integrate into the system of fixed rules, which governs business practices around the world, and implement the rules and keep up with its market access commitments. It directly benefits the U.S. economic interests. A sharp turn in the Russian foreign policy took place, which is also considered as the first sign of the emergence of “new Putin Doctrine” is the annexation of Crimea. After this event, he highlighted seven main points of his doctrine, according to Vladimir Ryzhkov, former State Duma deputy, these are the following; (Ryzhkov, 2014)

- i. “Russia no longer views the West as a credible partner. He believes that the West dismissed his legitimate complaints against U.S. unilateralism and double standards that he articulated in his 2007 Munich speech. Despite claims that the Cold War has ended, the West continues to pursue a Cold War-like containment policy against Russia. In reality, the West’s policy has been to lie to Russia, make decisions behind its back, and to try to weaken the country’s influence on the global arena. Russia feels that it has been not just robbed but plundered. From now on, Russia will be forced to base its actions on this harsh reality”. The new Putin Doctrine also apply to the post –Soviet space. Putin further said “Moscow has drawn its own red line: Russia will take action if any of the former Soviet republics, attempt to join NATO or the European Union or agree to host Western military bases on their territory. The Kremlin has a couple of tools to undermine any country that shifts too far to the West. It reserves the right to send in troops, install a government loyal to Moscow and hold a referendum, as it did in Crimea.” (Ryzhkov, 2014)
- ii. Russia had never viewed itself as a part of Europe and - much less as a Euro-Atlantic state. In fact, Russia believes that it is a country that follows a special type of democracy. Since the dismemberment of USSR in 1991 Russia has out rightly disapproved communist and “pseudo-democratic dogmas.” Interestingly, though it may appear questionable, more than 90 percent of Russians supported the annexation of Crimea, which means the act was legitimated. This fact indicates that Russia indeed is

a special type of democracy. The country does not believe in western imposed democracy and human rights

- iii. International law lost his credibility and no longer a system of rules. In such a scenario, every powerful state is free to choose whatever suits its interests. For example, to prevent rebellion in Chechnya, Moscow cited the international principle of maintaining regional integrity. But in the “case of annexing of Crimea, it referred to the fundamental right of self-determination.” So, this is the classical double standard of the U.S which is always criticized by Russia. But under Putin, “Russia has emerged a powerful country. Therefore, it has the right to criticize double standards of the U.S and its own sovereign democracy.”
- iv. The new Putin Doctrine is applicable in the whole territory of the post-soviet space except the three Baltic States that are NATO members. “Putin justifies the right to take care of this expansion on the basis of the ambiguous notion of the historical heritage of Russia” and the need to ensure the security of the country in its influence area.” The new Putin theory invites all the powerful states of the world to modify the rules of the game. In his 2012 article titled Russia Focus, Putin wrote that “Russia would not only follow but also shape the rules of the game in the world. Now we are looking at the strategy that is applicable in practice”.
- v. The chief Westphalian principle that maintains the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the state is now only applicable to the strongest countries that protect their borders against the armies of military forces such as its armies or NATO or collective security organization.
- vi. The weak especially failed sovereignty and integrity states become an open playground for strong countries and their blocks. States now fall into two countries; “big league, security and other guarantees for their members, and small leagues, with very little guarantee.” According to this logic, if a strong and powerful country believes that it's economic, political, military, and strategic are at risk. Then they feel free to take the initiative to intervene in the internal affairs of the weaker states and even started to seize parts of their territory.
- vii. International organizations such as “the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe and the Council of Europe,” now play a very little role. For example, the U.S and its allies bypassed the rules and regulations of the UNSC to conduct numerous military operations over the past 20 years.

Therefore, “the New Putin Doctrine” emphasises on the creation of a new balance of power in the world. In this context, it could be noted that the overall military and economic influence of the West has dramatically declined and it continues to do so. Moreover, contemporary international politics has also witnessed the increase of Russian and Chinese influence in; Asia, Africa, and Latin America are coming under the influence. In fact, SCO, BRICS, and other regional and emerging powers want to reinforce this trend as this would presumably advance their interests (Ryzhkov, 2014). Thus, New Putin Doctrine is mainly stressed on the ‘multi-polarity concept. It invites all countries of the world to set new rules and regulations for a new game of the world while rejecting the U.S hegemony on international organizations.

Caspian is a Priority for Putin

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, virtual withdrawal from the Caspian Sea Basin, the Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan, and even many high ranking Russian officials looking towards the West for investment for the exploitation of the energy resources of the Caspian are tell-tale signs of a severely diminished status of Russia in the world politics. In December 1999, Putin was appointed as an acting President, in context of the above-mentioned event and conditions of the situation Putin saw the U.S as victorious and considered the prevailing conditions as a political and economic defeat of Russia. The U.S took the competition to the next level by supporting the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan Pipeline project that started in 2003 and was completed in 2005. The pipeline was meant to promote the littoral states by directly connecting the Caspian to the Western markets. Simultaneously, NATO was attracting them by providing comprehensive aid. To Putin, the completion of “Baku-Ceyhan pipeline” was a strategic and economic defeat for Russia. Incidentally, the pipeline was inaugurated right after the fiftieth-anniversary celebration of NATO and more importantly after the formal conclusion of tripartite military alliance among the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland – into a formidable military alliance. In this regard, “Andrei Urnov, head of the Foreign Ministry’s Caspian Working Group argues external powers are trying to weaken the Russian in the Caspian Basin” (Saivetz, 2000). Undoubtedly, the U.S was the target of these remarks, and Putin was gradually restoring Moscow’s great power status. For instance, Russia openly opposed the U.S agenda by claiming the Caspian is an inland lake. This implied without the consent of all five littoral states; no project could be operational in the Caspian. All in all, Putin succeeded in achieving most of the targets that could help in regaining Russia’s status in international politics.

Pipeline Politics in the Caspian Region

The term 'pipeline politics' describes two different but interconnected ideas. First, the term denotes the power struggle among various powers vying to gain control over the energy resources of the Caspian region. Secondly, though the Caspian region possesses huge hydrocarbon resources, but the littoral neither has the required modern technology nor the investment needed for extraction and exploitation. Thereby, the terms also denote the competition among the littoral states in attracting external investment be it Western or Russian. Additionally, the region is strategically located between Iran, Turkey, Russia, and China, with no direct access to global waterways. Thereby making the littoral states dependent on transportation routes controlled by external powers to export the oil and gas. Therefore, the term also denotes the dependence of the Caspian bordering states on Russian and Western oil companies which on many occasions have been used in putting them under duress to sale their energy resources at throwaway prices. In this regard, some scholars argue that this game has no end. *Izvestia*, the Russian newspaper points out that "the most important factors of geopolitical influence will be controlled over pipelines in the Transcaucasus and Central Asia in the next century."(Shujaat, 2015:30).

The competition for multiple pipeline routes from Caspian Basin has become the key foreign policy issue of all the major parties involved in the energy economy. Therefore, external powers have sought to increase their engagement with the littoral states. Evidently, Russia has been increasing its influence over the Caucasus and deepening its relations with Armenia and Iran. Turkey has become cautious with the emerging geostrategic competition between the U.S and Russia in the Caucasus and the Caspian region. Geo-strategically, so far, Turkey continues to play an indispensable role in exporting the oil and gas to the European markets. Understandably, Turkey plans to diversify its pipeline infrastructure as per the increased in energy demand. Given this, the U.S and Turkey are strategic partners in the unfolding 'pipeline politics' in the region. Further, Azerbaijan and Turkey also share cultural and political ties, which in turn create its own synergy of cooperation in pipeline politics. Whereas Georgia views Turkey as a crucial partner, who will help the Georgian to become a member of the EU and NATO. Nevertheless, Turkey, despite being closer to the West, relies on Russia with transportation of around two-thirds of its natural gas. Given this dependence on Russia, Turkey surprisingly on the grounds of security, safety, and environmental considerations, has at times has sidelined their pipeline projects (Tavana et al., 2012: 351). There are five routes under consideration to move Caspian oil out of the area which are following (Ibid) :

- Northern Route (N)
- Southern Route (S)
- Western Route (W)
- Eastern Route (E)
- South-eastern Route (SE)

The Northern Route

Russia, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan advocate the Northern Route; this route will criss-cross the Black Sea. Russia dominates around 30% of the shoreline of the northern Caspian Sea. Russian foreign policy has seemingly given precedence to geopolitics more than to economic considerations. Russia has always sacrificed commercial interests to achieve political benefits. Unquestionably, energy and pipeline policy are key elements of Russian foreign policy, and its future will depend on mutual consensus with European countries (Tavana. et al.:2012: 351). The “Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) is a major international crude oil transportation project” (1,700 km long) which begun in February 2000 and was completed in summer 2001. The CPC is the main export route for Kazakh oil, and Chevron had signed agreements with the Soviet over the Tengiz oil field in the late 1980s, and the deals remain valid till date. The CPC initially created through a cooperation among the government of “Russia, Kazakhstan, and Oman, later international oil/gas companies such as Chevron, Rosneft, Lukoil, Royal Dutch Shell, Mobil, and BP became a part of the CPC.” (Henriksen,2013: 73). This pipeline transports Caspian oil from Tengiz and Karachaganak fields (Kazakhstan) to Novorossiysk on Russia’s Black Sea coast. This route is very important for Kazakhstan, and it is viewed as a national priority. During the SCO summit in June 2002, Kazakh President, Nazarbayev and the Russian President, Putin signed a 15-year contract that stipulates the modalities on the export of Kazakh oil via Russia (Nygren, 2007: 173).

The CPC is the main export route for Kazakh oil, and Chevron had signed agreements with the Soviet over the Tengiz oil field in the late 1980s, and the agreements remain effective till date. Currently, Russia owns 24 % of the shareholding in the CPC, followed by Kazakhstan with 19% and Oman with 7%, the rest is split among the private international companies mentioned above (Daly, 2008). Russia has the largest share and thus is the most benefitted shareholders. In 2013, the CPC pipeline transported an average of 706,000 b/d from Atyrau, Kazakhstan, to Novorossiysk (Chevron New: Expansion boosts Caspian pipeline export capacity).

Map 3.2 Caspian oil and gas pipelines



Source: “U.S Energy Information Administration, (2013), “Caspian countries are developing new oil and natural gas export capacity,” Accessed on 19 December 2018, URL: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=12931>”

During 2004-2005, the CPC pipeline expansion was planned, and the shareholders approved it in 2010. Nevertheless, “the section of the CPC pipeline, that connect the Sangachal Terminal near Baku with the Novorossiysk terminal at the Black Sea coast in Russia,” has come under threat due to the uprising in Chechnya seeking independence from Russia. Another transit route through Russian territory is the “Baku- Novorossiysk Oil Pipeline” which was concluded between Transneft, Russian company and SOCAR, Azerbaijan’s state energy company. After the second Chechnya war, Transneft bypassed Chechnya. Besides, “the Atyrau-Samara Pipeline” is one of the major oil pipelines of Kazakhstan, which runs from Atyrau to Samara (Volga region) and Transneft Russian Oil Company operates it. Until the BTC became operational, Kazakhstan has to export almost all oil through this pipeline. Transneft’s head Nikolai Tokarev points out that since the operationalisation of the supply line that starts from

the Kashagan oil field, Kazakhstan's oil exports has increased "from 2 million tons to 17 million tons in 2017 through the Atyrau-Samara pipeline"²².

The Western Route

The Western route is preferred by the U.S, which passes through Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Turkey. Major oil production comes from the giant Azeri- Chirag -Gunashli (ACG) fields located in Baku. The "Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC)" constructed during the Clinton Administration could be considered as It is one of the largest pipelines which is and politically and economically most vital for Turkey, the U.S, EU, and Caspian states. The execution of this project started in 2002, at the cost of about 4 billion USD, and the pipeline was officially inaugurated on 13 July 2006 (Misiagiewicz, 2012: 71).

The 1,768 kilometers long BTC pipeline transports oil from 'the Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (ACG) and Shah Deniz that passes through Georgian territory to the Ceyhan marine terminal on the Turkish Mediterranean coast. It crisscrosses through "443 km in Azerbaijan, 249 km across Georgia and 1,076 km further through Turkey to the Ceyhan". As mentioned above, the BTC has reduced the dependence on Russian pipeline, and a significant percentage of Kazakh oil is currently transported through the BTC pipeline²³. In 2006, Kazakhstan agreed to channel 53 million barrels, which in due course would reach 175 million barrels per year that would meet the expected profit margins of the BTC investors. It must be noted here that the BTC was a result of the cooperation between many international companies such as Unocal, ConocoPhillips (US), BP (Britain), SOCAR (Azerbaijan), TPAP (Turkey), Itochu and INPEX (Japan) and Statoil (Norway) (Misiagiewicz, 2012: 71). However, the BTC pipeline is under threat of being made redundant, in context of an ongoing dispute over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which has become an issue of national security for both the countries since its independence. Not only this, Georgia's internal problems of emergence of separatists groups also a prospective threat that could disturb the normal functioning of the BTC pipeline. For example, in 2004, the Azeri separatists successfully blocked the Georgian port of Batumi that caused a temporary hold on transportation of Azerbaijani oil onto the Black

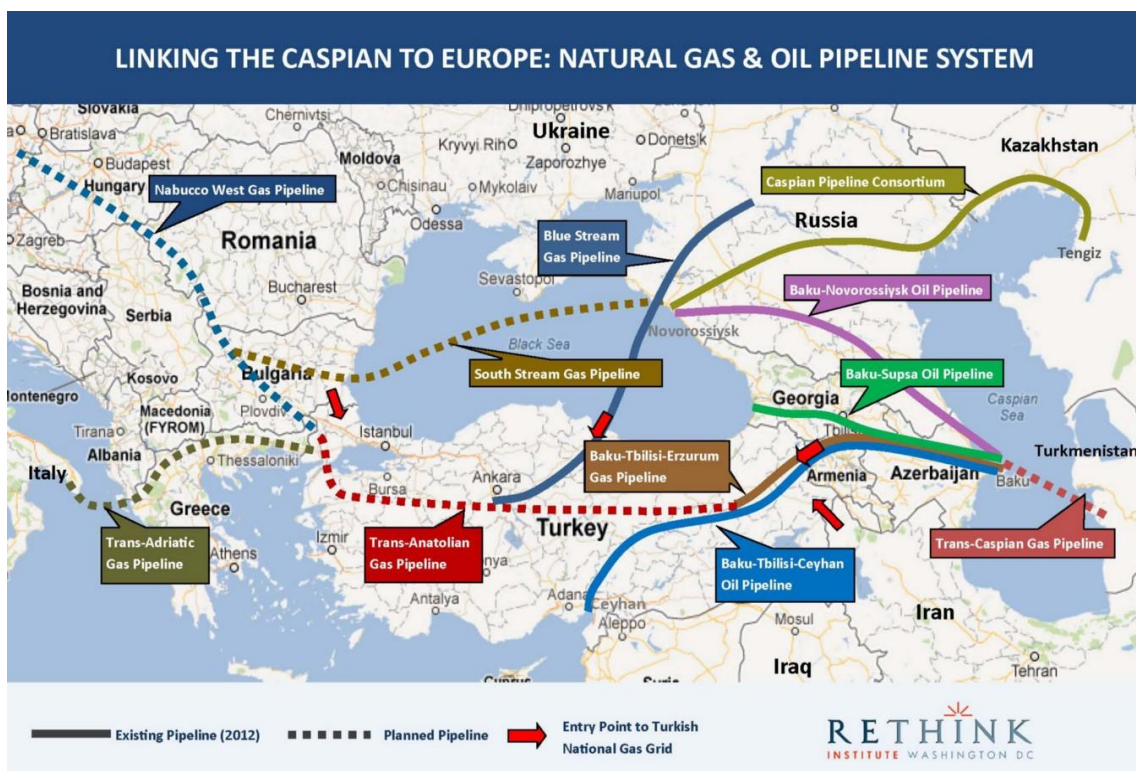
²² "Reuters (2016), "UPDATE 1-Transneft says transit of Kazakh oil via Atyrau-Samara could reach 17 mln t in 2017", (online web) Accessed on 18 May 2018, URL: www.reuters.com/article/russia-transneft/update-1-transneft-says-transit-of-kazakh-oil-via-atyrau-samara-could-reach-17-mln-t-in-2017-idUSL8N1BX2OE"

²³ BP Azerbaijan: Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, (online web) Accessed on 18 June 2018 URL: https://www.bp.com/en_az/caspian/operationsprojects/pipelines/BTC.html

Sea. Additionally, Kurds, a large majority of the population in Turkey who are fighting for independence are also posing a threat to the pipeline.

Another project, the “South Caucasus Gas pipeline,” is a natural gas pipeline known by different names such as “Shah-Deniz pipeline and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum pipeline” (BTE). The construction of this pipeline started in 2004, and it became operational since 2006. This pipeline connects the Shah-Deniz and Azeri-Chirag- Gunashli gas fields to Georgia, and then it leads up to Turkey. It started in 2004 and is operational since 2006. (Nygren, B. 2007: 172). The BTE pipeline runs parallel to the BTC pipeline, with approximately 250 million cubic meters capacity per year (Misiagiewicz, 2012: 72).

Map 3.3



Source: Orenero, J. (2017), “EBRD to lend \$500m for Azerbaijan gas pipeline, accessed on 17 May 2018 URL: <https://medium.com/@Oillywood/ebrd-to-lend-500m-for-azerbaijan-gas-pipeline-5ebb3672acd4>”

Furthermore, the “Trans-Caspian Gas (TCG) pipeline is a part of the pipeline network of the Southern Corridor.” This pipeline is a proposed subsea pipeline, which starts from Turkmenistan’s central Karakumi gas fields and goes to Azerbaijan. The EU initiated this pipeline project after the Ukraine–Russian gas crisis. The purpose of this pipeline is to counter the Russian monopoly over energy export routes. Thus, this pipeline will transport Turkmen

gas to European markets through Turkey bypassing both Russia and Iran. In other words, practically, the TCG pipeline will deliver the Central Asian gas to Azerbaijan through the South Caucasus pipeline and will also deliver gas from Azerbaijan to Turkey (Mitrova, 2007: 69). Russia paused this project on the bases of environmental concerns. In this regard, Putin has recalled the legal aspects around the Caspian Sea and warned that any decision made by the European Union on the Trans-Caspian pipeline as well as in the vicinity of the Caspian Sea would not be accepted without the consensus of Caspian five states (CESD, 2012:1). Furthermore, Russian Prime Minister Medvedev warned in 2011 “any construction of pipeline planned by Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan and supported by EU, will not be acceptable until the legal status of the Sea is resolved by five littoral states of the Caspian” (German, 2014: 22). Article 14 of the

Convention of the Caspian Sea 2018, clearly states; the Parties may lay trunk submarine pipelines on the bed of the Caspian Sea, on the condition that their projects comply with environmental standards and requirements embodied in the international agreements to which they are parties, including the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea and its relevant protocols²⁴.

Conditionally, this convention put restrictions on the implementation of any project without the consent of all the Caspian state. For example, if any two or three country plans to build a pipeline, then this has to be duly informed to the neighboring Caspian states with complete information about the projects. In case such a move is initiated by one or the other party, the interested parties have to provide their positive and negative suggestions or recommendations about the project within 180 days. Thus, mandatory consultations have also been envisaged to meet the final criteria of the project. In short, in theory, these conditional ties could be subjected to political hurdles and can create problems in the implementation of the pipeline (Pritchins, 2018).

Another route, the “*Baku-Supsa Pipeline* also known as the “*Western Route Export Pipeline*, goes from the Sangachal terminal near Baku to the Georgian port of Supsa and then to the Western market.” Azerbaijan International Oil Consortium and BP operate this pipeline. In August 2008, this pipeline was closed due to military activities in Georgia, but it reopened in

²⁴ President of Russia (2018), “convention on the legal status of the Caspian Sea”, accessed on 18 February 2019, URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5328>

November 2008²⁵. However, pro-Russian separatists of South Ossetia controls a mile-long stretch of the Baku-Supsa pipeline. These projects aim to reduce transit dependency on Russia. Thus on the bases of above-cited reasons, Moradi, M. (2006) points out that the nature of the international economy is essentially political and follows the logic of “who gets what, when and how,” a concept developed by David Easton with regard to the definition of politics. For example, the construction of the BTC pipeline is seen as more political than economic. Instead of taking the cheapest, shortest, and safest export route through Iran, an expensive route was constructed from Azerbaijan to Turkey that bypasses both Russia and Iran. This clearly shows that the U.S also wants to have its monopoly over the BTC and thus enhance its position in the region. (Moradi, 2006)

Also, the Russian supported “*Blue Stream Gas Pipeline*” which overshadows the American pipeline strategy in the Caucasus and Central Asia as a whole.” This pipeline will transport natural gas directly from Russia to Turkey across the Black Sea, bypassing third countries. In this regard, Sergei Lavrov, Russian Foreign Minister in 2008 stated that “the Blue Stream project is already operational and economically more effective,” while the Nabucco pipeline which connects Turkey and Austria is an ‘artificial project’ (German, 2014: 21). The Nabucco Gas Pipeline (1,300 km long), is one of the more important projects of EU’s gas supply security strategy (Endicott, 2009: 6). Bypassing Russia, it was supposedly meant to transport gas from the Caspian Sea to Europe. However, the project has not taken off, and the Turkish Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan has expressed his concern on 30 Jan. 2010, that “the EU has dealt seriously the Nabucco project which needs 30 billion cubic meters of natural gas every year. But there is no gas, no pipeline” (Benke, 2010: 35). However, this project was completely aborted in 2013, and this event was marked as a victory for Russia. Given the facts mentioned above, it has become evidently clear that the competition to control over the energy resources of the Caspian Sea will largely determine the outcome of the “New Great Game,” more specifically the future prospects of the United States, Turkey, Russia, and EU.

The Southern Route or Iranian Route

The southern route runs through Iran, and it then connects the Persian Gulf and this route, by all means, is no doubt the cheapest, shortest, and most environmentally safest route for exportation energy resources from the Caspian Sea. From the Persian Gulf, both the Asian and

²⁵ Hydrocarbon Technology: *Supsa Terminal and Pipeline, Georgia*, (online web) Accessed on 17 March 2017, URL: <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/supsa/>

European markets can be effectively served. On top of this, Iran contains “the second-largest natural gas reserves of the world.” It strategically located between West Asia and the Caspian Sea. However, energy resources that are located in the Iranian territories of the Caspian Basin remain unexplored and underdeveloped. Rather security has been the primary interest of Iran, particularly the security of its northern border in the Caspian that requires stability in Central Asia. Meanwhile, Iran has focused on normalizing its relations with the EU, China, and Japan. At the same time, Iran has been exploring options to transport its natural gas to Europe through Turkey’s pipeline network. (Tavana, et al., 2012: 352).

The U.S economic sanctions have weakened Iran’s oil sector Iran has also focused on the construction of the 1,880 km long, “Iran –Pakistan Gas pipeline,” which will run from the South Pars fields of Iran to Baluchistan and to Sindh provinces in Pakistan. This project was originally proposed in 1990 and included 600 km extension to India. However, in 2009, India withdrew from this project due to security and gas price concerns. In 2013, Iran’s Tadbir Energy Costar and Pakistan’s Inter-State Gas System signed an agreement to get going with the construction of the Pakistani segment of the pipeline. Currently, the construction of the Iranian section of the pipeline in has been completed; the Pakistani section is under process²⁶.

Another pipeline project known as the “*Iran-Turkey-Europe (ITE) Pipeline*” supposedly to be 5,000 km long is currently under construction. This pipeline would “transport natural gas from Iran to Europe passing through Turkey. The agreement on the project was signed in November 2008 between the Iranian Oil Ministry and the Turkish Ministry of Energy and Natural Resource”. The construction began in August 2013 (Bahgat, 2014). The carrying capacity of the pipeline would enable the transport of approximately 35 billion cubic meters annually to Europe. Despite the U.S opposition, Ankara is interested in the full utilisation of Tehran’s oil and gas resources²⁷. However, the international sanctions on Iran have been a serious concern in terms of how it will affect the quality of the infrastructure as well as the level of technical capacity to complete the pipeline project. Furthermore, the southern route is opposed by the U.S for political reason, and Azerbaijan remains cautious of Iran’s intentions. So far, Iran has always been provoked by Azerbaijan’s allies such as the U.S, Israel, and Turkey. (Amirahmadi, 2000: 166).

²⁶ “Hydrocarbons Technology: Iran-Pakistan Pipeline, (online web) Accessed on 1 Dec.2017, URL: <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/iran-pipeline/>”

²⁷ “Iran-Turkey-Europe gas pipeline project, (online web) Accessed on 1 Dec.2017, URL: <http://en.turangtransit.com.tr/overview>”

The Eastern Route

The eastern routes include Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are rich in energy reserves while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have few fuel deposits. The Central Asian states to the east share a 3700 km long border with China. In order to meet the ever-increasing demand of energy to sustain the robust economic growth, China has become the leading importer of Central Asia's hydrocarbon resources and also has been strengthening its presence in the Caspian energy market. Since the beginning of 2010, China has successfully gained access to the Caspian states, mainly Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, by building pipelines. The “*Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline*” built by a joint venture between KazMunaiGaz and the China National Petroleum Corporation” annually transports about 10 million oil to China, and the volume is set to be doubled in the future. In 2010, both the countries also agreed to build the second phase of the “*Kazakhstan-China gas pipeline*.” This pipeline became operational, and on 16 October 2017, it began to supply gas to China (Aliyeva, 2017). This pipeline is a section of a larger project, known as the “*Central Asia-China gas pipeline which directly connects Central Asia's natural gas reserves with China*.” The Central-Asia-China gas pipeline starts at Gedaim, which is located on the border of Uzbekistan/Turkmenistan and terminates at Horgos, in the Xinjiang province of China. This pipeline is sufficient to fulfill China's growing energy demand²⁸.

Apart from this joint venture, China is also cooperating with Turkmenistan in the energy field. For instance, in April 2006, the CNPC signed an agreement with Turkmenistan and as per the agreement Turkmenistan committed to supply natural gas to China for 30 Years. With this addition, around 30-bcm natural gas will be transported from Turkmenistan to China, starting from 2009 onwards (Misiagiewich, 2012:77). On 3 April, 2006, China and Turkmenistan arrived at an agreement to initiate the construction of a longstanding gas supply line (Kimmage, 2006).

In June 2007, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov visited China, and both the countries agreed to accelerate the implementation of the Turkmen- Chinese Gas Pipeline Project. Consequently, both the countries approved a gas export agreement and decided to expand this pipeline. As a result, the CNPC began the construction in August 2007. It runs from natural gas fields of, i.e. Tengiz, Karachaganak, and Kashgan respectively located in

²⁸ Hydrocarbons Technology: Central Asia-China gas pipeline: Turkmenistan to China, (online web), Accessed on 30 April 2017, URL: <https://www.hydrocarbons-technology.com/projects/centralasiachinagas/>”

Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan to China. Moreover, in April 2007, China and Uzbekistan also signed an agreement on the construction and exploitation of the Uzbekistan section of the pipeline. The whole pipeline was inaugurated during China’s President Hu Jintao’s visit to Turkmenistan in December 2009, wherein he also met with the leaders of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. On this occasion, he stated that “it will benefit all countries in the region. The whole world is watching us right now. The pipeline is a big win for China since it is Central Asia’s biggest export route that reaches markets outside Russia and bypasses its territory”. (Gurt, 2009).

Map 3.4



Source: “Farchy, J & Kyngé, J. (2016), “Map: Connecting central Asia: A ribbon of road, rail and energy projects to help increase trade.” (online web) Accessed on 18 May 2018, URL: <https://www.ft.com/content/ee5cf40a-15e5-11e6-9d98-00386a18e39d>”.

Currently, in the Caspian region, development of energy economy are ongoing in three major centers, i.e. Kazakhstan’s Tengiz oil fields, Azerbaijan’s oil fields and Turkmenistan’s natural gas fields. The fourth could be Iran, provided it expands the extraction and exploration of its Caspian Sea zones energy resources (Barylski, 1995: 226). What the Chinese have managed in securing the gas supply line is significant because the western route through the Caspian and the Black Sea might be problematic due to terminal capacity and environmental concerns. Besides, the transit quotas imposed by Russia restrict a northern route via Russia, whereas the

southern route via Iran is limited by the U.S economic and political sanctions. In this context, the eastern route is considered more reliable than other routes, and the Chinese are aiming to become a forerunner in the development of the eastern route. (Tavana, et al., 2012: 352).

The South-Eastern Route

This route goes through Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan. These countries signed a document to construct the “Central Asian Oil Pipeline.” This pipeline was meant to export oil to Pakistan via Afghanistan and then to be distributed to the world market. However, it has been unsuccessful due to ongoing instability in Afghanistan. Due to huge natural gas reserves as well as the landlocked location of Turkmenistan, energy-consuming countries have proposed to build a large number of pipelines mainly on the eastern as well as western sides. Despite the historical and cultural ties, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan have not been able to cooperate in the field of energy. The ongoing terrorist-related political instability has threatened and increased the uncertainties and thereby has hindered the development of oil and gas route in the region. Given this unfavourable context, China, the U.S, and the EU continue to support Pakistan to serve the role of an international trade corridor (Ibid).

Notwithstanding this, with a length of 1735 km, the “*Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI)*” is a natural gas pipeline, it starts from Galkynysh gas field, in Turkmenistan the runs through Afghanistan, into Pakistan, and then to India.” In December 2015, the construction work in the Turkmenistan section of the pipeline has started after the agreements among these states. This pipeline is scheduled to be completed by 2019 (Gidadhubli,2016). On completion of the project, India and Pakistan will be able to receive 1.325 bcf/d (billion cubic feet of gas per day), while Afghanistan also will get 0.5 bcf/d gas” (Bhutta, 2017). Thus, at present with the exception of Iran, these three countries (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan) have become the focal point of pipeline politics simply because the majority of the pipelines that directly connects to the world market originates from these states.

NATO and SCO: A Comparative Study

As discussed in the previous chapters, the Caspian Sea was an area of vital interest and for Britain and Russia in the ‘Age of the Empires’ and both countries fought an indirect war to gain control over the region. Currently, Russia and the U.S are the major actors in the Caspian region, competing in political, economic and military affairs mainly to secure the energy resources, which has come to be known as the “New Great Game.” Besides, various other regional and sub-regional states in the Caspian are also vying for similar aims. The Western

countries, through the expansion of NATO, have established a political, economic, and military presence in Central Asia and are thereby competing with Russia in the region.

The motive behind the eastward expansion of NATO and the effort of the Western countries in developing bilateral and multilateral ties with the Central Asian states through the 'Partnership for Peace Programs' have alarmed Russia and China. For instance, in 1997, the NATO-sponsored Partnership for Peace military exercises were conducted in Caspian. Moreover, Georgia and Azerbaijan have been seeking membership to NATO. These developments have aggravated the security situation, and Moscow has perceived the increased activities of the West in the region as an attempt to push out Russia from the Caspian as well as Central Asia. Nevertheless, Russia and China were ready to give all support to the U.S after the 9/11 terror attacks; The rationale behind is that Moscow and Beijing believed that Chechen and Uyghur separatists are allied with Al-Qaida, which means are connected to Osama bin Laden and the Taliban in Afghanistan (Ziegler, 2013: 491). The persistence of Uighur separatist movements in Xinjiang Province led to conflict like situation in 1990, 2009 and April 2013. The Chinese have taken the activities of the separatist groups as a threat to their interest in the region.

Given the exigencies of 'energy politics,' and the overall context of 'war on terror' the Central Asian Muslim countries and the Caspian states were soon absorbed in the U.S strategy to expand energy security. Similarly, the U.S has taken initiatives of gain control over the whole of Western Hemisphere, and Africa also by promoting its model of governance, i.e. liberal democratic states. Whereas, Russia, China, and Central Asian countries have relied more on authoritarian stability.

NATO and Caspian

NATO started with twelve founding members in 1949, after Montenegro joined in 2017, it has now 29 member states. Before the dismemberment of USSR, the whole region of Central Asia and also the Caspian region to a certain extent was inaccessible to the West because of the 'Iron Curtain.' However, after the disintegration of USSR, since the 1990s, this region again because of its location and availability of energy resources has attracted the Western countries. The West aims to establish a Eurasian energy corridor connecting Europe to Central Asia. NATO activities in this region clearly indicate that energy security has become a major concern in the 21st century. The West so far has employed support for democratic governance and market economy as a means to gain access into the region. Since 1994, through the Partnership for

Peace (PfP) framework, NATO has been cooperating with Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan (Grison, 2013: 90).

The aim of PfP program is to maintain the security and stability of the region by way of strengthening ties between NATO and its partners and also among the PfP states as well. Thus, NATO has been cooperating with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan on defense-related issues such as defense planning, defense reform, military-to-military cooperation in joint exercises and, training, disaster response, education, science, and environmental issues. However, Turkmenistan official position of neutrality has limited its relation with NATO. With Russia, NATO primarily cooperates in the war against international terrorism, drug trafficking, arms control and with matters related to non-proliferation of a nuclear weapon. With regard to NATO-led ongoing 'war on terror,' Azerbaijan has contributed soldiers to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission (Ibid). Through, ISAF in Afghanistan, NATO started to provide security assistance against the threat of international terrorism, from August 2003 to December 2014. ISAF was formed at the request of the Afghan authority under a UN mandate in 2001 to prevent terrorist activities in Afghanistan. Subsequently, the state security apparatus of Afghanistan were assisted, and a new Afghan security force has been created to stabilise the country (NATO, 2016:1).

In April 2008, at the Bucharest Summit, the Allied Heads of State declared, "NATO would contribute to energy security by engaging in information and intelligence sharing, projecting stability, advancing international and regional cooperation, supporting consequence management, and supporting critical energy infrastructure protection." NATO's new Strategic Concept 2010 has emphasised these commitment, and more specifically with regard to energy states that "NATO would develop the capacity to contribute to energy security, including protection of critical energy infrastructure and transit areas and lines, cooperation with partners, and consultations among Allies on the basis of strategic assessments and contingency planning". (Yetiv and Cunningham, 2012).

After the conception of this strategic goals, NATO PfP programs has been strengthening its cooperation and has initiated dialogue with its members on the prospective gains of cooperation in the field of energy security through the PfP program. Consequently, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have taken various steps to increase energy security. For example, in June 2009, the Euro-Atlantic Council Security Forum meeting took place in Astana wherein member countries stressed on the importance of energy security and also called for the resolution of the

crisis in Afghanistan (Grison, 2013: 91). Moreover, NATO has been conducting international and regional conferences, workshops, exercises, and events to build transnational professional networks. In this regard, official representatives of NATO and Azerbaijani experts have regularly been meeting to explore possibilities of collaboration in the field of security. For instance, with the support of NATO, Azerbaijan hosted a seminar in 2009 in Baku that discussed of the problems of how to ‘ensure energy security in the future and what should be the role NATO in protecting all the critical energy infrastructures in the Caspian Basin.’ NATO’s science (SPS) program for peace and security has been organising workshops to bring experts and policymakers together to discuss the “Euro-Atlantic energy security and supply” (Ibid, 92).

It must be pointed out that NATO’s energy security concept in all likelihood might not be successful without accommodating the Russian interests in the matter. For example, despite signing the PfP program document in June 1994, Russia has vehemently opposed the expansion and enlargement of NATO in the ‘Near Abroad.’ As mentioned earlier, after the 9/11, fight against terrorism, the proliferation of arms and drug trafficking are the major 91area of common interests between the U.S and Russia. In the context of the common interests, NATO and Russia organised two summits: Rome (May 2002) and Moscow (June 2002) wherein both officially came to an understanding to work together towards a cooperative security framework in the CIS countries. As a result, by the end of 2002, a mechanism known as the NATO-Russia Council (NRC) was created in order to facilitate cooperation and consultation between Russia and NATO member states on the issue of energy. However, in August 2008, because of Russia’s military action in Georgia, the NRC meetings were suspended, only to be resumed again in March 2009 (Yetiv, and Cunningham, 2012).

Notwithstanding the understanding made with NATO, during the fourth Caspian Summit in Astrakhan in September 2014, Russia along with four other littoral states signed a political declaration that rules out any external armed forces and only armed forces of the coastal countries should manage the affairs concerned with of the security and stability in the Caspian area. This declaration has effectively closed the door for NATO forces and other external forces from the region. Hassan Rouhani, the Iranian President has supported Russia on this issue, he declared, “there is a consensus among all the Caspian Sea littoral states that they are capable of maintaining the security of the Caspian Sea and military forces of no foreign country must enter the sea” (Dettoni, 2014). Nevertheless, energy security remains a significant issue for

NATO as it does determine the dynamics of the “New Great Game” and none of the parties involved are willing to be side-lined.

Given this context, so far, the initiatives taken by NATO to preserve security in the region has not succeeded, especially with regard to the Afghan Mission wherein not all its allies endorsed the military campaign. Interestingly, NATO intervened in Libya, but not in Syria, and this anomalies in the approach have been questioned. Undoubtedly, NATO played a crucial role in providing security to Europe and America during the cold war period (Curtin, 2013). In light of the anomalies in NATO’s approach, internal conflicts are seemingly brewing within NATO. For example, the British Parliament vetoed against bombing on Syria and; Germany and France had opposed the invasion of Iraq. Moreover, the Turkish Prime Minister, Recep Tayyip Erdogan has threatened to eschew its EU membership and shown interests in joining the SCO. In fact, notwithstanding its NATO membership, Turkey has been accepted by the SCO as a dialogue partner (Bo, 2017).

The unfolding competition in the realm of security in the region would only intensify in the future. For instance, the original Shanghai Five was formed in 2001 by China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, making it six when Uzbekistan joined. The rationale of the formation of this organisation was to counter NATO’s eastward expansion. On 9 June 2017, India and Pakistan joined and became a full member of SCO at its Astana meeting. The initial aim of the Shanghai Five was to resolve border issues among the members and defend the region from transnational security threats, economic-trade cooperation, and more importantly regional security cooperation against what the Chinese terms as the ‘three, i.e., terrorism, religion-based extremism, and separatism (Daling, 2015). With regard to the actual purpose of the SCO, there have been divergent views. For instance, Bo, Z. an honorary fellow of Centre of China-American Defence Relations, in his article that ‘SCO designed to address its own problems rather the external threats, unlike NATO.’ Further, he argues that initially, there was no cohesion within the group, and all members have no interests to oppose the West. On the other side, some analysts believe that the SCO is becoming anti-western, a rival to NATO and has been referred to as a “club of authoritarians” with a central goal to diminish the Western efforts of supporting democracy in the region. The SCO is also perceived as a strategic partnership to counter the unilateral approach of the U.S. In other words, a strategic move to create a multipolar world order. Nonetheless, any such agenda would mean the SCO member states have to work collectively to counter U.S political, economic, and military dominance in the world. With regard to Iran in 2005, it became an observer of SCO and in 2012; the SCO

member states welcomed the Iranian President Mahmud Ahmadinejad at the Beijing Summit wherein he condemned the U.S unilateral actions against Iraq and Syria. Among the SCO members, Russia and China are the two major powers, and both have been interested in expanding the SCO membership and its functions (Ziegler, 2013: 498).

Currently, there is a substantive difference between the U.S and the SCO member states about external intervention to spread democracy, especially in the Caspian and Central Asian region. However, on matters related to the prevention of terrorism and extremism from the Caucasus to South Asia, both do share a common interest. For instance, the Obama administration was very keen on engaging with Russia, China, and the Central Asian states in tackling the security problem created by the Taliban. Consequently, for the first-time senior officials from the U.S and NATO's Deputy Secretary-General Martin Howard attended the SCO meeting held in March 2009 in Moscow (Ibid, 498-500). Since attending the meeting, the U.S has gradually reduced the military contingent; the withdrawal was completed in 2016, leaving behind 8,400 troops to conduct drone assisted special operations. On September 18, 2017, James Mattis, U.S. Defense Secretary declared, "the United States will send 3,000 more troops to Afghanistan. The extra troops would bring the total number of US forces in Afghanistan to nearly 14,000. The extra troops are meant to bolster the Afghan military in its fight against the Taliban, al Qaeda, and the elements connected to the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria". (Mitchell, 2017).

Besides, the violent events in Kyrgyzstan in June 2010 and the Gorno-Badakhshan region of Tajikistan in July 2012 highlighted the inability and limitation of the SCO in addressing regional security issues. For example, Russian Foreign Minister Ivanov stated that "the key role of the SCO is to promote a multipolar world order," thereby hinting that the primary purpose of the organisation is to counter the growing influence of the U.S in the region. Countering this statement, his Chinese counterpart Li Zhaoxing in an article in 2004, reiterated that the "SCO is not against other countries but aims to promote China's modernization drive" (Hessbruegge, 2004: 4). Some scholars believed that the SCO in the region would balance NATO and OSCE. Given the divergence of views between the foreign ministers of both the countries, SCO/Chinese-Russian military exercises took place in 2005 (off the Chinese coast) and in Siberia and Xinjiang in 2007. This development) indicate that the SCO as per the changing dynamic in the 'New Great Game' might convert into a military organisation. In this regard, Moscow is presumably more concern with the SCO's military and security aspects while China interest is in developing trade and economic cooperation. The difference in the objective of China and Russia on the purpose of SCO has made Russia inclined more towards

the CSTO, which is seen as a potential security bulwark that could compete with NATO (Ziegler, 2013: 496- 497).

The CSTO has broken all connections with NATO on the occasion of the Ukrainian crisis in 2014. For instance, Baloch, T. (2016), argues that Russia is fighting SCO's war in Syria against the ISIS, because Afghanistan, Central Asian states, Pakistan and China's Xinjiang are the target of ISIS, which in turn can destabilise the region. Further, he even argues that the ISIS was created because of the U.S invasion in Iraq and now the same policy has been adopted in Afghanistan as a way to prevent regional integration by supporting the ISIS militants. NATO's presence and increasing influence of ISIS in Afghanistan pose a great threat to the SCO. In this context, Baloch T. affirms the theory that the SCO was established to counter NATO. For example, the creation of 'Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) among its member states of SCO (Baloch, T., 2016). This means through the SCO, Moscow, and Beijing are engaged in strategies against the U.S's intention of regional dominance in Central Asia. However, some critics argue that 'the SCO, by contrast, does not address external threats. Thus it is not directed against NATO.'

Leaving aside the debate on the actual purpose of SCO, it must be noted here that the U.S on the one views SCO as an unsuccessful regional organisation and on the other hand, at the same time the U.S has been struggling to become an observer of the SCO. The expansion of SCO, in fact, supports the Mackinder's 'heartland theory,' i.e., world-island, as the pivot will phase out the domination of the U.S over the world. One reason why China is half-heartedly interested in the security dimension of the SCO is that China has its own agenda of realising world domination. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, China is increasing its influence in Eurasia, West Asia, Latin America, and Africa. The aim of this project to 'promote regional connectivity. Some observers argue that sees it a tool of Chinese domination in world affairs as well as trading network.

Analysing the dimensions of the discussion above, it is clear that Russian policies in the Caspian Sea region are based on its national interests such as geopolitical interests, geo-strategic, economic, and ecological interests. To achieve these goals, Moscow strives to reinforce its standing in the global energy markets so that Russia could maximize gains out of the oil and gas sector of the Central Asian and the Caspian states. Strategically, the Caspian region gained more importance for Russia as it became the launching pad for a series of missile

attacks against targets in Syria. Nonetheless, since the collapse of the USSR, there has been a seeming competition among the littoral states to militarise the Caspian region, primarily to protect and promote specific national interests. In this backdrop, Russia under Putin has given priorities to the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus region. Under his leadership, Russia is emerged as a significant power at domestic as well as global level. Apart from, NATO and SCO have been engaging in the region in order to bring all states in their influence.

Chapter IV

The Legal Status of the Caspian Sea

Contrary to its name, the "Caspian Sea" fails to reveal its legal status today. A legal status aims to define the scope of sovereign power over a body of water. This lack of legal standing majorly hampers the economic growth of this area. Adding to it are the challenges of territorial demarcation and the rights to an exploration of hydrocarbon and shipping. It destabilizes the political situation and consequently reduces security in the Caspian area, which is the "largest enclosed water body on Earth." It has typical characteristics of both lakes and seas. Dividing the hydrocarbon resources as well as defining the legal status of the Caspian Sea is a difficult task in itself, leaving researchers with vast scope. In this context, experts have varying views; some of them described it as a "unique body of water" or the "largest inland on Earth," while others termed it as "semi-enclosed sea." The actual situation of the Caspian seems more political than a legal one. Until the split-up of the USSR in 1991, the whole of the Caspian region was under the control of the Soviet Union and Iran resulting in a series of bilateral treaties. These treaties aided in defining it as a lake and divide it equally. The Soviet Union had the de facto sovereignty of the Caspian region and complete naval dominance. Complications never arose because both Iran and the USSR had equal rights of navigation and fishery in the Caspian and no external power was allowed. Consequently, there was no question of delimiting the Caspian Sea. The Caspian Sea, perceived as "not-a-lake-not-a-sea" water basin, was divided accordingly between Persia and the USSR (Sotiriou, 2015:17).

After 1991, the riparian states of the Caspian region expanded from two to five: Russia, Iran, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan, which drastically transformed the geopolitical scenario of the region. Subsequently, the independent sovereign states started to claim their share and interests in the Caspian, leading to manifold problems. The now-independent states demanded sovereignty, jurisdiction, and legal rights to its natural resources. The Caspian Sea is vital for the littoral states both in economic and political terms. Economies of the Caspian states such as Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan are highly dependent on the Caspian's oil and gas resources. In fact, the economies of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan completely rely on the Caspian energy resource. Approximately 94% of Caspian energy resources contribute to the Kazakh economy, as mentioned in the second chapter. These resources play a significant role in their economic development as well as to resolve the ethnic issues ("Nagorno-Karabakh

between Azerbaijan and Armenia”). Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan share a strategic alliance with the West, especially in oil and gas fields. These countries signed multimillion dollars agreements with Western countries. Nevertheless, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (both landlocked countries) still rely on the Russian pipelines for their oil and gas export to the world markets.

The Caspian Sea is essential for Russia and Iran for political reasons. Both states already have oil and gas fields in their territories. For instance, Russia has substantial energy resources in Siberia, while Iran has oil fields in the Persian Gulf. It is very difficult for Iran to extract natural resources from the Caspian Sea. So Due to the challenging nature of extracting natural resources from the Caspian as well as to stop the entry of the U.S and NATO in the Caspian region Russia and Iran needs to cooperate to work together with each other through agreements. (Ramazanova, 2012:7), and this gives rise to a political quandary. In August 2011, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated, "Moscow and Tehran are antagonistic towards any external power and said that both parties had a similar stand on the legal status of the Caspian Sea." Furthermore, the Russian energy minister, Sergei Shmatko declared, "the environment and maritime resources are threatening due to European support for the construction of the pipeline under the Caspian Sea" (Kashfi, 2015).

Now a booming industry, the sturgeon fish stocks of the Caspian is globally renowned and available in abundance. At present, the commodity is continually decreasing due to an enormous rise in oil & gas drilling and construction of new pipelines across the Caspian. All these activities have been threatening the Sea ecosystem. Other challenges such as the ambiguity of the division of energy resources of the sea, drugs, fish poaching, illicit arms trafficking, illegal immigration, terrorism, extremism, and pollution have become widespread as well. Unfortunately, these act as a catalyst to maritime terrorism and piracy (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 35).

Russia started playing an active role in the Caspian Sea since the election of the Russian Federation President in March 2000. Recognizing its importance, Putin nominated Viktor Kaliuzhnyi as a special representative for the Caspian Sea legal status regulation. In July 2000, he visited Azerbaijan, Iran, and Turkmenistan to resolve the dispute of legal status of the Caspian (Abilov,2013:139). In 1996, during a meeting of five littoral states in Ashgabat, Yevgeny Primakov, Russian Foreign Minister, stated, “Moscow was willing to agree on jurisdiction areas of 45 nautical miles and recognize the rights of the littoral states to exploit

mineral resources in the sea where they claimed to be their national sectors” (Oglu Shafiev, 2001:3). However, the management of fisheries, navigational rights, and protection of the environment still require cooperation. Putin commenced negotiations with full throttle to maximize its economic growth. Hence, Moscow pushed Russian oil companies like Lukoil to make a deal with Caspian bordering state. Lukoil has been working in Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and other oil offshore of the Caspian Sea ever since.

Geographical Characteristics

Geographically, the Caspian Sea is “located between 36°34 and 47°13 N and 44°18 and 52° 24E” (Fuad, 2009:140). An S-shaped body of water, “the Caspian Sea, measures 1,200 km from north to south with an average width of 320 km (200 miles)”. The Caspian is the world’s largest inland sea situated between Central Asia and the Caucasus Mountains (Dekmejian and Simonian, 2001:19).

Figure 4.1: Main characteristics of the Caspian Sea (CEP, 2002)

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--------|-----------------------|------------|
| Surface area (km ²) | | 371,000 ²⁹ | |
| Volume (km ³) | | 78 100 | |
| Catchment area (km ²) | | 3 500 000 | |
| Coastline (km) | | 7 000 | |
| Length (km) | | 1 200 | |
| Width (min-max) (km) | | 196 - 435 | |
| Average depth (m) | North | 5 (max20) | |
| | Middle | 190 (max 790) | |
| | South | 330 (max 1025) | |
| Average surface temperature (C) | | Winter: 0 | Summer: 25 |
| | North | | |
| | | Winter: 10 | Summer: 26 |
| | Middle | | |
| Surface salinity | North | 0.1 | |
| | Middle | 10 | |
| | South | 13 | |

Source: Monakhov S., Postnov A., Ostrovskaya E., Kholina O. CASPCOM: regional co-operation in the Caspian Sea. Proceedings of the International Conference MEDCOAST 15 (06-10 October 2015, Varna, Bulgaria). MEDCOAST Foundation, 2015. Vol. 1.

²⁹ Dubner, 1999: 265

It is the “largest enclosed body of water on Earth, even larger than the Lake Victoria of East Africa and the American Great Lakes.” The length of its coastline is about 7,000km with a surface area of 371,000 km. The area of the “Caspian Sea is approximately 149,200 square miles (386,400 square km), and its surface lies 27 meters (90 feet) below sea level”. It covers the drainage basin for around 3,625,000 square km (1,400,000 square miles) (Dubner, 1999: 265). Major activities in this region are oil, gas production, and fishing. According to geomorphological and hydrological features, the Caspian Sea can be divided into the “North, Central, and South Caspian.” The northern part of the Caspian has the shallowest water, with an average depth of 4 to 5 meters. The Middle is more in-depth, with depths of about 190 meters, and the South is highly depressed with a depth of 1000 meters engulfing most of the water (Szalay, 2017).

At present, more than one thirty large rivers flow into the Caspian Sea, among them the Volga (the largest), Emba, Terek, Kura, Ural, Atrek and Samur supply approximately 90% freshwater. There is no flow in the eastern coast of Caspian. (Ghafouri, 2008:82). The Volga River supply around 80% water in the Caspian. The northern Caspian Sea is described as a freshwater lake, but it is saltier on the Iranian shore. The Caucasus and Elburz mountains border the southern and the south-western shores. Due to violent storms, navigation becomes savage in the southern parts. Concurrently, sheets of ice envelop the northern parts during winter. The principal ports are Makhachkala (Russia), Krasnovodsk (Turkmenistan) and Baku (Azerbaijan) (Ghafouri, 2008: 82). However, the littoral states have been under increasing environmental threat due to the rise in sea levels, assisted by oil, phenols, and ammonia. The five countries are located on the coastline of the Caspian Sea; as such, the shoreline of Russia (Dagestan, Astrakhan Oblast, and Kalmykia) is 695 km in the North-West and West. Kazakhstan is located with 2320 km in the East and North-East of the Caspian, Turkmenistan with 1200 km in the South-East, Azerbaijan with 955 km in the South-West and lastly, Iran with 724 km in the South (Center for Strategic Assessment and Forecasts, 2016).

The “Caspian became landlocked about 5.5 million years ago; hence its ecosystem is a closed basin”. It has no natural connection to any sea or oceans today. Rather, through the “Volga–Don Canal, it is connected to the Sea of Azov, the Black Sea, the Mediterranean, and the Atlantic” (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 9). Due to its geographical parameters, from a legal point of view, most experts and researchers describe that the Caspian Sea is a lake, not a sea. In this regard, the renowned French expert, Gilbert Gidel believed that “for the status of such water areas to be regulated by the international law of the sea, they must be freely and naturally

connected with each other all over the globe. In so doing, the saltwater basin called the Caspian Sea may be an entity of international relations since several political regimes share its coast; however, it is not automatically governed by the regulations of the international law of the sea since it is not connected to the oceans”, (Gidel, 1932: 40).

Historical Background of the Legal Status of the Caspian ‘Sea’

The legal history of the Caspian dates back thousands of years. The geographers such as Hecataeus, Herodotus, Aristotle, Milctskiy, Eratosthenes and others termed the Caspian Sea as “a closed basin or a bay of an ocean.” Forty different names throughout decades had known the Caspian Sea. These names were given to the Sea either by its coastal residents or were namesakes of provinces, cities or countries located in its littoral zone. For example, the Caspian Sea was named the Baku Sea after its largest port; the Abaskun Sea according to a coastal province of Abaskun; the Girkan Sea because of the state Girkaniya, and the Hazar Sea called by its northwest coast inhabitants. The Russians described the Caspian Sea as the Hvalinsk Sea due to people who lived in the mouth of the Volga River. Moreover, the Iranians termed it “Darya-e-Kazar (the Hazar Sea), Darya-e Komal (North Sea) or Darya-e Mazandaran (the Mazandaran Sea)” based on local preferences (Mamedov, 2000: 109-110). Apart from this, the names of the Caspian Sea also stems from the ancient people who lived in Transcaucasia to the west. Additionally, other historical names, like Khvalynsk, Khazarsk, and Girkansk, show that the Caspian was considered a ‘Sea’ since the ancient times, despite its contradictory nature (Mammadov, 2010:17).

Treaties on the Status of the Caspian Sea between Russian and Persian Empires

In the 8th and 9th century, the Arabic Caliphate took a special interest in this water body. The process of the development and seizure of the Caspian territories had triggered long before the emergence of Christianity in Russia or the advent of Islam in the south of the Caspian. Abbasid's dynasty conquered the southern parts of the Caspian in 760-761 A.D., but could not force out the small Zoroastrian kingdoms (predominant religion of the Greater Iran) until the 19th century. Virtually, there had been no major changes in the Caspian under the influence of Persia until 1722. Azerbaijani Safavid dynasty (1501-1722) had been promoting Shia Islam in the southern parts of the Caspian and strengthening its power in the region. Since the 9th century, Russians became aware of the Caspian basin. War parties have been frequenting the region from 10th to 13th Century, until the invasion of the Mongolians. The Mongol-Tatar conquerors seized the Caspian and the lower portion of Volga River. To counter this, Russia

became interested and attempted to take the Caspian basin and the Volga under their control in the 16th Century (Aliyev, 2014: 28-29). Russia started its invasion of Persia in the 16th century, captured Khanate of Kazan in 1552 and then the Astrakhan in 1556, and became the owner of the waterways in the Caspian. Furthermore, Russia successfully governed the northeastern part of the Caucasus till the Terek River, and with this, Russia began its dominance over the Sea (Nadirkulova, 2012:9).

Under the Romanov dynasty (reigned from 1613 until March 1917), the Russian power spread in and around the basin. Consequently, the Russian navy raided the Caspian Sea and battled Persia under the rule of its Tsar, Peter the Great, in 1722-1723. In 1723, Russia seized the Persian port Resht and eventually captured the whole of the Sea. Iranian scholars believe that the 18th and 19th century witnessed Russia expand throughout the Caspian and venture towards the south of Iran. Most importantly, the modern oil industry was developed in Baku, which attracted foreign investors and companies, after which the Caspian Sea was perceived as the most important oil area. Due to this reason, defining the status of the Caspian Sea became important. In 1935, Genrikh Yagoda, head of NKVD (People's Commissariat of Internal Affairs) defined the "Astara- Gasan- Kuli line" as a borderline between the two empires (Russian and Persian) (Cherniavskii, 2002:86). In 1970, it was decided that the Caspian Sea should be divided between the constituent republics of the Soviet Union such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. The division was applied based on the median line (Mehdiyoun, 2000:180). However, when tsarist Russia defeated Persia in the wars, several treaties were signed. Some of them are discussed below.

The St. Petersburg Treaty was signed on 12 September, 1723, between Russian and Persian empires (Abilov, 2013:124), in which Persia recognized the sovereignty of Russian Tsar along with its naval rights in the Caspian Sea. It also recognized Russia's dominance on Baku, Mazandaran, Derbent, Gilan, and Astarabad (Nadirkulova, 2012:9).

The Resht Treaty signed by Russia and the Persian empires replaced the Treaty of 1723 on 21 January, 1732. Under this treaty, the Russian empire acquired some Persian territories. Iran was granted privileges to navigation and trade in the Caspian Sea and the Araz and Kura rivers (Aliyev, 2014:29). In return, Russia handed back Caspian provinces such as Astarabad, Gilan, and Mazandaran to Iran.

The Peace Treaty of Golestan was signed on 12 October, 1813, on the River Seiwa, which ended the nine-year war (1804-1813) between Russia and Persia. In accordance with this peace

treaty, Persia ceded to Russia wide territories of Khanates of the eastern Caucasus (Nadirkulova, 2012:10). Granmayeh, a former Iranian diplomat, considered this as the first agreement on the Caspian Sea between two empires. The Araz (Araxes) river was recognized as a border, and the northern territory of this river was selected as a Russian section (Abilov, 2013:124). Although the treaty provided equal rights to both empires for navigation for commercial purposes, nevertheless in case of emergency, Russia retained exclusive rights to maintain its naval fleet in the Caspian. Despite all this, the Russian-Persian War erupted in 1826 and continued till 1828 (Sinkov, 2001:56).

The Treaty of Turkmenchay was concluded on 22 February, 1828. Russia strengthened its territories, including Yerevan, Talysh, Nakhichevan, Ordubad, and Mughan regions of the Arran Province of Persia under this treaty (Nadirkulova, 2012:10). That is to say, both the treaties of 1813 and 1828 gave exclusive rights to the Russian navy in the Caspian Sea (Romano, 2000: 147). Article 8 of the Turkmenchay Treaty accorded both the rights to civil and trade navigation, with the limitation that Persia will not stand gunboats at the Caspian Sea. This singularly became an initial point in determining a legal status for the Caspian. It remained effective till the Russian-Persian Treaty of Friendship of 1921 (Aliyev, 2014: 29). This treaty established the Aras River as a borderline between the two empires. After 1991, this demarcation line became a boundary between Iran and the former Soviet republics of Azerbaijan and Armenia. (Synovitz, 2013). Apart from, the Treaty divided Azerbaijan into two parts, northern and southern, which were ruled by separate imperial powers for a long time. Most of the Azeri part is still within Iran and have become a home of diaspora. As a result, after independence, Azerbaijan felt fearful and insecure from its powerful neighbours (Russia, China, and Iran). Consequently, it urged to form an alliance with the U.S, Georgia, and Turkey to safeguard its sovereignty and security (Zimnitskaya and Geldern, 2011:7).

The Russian-Persian Treaty on Friendship and Cooperation, February 26, 1921

A new government following the “Bolshevik Revolution of October 1917 replaced the heritage of Tsarist Russia”. The Bolshevik government adopted a new attitude towards Iran and declared that all nations are free from capitalism and imperialism. As a result of this new attitude towards Iran, a “Friendship Treaty on February 1921 was concluded between Soviet Russia and Iran”, announcing the treaties of Golestan and Turkmenchay as null and void (Vinogradov and Wouters, 1995:608). For the first time, there was any emphasis on the legal

status of the Caspian Sea (Islamova, 2015; 485). Equal rights were granted. This paved the way for any future possibility of an international legal regime for the marine body.

There are some critical provisions in the Treaty on which both countries have agreed. In Article 3, both parties vowed to recognize and respect borders between Russia and Persia, which was outlined by the special commission in 1881. Nevertheless, the treaty failed to recognise the stipulated borders of the Caspian Sea (Aliyev, 2014, 30). Article 6 barred the involvement of any third country into this territory. Russia was licensed to its armed forces in the event of any military advancement from Persia. If the territory of Persia was used as a base for military actions against Russia, then the Russian Soviet government has right to take all necessary military operations in the Persian territory, in the purpose of self-defense. Iran was given equal rights to keep its ships in the Caspian Sea and free navigation under their own flag by Article 11. In addition, Iran enjoyed equal rights to fishing, owing to Article 14 (Nadirkulova, 2012:13-14).

Analysing the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, 1921, we find important issues in the treaties signed between Iran and the Tsarist government. The two countries recognized the borderline between them even though it was earlier invalidated. Besides, the Treaty legitimized the equal rights of free trade and navigation to Iran. Moreover, both states were invariably concerned about international security. Hence, the Treaty does not allow any third state intervention or the presence of third state citizens in Persia. However, there was no time period set for this contract. It was also the silent legal position of the Caspian belt.

Iran and the USSR Treaty of Commerce and Navigation, March 25, 1940

The increasing fisheries and navigations activities in the Caspian Sea required bilateral dialogues to develop the legal framework. The USSR and Iran concluded a Fisheries Agreement for 25 years in 1927. Industries from both countries were authorized to exploit the Caspian's biological resources, letting them explore without consultation or notification. Moreover, both empires were not supposed to violate the Astara-Hassanqoli line (Ramazanova, 2012:13). Another Convention referring to "Establishment, Commerce, and Navigation" was signed on October 27, 1931 (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 16). According to Article 16 of the agreement, "only both countries have the right to deploy any vessels anywhere in the entire Caspian Sea" (Mirfendereski, 2001:139). Throughout 1990, most governmental declarations suggested that the riparian states should find out solutions to the legal status of the Caspian Sea. Treaty of Establishment, Commerce and Navigation 1935, substituted the Treaty of 1931,

which reiterated its previous claims of vessels in the Caspian, which was replaced by yet another agreement in 1940. However, no duration period was stipulated. Hence, due to the unlimited period, the validity of the treaty is until today. The intent of this treaty was only to enhance trade development between the states (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 16).

Borrowing from its 1921 predecessor, the 1940 Treaty afforded exclusive fishing and navigation privileges only to the two states, banning the entry of any third country from the Caspian Sea. The two countries even prohibited foreign crewmembers to operate these ships or floats (Janusz- Pawletta, 2015: 16). The Treaty of 1940 created a new clause (Clause No. 11) for the establishment of a 10-mile fishing zone from the coasts (Mamedov, 2000: 124). According to “both Treaties of 1935 and 1940, Iran and USSR had the rights to fish in the Caspian Sea, provided they did so within a 10-mile zone along their respective coasts”. Following these treaties, both parties considered the Caspian Sea as a “Soviet-Iranian Sea with exclusive equal rights to shipping and fishing,” where 80% of the northern part was controlled by the Soviet and around 20% of the southern Caspian was put under the jurisdiction of Iran (Aryan, 2014). The Government of Iran agreed to “provide the right to USSR to establish petrol pumps and to construct oil stocks and its products in accordance to Iranian laws and regulations”. (Janusz- Pawletta, 2015: 16).

Iran accepted that the Caspian Sea was a closed Sea; therefore, the Soviet Union triggered its exploration and exploitation of the mineral resources in the Sea, particularly in the area of Azerbaijan in 1940. Iran neither objected to the Soviet’s petroleum activities in Azerbaijan nor provided legitimacy to the activities of the Soviet Union in the Caspian. (Amineh, 1999:145,146). However, the treaties do not regulate the related issues of mineral resources, military activity, and environmental conservation (Nadein- Raevsky, 2014). It raises a serious question as to how both the states agree on the Caspian's water without defining it as a lake or sea. No agreements define the delineation of its territorial water and seabed. Even the Treaty of 1954 established only land borders between two empires and but did not specify the sea floor or its perimeter. Yet unresolved issues like the exploration of mineral resources or the protection of marine environment and management of fisheries still persist.

The territory of the Caspian Sea was never defined between the riparian states, which remained in their usual and exclusive possession. Unquestionably, this ‘Soviet-Iranian Sea’ (previously agreed upon the name by both parties), is regarded as a key element in defining the legal status of the Sea as a condominium. Devoid of any legal evidence for such claim, neither country

considered it for any shared sovereignty. Both the nations exploited their respective territories while considering the rest as their *res communis*. (Vinogradov, 1997:56- 57).

Pertaining to all the aforementioned facts, it is to be noted that all the treaties mostly defined the rights of ownership, trade, and navigation. Even though the Soviet-Iranian deals manifested in considering the Caspian as a lake, the resources, especially fish, were settled to be of common use. Anyhow, the 1921 and 1940 treaties have resulted in long-standing disputes amongst the new Caspian states. The legal status of the Caspian remains the central question. Which international set of principles will apply to the future status of the Caspian Sea? However, the Soviet-Persian treaties can be the foundation to resolve resource-related disputes in the Caspian expanse.

The Validity of the Treaties after the Collapse of the USSR

After the breakup of the USSR, each littoral state started to claim their full sovereignty and jurisdiction over a larger part in the Caspian Sea, leading to controversies regarding the binding force for the successive states. The validity of the pacts was questioned by the Post Soviet states (Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. No preconditions regarding exploration or exploitation of mineral resources could be fully applicable to the Caspian Sea in the current situation (Nadirkulova, 2012: 214). Article 34 of the “Vienna Convention on Succession of States in respect of Treaties (1978) stated:

when a part or parts of the territory of a State separate to form one or more States, whether or not the predecessor State continues to exist, any treaty in force at the date of the succession of States in respect of the entire territory of the predecessor State continues in force in respect of each successor State so formed. (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015:19)

Thus, the proposition was that the Soviet-Iranian treaties would be applicable for the post-Soviet states. The United Nations and other countries accepted the Russian Federation as a successor state of the USSR, and it acquired a permanent seat in the UNSC by replacing the Soviet Union. Moreover, Russia was the only Soviet republic that did not declare its independence from the USSR (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015:19). In addition, the Minsk Agreement was signed on 12 December, 1991, by Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, which created the CIS. The “eleven independent states of the CIS (including Azerbaijan Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) signed the Almaty Declaration on December 21, 1991” (Nadirkulova, 2012:24). The newly independent states, by virtue of both the agreements, were

guaranteed to fulfill international obligations derived from the treaties of the Soviet Union. (Ramazanova, 2012:14). However, Azerbaijan rejected the Almaty agreement denying to recognize Russia as a successor state to the USSR. It demanded that it be granted free access to the Sea and its resources. Yet, Aliyev, the then president of Azerbaijan approved the Almaty Declaration in 1992. (Raczka, 2000:206).

Contrary to this, professor Janusz-Pawletta, B. (2015:18) argues that after the collapse of the USSR, “Soviet-Iranian Treaties of 1921 and 1949” were no longer binding to the Caspian littoral states, particularly Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. Hence, these treaties lost their validity. The pacts merely defined protocols for navigation and fishery but failed to address borders between the former Soviet republics. It was also unsuccessful in providing any legal status to the Caspian. Additionally, the “Vienna Convention on Succession of States in respect of Treaties (1978)” could not apply to the Caspian Sea, because none of the littoral states signed this convention. Yolbars A. Kepbanov, who is the former Deputy Minister of Turkmenistan, in fact, supported this view. Eventually, after the fall of the Soviet Union, the treaties ceased to exist. (Abilov, 2013:127).

However, Russian professor Barsegov observes these agreements as the chief elements in establishing an international-legal status for the Caspian. According to Mamedov, they authorize freedom of mercantile navigation while giving a special right to Russia to have its fleet (Mamedov, 2000: 116). The Soviet-Iranian treaties are still considered to play a rudimentary part in defining the current status of the Caspian. It is further developed by the customary international law of the region, which is based on both the conduct and behaviour of the coastal states after and before the collapse of the USSR (Sinker, 2001:72). In this regard, Grigory Karasin, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister, said that “the international agreement of 1921 and 1940 determined the U.Se of the resources of the Caspian Sea and would remain in force until the five states reach an agreement of its new legal regime” (Uibopuu, 1995:120). Hence, the Russian-Iranian legal regime is still in force and there are no borders in the Caspian Sea except a 10-mile exclusive fishing zone. Both states regard the Caspian as a “unique inland water basin, “and the sea had never been under to any state sovereign jurisdiction (Raczka, 2000:208)

Disputes or Conflicts among the Littoral States Regarding the Use of Resources

The Caspian Sea is abundant in hydrocarbon reserves and other natural resources, accommodating as much as 123 species of fish; almost 30 of these are in high demand. The

Caspian Environmental Programme reveals that around 500-600 thousand tons of fish are caught annually, with a majority of Beluga, Sterlet and migratory marine species of Herring, Bream, Catfish, Pikeperch, etc. (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 83). The unsettled nature of the Caspian's legal status renders the delimitation of energy or living resources impossible, furthering the issues for the newly formed states, which are entirely landlocked. They depend on other countries for the exportation of their goods. Considering this plight, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkmenistan, Kepbbanov, Y.A., stated, "The first problem of the legal status of the Caspian Sea is a territorial matter, and another is the issue of national security of the Caspian states. Therefore, there should be boundary lines of territorial limits for each littoral states and each sovereign state must be divided into the land as well as sea, for it is necessary to prevent territorial disputes and disagreements". (Kepbanov, 1997:3).

In 1993, Turkmenistan approved the "Law on the State Border that extended the country's sovereignty into the territorial waters and created an exclusive economic zone for itself in the Caspian." In the same year, Kazakhstan concluded an agreement with western oil companies, Chevroil Consortium for the exploration of the Tengiz oil field. These foreign companies forced their sovereigns to clearly define territories. As a response to such pressure, Azerbaijan made its own draft convention where it declared the Caspian Sea as a "border lake," and proposed to divide it into national sectors following the pattern used for African and North-American border lakes. This alarmed Russia, which became more concern about the unilateral actions in the Caspian Sea. Following Baku's strategy, Kazakhstan presented the Caspian Sea as "an enclosed Sea," which is the subject of the UNCLOS 1982; Baku and Almaty concurred with this decision. Refuting any of such claims, Russia claimed the Caspian to be a "unique inland water basin implying that it is neither a border lake nor an enclosed sea." Inevitable disputes were borne out of such discrepancies (Raczka, 2000:207).

The Caspian holds boundless hydrocarbon reserves with oil deposits of around 16-32 billion barrels. Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are among the world's top natural gas countries. This led Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan to take a special interest in the immediate discovery and development of natural resources in their shores. An expert on Caspian issues, Rustam Mammadov, argued, "We must not think that there has been real progress. Russia and Iran do not want that Caspian oil and gas is being exploited without them. Therefore, they do not hurry to define the legal status of the Caspian Sea" (Islamova, 2015; 484, 485). Like Iran and Russia, Turkmenistan has shown little interest in the urgent exploitation of its Caspian oil reserves, despite it being the richest in gas reserves, focusing majorly on exporting its gas into

international markets without operating on Russian soil. (Aydin, 2004: 7). Many scholars hold these geopolitical and energy factors responsible for all the uncertainty of the legal process of the Caspian. Western countries, especially the United States, has successfully increased its presence in the Caspian region by establishing bilateral ties with Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan, creating active transitways while bypassing Russian and Iranian territories. These two nations, on the other hand, are busy in their efforts to exclude the U.S. from this region. Complications in view of mineral resources became the next big problem in the region.

Contract of the Century 1994

The tensions of the five states started when Azerbaijan (Azerbaijan International Oil Consortium) unilaterally signed the “Contract of the Century” on September 20, 1994 (Abilov, 2013:135). This contract between Azerbaijan and twelve large western oil companies allowed extraction 4 billion barrels of oil in three joint offshore fields; Azeri-Chirag-Gunashli (Abilov, 2012: 37). Baku signed matching agreements in 1995 and 1996, and others followed suit. Kazakhstan also signed similar agreements for the Tengiz oil fields. The Russian Foreign Ministry rejected Azerbaijan’s claim on this area by stating, “We shall not officially recognize this agreement and the Caspian Sea is not an open sea. Therefore the provisions of the international law of the sea cannot apply to it,” (Saadat, 2012:83). Other than violating international law, Azerbaijan's decision was damaging to marine ecology. Conversely, the Deputy Foreign Minister of Russia Albert Chernishev declared Baku’s unilateral actions as “robbery” (Abilov, 2013:135).

Questioning the Caspian’s legal status, Russia sent a document to the UN General Assembly, “Russia was against unilateral action regarding the status of the Caspian Sea.” Its main features included, “geographically the Caspian Sea lacks natural connection with any ocean, it is a closed water body, therefore, the norms and principles of the International Law of the Sea” cannot be applied. Even the provisions of UNCLOS such as Territorial Sea, EEZs, and continental shelf would not be applicable to the Caspian. Russia insisted on the principle of joint utilization and respects the legal regime of the Caspian Sea by following the 1921 and 1940 of Soviet/Iranian treaties. (Uibopuu, 1995:121).

No matter the barrage of criticism, this unilateral action initiated similar opportunities for other coastal states. Eventually, Russia acquired 10% shares of the same international consortium, attracting heavy for its paradoxical stand. Minister of Energy and Fuel, Yuri Shafranik justified Russia’s commitments by saying, “The reason behind the involvement of Lukoil with the

consortium was to promote and strengthen the Russian companies in profitable projects in the CIS, because Russians had played an important role in the creation of these resources by their mind, labor, and energy,” (Granmayeh, 2004:19).

Azeri, Chirag and Kyapaz Oil Fields

Since 1991, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have been fighting for ownership over the highly controversial oil fields of the southern Caspian. The two states have been at odds over areas such as Azeri, Chirag, and Kyapaz (known in Azerbaijan). These disputed regions are known in Turkmenistan as Osman, Oman, and Serdar respectively. There are still altercations about the Chirag/Oman field, lying near the median line between the two countries. A BP-led consortium developed the Azeri and the Chirag oil fields. Another 50 million tons of oil reserves lie in a third field called Kyapaz, which is still underdeveloped (AbbasovSha, 2012). Azerbaijan claimed to have discovered these oil fields in 1959. However, currently, the Azerbaijan International Operating Company is developing the Azeri-Chirag oil field.

Opposing the 1994 deal, Turkmenistan President Saparmurd Niyazov gave an interview in the *Financial Times* in January 1997, claiming that ‘the Azeri area is situated in Turkmen territorial water; therefore it belonged to Turkmenistan’ (Harris, 1998:56). Out of the 109 Turkmen, oil, and gas fields in the Caspian, only four are disputed (Haghayeghi, 2003:35). Concerns deepened when Azerbaijani president Aliyev visited Moscow in July 1997. Lukoil, SOCAR, and Rosneft signed a contract for the development of the Kyapaz resources. The Turkmenistan Government blamed both Russia and Azerbaijan for failing to consult the rest of the littoral states before signing deals. However, Sergey Kiriyenko, Russian Deputy Minister of Fuel and Energy explained that it would not affect any country's interests. Eventually, Rosneft withdrew from the project altogether. (Granmayeh, 2004:22).

In 2008, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan officially decided to stop all exploration until the affected areas were free of disputes. Even though the two countries initiated friendly relations in 2007-08, in an abrupt change of event, Turkmenistan threatened Azerbaijan with a lawsuit over international arbitration instead of engaging in bilateral dialogue. In June 2012, Turkmenistan revealed plans to begin geological sampling in the Kyapaz field. “Turkmenistan’s illegal activities are unacceptable, and Azerbaijan preserves the right to take appropriate measures to defend its sovereign rights in the Caspian,” Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry said. The ministry also accused Turkmenistan of violating the 2008 bilateral agreement. (Abbasov, 2012).

Araz-Sharq-Alov Oil and Gas Fields

In July 2001, a severe conflict occurred between Azerbaijan and Iran the offshore fields “Alborz’ in Iran and ‘Araz-Sharq-Alov’ in Azerbaijan”; the area is about 900 square miles that is situated more than 100 miles southeast of Baku, operated by British Petroleum (Haghayeghi, 2003:35). Iranian fleet entered in this field to stop Azerbaijani oil exploration in June 2001. Iran claimed that it would not allow the involvement of foreign companies in this area and demanded immediate withdrawal. The Defence Ministry of Afghanistan declared that “the national air defense forces of the country would prevent further incursions. The BP consortium ceased all oil exploration in the region as a result”. The U.S and Russia condemned Iran. Thus, the Azeri-Iranian conflict is a core issue in the Caspian matrix.

In April 2018, Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev visited Tehran where the two states signed an MoU on the "Joint Development of Relevant Blocks of the Caspian Sea." Afterward, President Rouhani made a diplomatic visit to Baku where both parties agreed, “Iran's state-run NIOC and Azerbaijan's SOCAR would recover oil on a 50-50 basis”, keeping the Alvand and the Alborz fields as common spaces for equal shares. (Kalehsar, 2018). This alone became the stepping-stone for Iran’s energy rights in the Caspian Sea. But, the sanctions regime represents challenges in Iran’s energy path.

Apart from this, President Rouhani refuted the median line method of delimitation of the South Caspian area, during the Aktau summit in 2018. Bordering Azerbaijan and Iran, “the Araz-Sharq-Alov gas field holds about 300 million tons of oil and 400 bcm of natural gas”. While a straight line would render most of the resources to Iran, the median line will allocate the major portion to Azerbaijan. Though Azerbaijan is near to reaffirming its authority over large areas of the region. However, the Iranian government is facing internal pressure not to surrender its claim. Rouhani said that “the treaty assisted in resolving only 30% of all pending issues with respect to the delimitation of Caspian”. This unveils the probability that Iran is not ready to compromise any further in the near future. (The Caspian Sea Treaty, 2018). Iran is reportedly planning to develop Sardar-e Jangal, a Caspian oil, and natural gas field, even though Azerbaijan also lays claim on it. There were additional disputes between Russia and Kazakhstan over Kurmangazy, Tsentralnoye, and Khvalynsk, but later they were settled diplomatically. Russia took over Tsentralnoye and Khvalynsk while Kurmangazy was put under Kazakhstan (Rahimov, 2018).

Over-drilling of oil and gas, habitat destruction and constant decrease of fish stocks has been threatening the ecosystem of the Caspian Sea. In 1994, the Almaty Declaration was adopted in order to prevent further decline of the ecosystem. In November 2003, the Caspian states signed a final act titled the “Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea” (Tehran Convention) which was put into effect from August 12, 2006. Since then, three additional protocols, namely “the Aktau Protocol (2011), the LBSA Protocol (2012), and the Biodiversity Protocol (2014)”, have been adopted, but their implementation is still awaited. Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Iran ratified the Aktau Protocol. The Land-Based Source and Activities Protocol (LBSA) has been ratified by Iran and Azerbaijan. Similarly, Article 4 of the Tehran Convention prescribes that all states will have to take necessary actions, jointly or otherwise, in order to protect the environment of the Caspian. The Convention developed procedural rules for better execution of the state's general commitments. This includes scientific and technological cooperation, monitoring, exchange, and information between environmental parties of the contract. It is seen as a key step in preventing further pollution (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 44).

The Littoral States and the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea after 1991: Agreements and Treaties

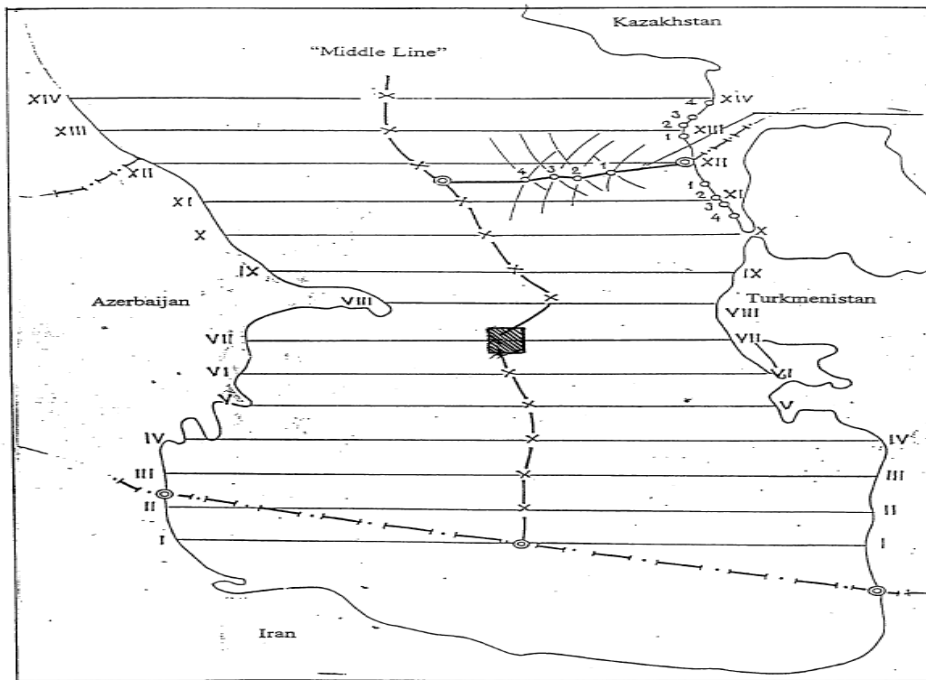
After the demise of the USSR, the littoral states were keen to demarcate the seabed of the Caspian Sea. From 1998 to 2004, three bilateral and one trilateral agreement (known North Caspian Agreements) were signed between Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan for the delimitation and exploration of mineral resources in the northern part of the Caspian Sea. In 1998, Kazakhstan became the first to initiate and sign a treaty with Russia. Later, the same agreement was signed with Azerbaijan by Russia on September 23, 2002 (Nadirkulova, 2012:25). Russia and Azerbaijan signed another agreement in April 2001, which demarcated the border between them for the delineation of the land of the Caspian Sea shelf (Islamova, 2015; 487). During the official visit of Putin in Azerbaijan on 8-9 January 2001, Presidents Aliyev and Putin signed a “Joint Statement of the legal status of the Caspian Sea.” They agreed to divide the sea shelf with common use reserved for water resources, which were reiterated it in February 2003 by both the countries. Kazakhstan and Russia agreed only on “the division of the seabed, leaving the surface common,” while Iran, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan proposed that both the seabed and the surface be split into national sectors (Dubner, 1999: 280). Furthermore, in 2003, Kazakhstan and Russia jointly decided to develop oil and gas reserves situated on their borders (Bantekas, 2011:53).

The North Caspian Treaties agreement (referred as Tri-Point Border Agreement) was concluded on May 14, 2003, on the basis of the median (middle) line method, leaving the water surface common for all littoral states. Consequently, the northern part of the Caspian seabed was demarcated between Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan. (Carletti, 2014). However, this agreement was rejected by Iran, in light of the existing Soviet-Iranian treaties. Another question is how to divide the southern part. Other contracts were also signed. For instance, the Presidents of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan agreed that the “Caspian states would follow the delimitation of territorial borders through the median line until all parties reach an agreement on the status of the Caspian” on February 27, 1997. (Abilov, 2013:137).

During the first meeting of Caspian Five in Moscow in February 2002, Iran proposed that the sea should be divided equally among all five states, 20% for each state, including, Araz-Alov-Sharg territory, which was rejected by Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Russia (Saadat, 2012:84). On March 14, 2003, Russia and Iran signed a treaty on the “Basic of Relations and Principles of Cooperation” that is based on mutual friendship and cooperation (Nadirkulova, 2012:26). Controversies boiled further as the countries remained divided on the opinion of the median line divide maritime or subsea boundaries. While Russia, Kazakhstan, and Azerbaijan supported the concept, Iran was strongly against it. Turkmenistan remained silent on the matter (Roberts, 2001:65).

Scholars Askari and Taghavi (2006:87) believe that Russia’s intervention in Kazakh and Azerbaijani decisions due to the fact that they depend on Russia for military aid. Around 35% of Russian minority are living in northern Kazakhstan. Due to American endorsement and Russian fear, it became imperative for Azerbaijan to support the median line. Indeed, the method of division allows free Russian navy in the Caspian, which wants to remain strong in Central Asia and the Caucasus regions. On the contrary, Turkmenistan shares a border with Iran; therefore, it is closer to Iran than Russia. Although Turkmenistan is silent on the median line principle, however, it recommended the principle for exclusive rights; each state have a width of around 45 miles, and all parties could use the remaining water (Askari and Taghavi, 2006:87).

Map 4.1: The location of the dispute and the ‘so-called median line



Source: Harris, A. (1998), "The Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan Dispute in the Caspian Sea", *Boundary and Security Bulletin*, 5, 56-62.

Tehran Declaration

After the fall of the Soviet Union, the energy-hungry countries, particularly the U.S, China, Turkey, and the EU provoked the issue of the legal status. The littoral states followed suit trying to defend their national interests. The Islamic Republic of Iran proposed an organization to resolve the age-old debate of the legal position of the Caspian Sea. As a result, an intergovernmental conference on Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) took place on 17 February, 1992, in Tehran, where Iran emphasized cooperation in the exploitation of the region's mineral resources. Moreover, the Final Communiqué that came out in the Tehran Conference (September-October, 1992), put pressure to establish an international mechanism for a settlement. Azerbaijan set the stage by proposing delimitation. All parties agreed on joint cooperation, such as the defense of the mineral resources of the Caspian Sea, conservation and ethical use of biological resources (i.e., petroleum and gas) and to determine sea routes while respecting interests of all (Mamedov, 2001:220-222).

Resht conference

The first prominent clash of interest emerged in the Resht (Iran) conference of 1993, where the Caspian Five met to discuss the protection of its biological resources. Azerbaijan refused to comply with the 1992 agreement and demanded that the legal status of the Caspian (Sinker, 2001:62) be that of a boundary lake. Azerbaijan also put stress on dividing it according to the median line, but it was not supported by Russia and Iran. Kazakhstan supported Baku's proposal, but the issue was not discussed further. Turkmenistan continued its silence. Moreover, Russia rejected another proposal of Azerbaijan regarding changing the distribution of resources on a national division principle. The main conference took place on 11-12 October, 1994 in Moscow, where Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan submitted separate drafts. In the second draft, Kazakhstan changed positions and proposing the Caspian as a 'sea. Hence, the norms and principles of the UNCLOS will be applicable to it (Mamedov, 2001:223,231).

Most importantly, the Caspian five states agreed to organize six special agencies, related to the legal status and protection of biological resources, navigation, environment protection, scientific researches and control of the water level of the Caspian Sea. In the Tehran conference, the five states hoped to form the "Treaty on Regional Cooperation in the Caspian Sea with the aim to govern the Caspian without the division of the Sea. The agreement was based on the consensus of the five countries, where each sovereign state has the 'veto' right for any Caspian development" (Sinker, 2001:62). Despite these efforts, Russia proposed a 'condominium,' Azerbaijan 'national sectoral division,' Iran 'equal share for each,' whereas Turkmenistan changed its position many times due to its dispute with Azerbaijan on oil fields in the Caspian (Gurbanov, 2014).

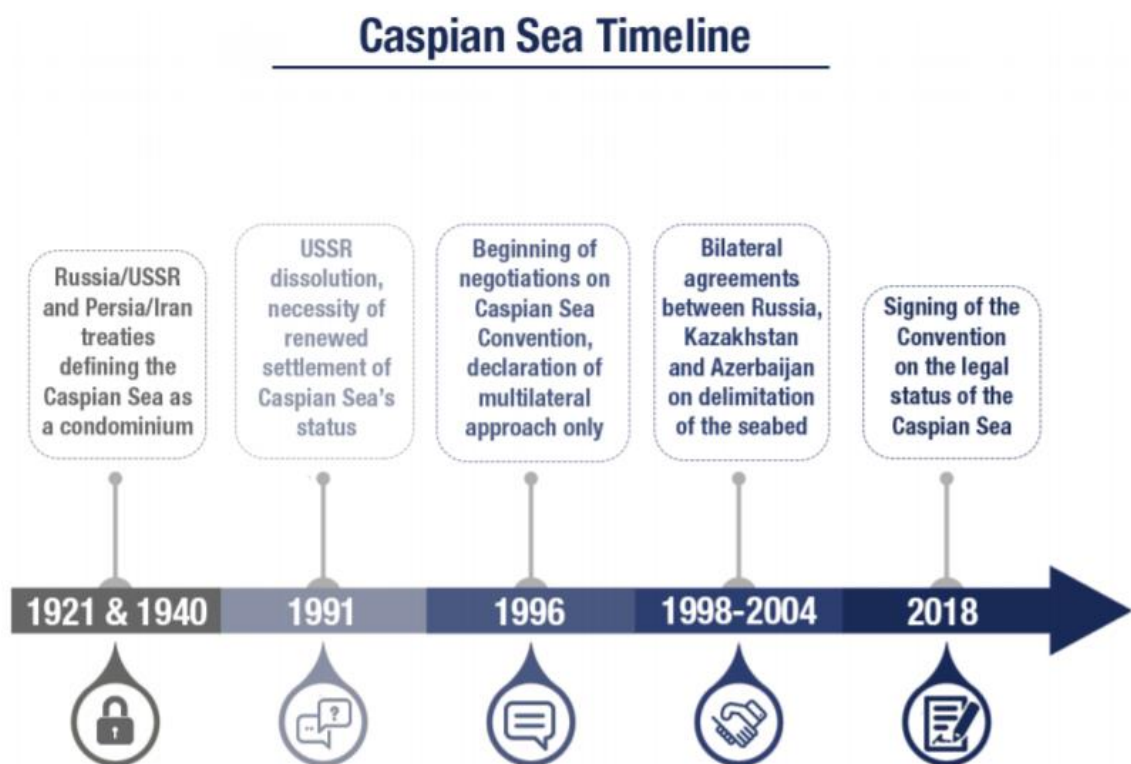
Russia's advice of a condominium was centered on an equal share of the seabed. Due to the unavailability of official consensus on any joint claim over the Caspian, the condominium principle could not be applied. Differing views gave rise to political, economic, geopolitical, and geological problems. Commenting on this, Kapyshev, A. suggested negotiations and collaboration among the Caspian states. He argued that "the problem of the legal status of the Caspian is not new and it is continuing since the ancient time." The geopolitical, geostrategic, and energy resource attracted great powers for their national interests, which hampered the negotiation process (Kapyshev, 2012). Supporting this argument, the Deputy Foreign Minister

of Turkmenistan, Kepbbanov, Y. A. suggested that “the legal problem of the Caspian Sea can be resolved only through ‘consensus.’” The Caspian is a body of diverse interests, and so, unilateral actions have the probability of straining the situation even further (Kepbanov, 1997).

Permanent Special Working Group (SWG)

Bypassing other deals, the Caspian states established a Permanent Special Working Group (SWG) in November 1996 to pass a resolution on the legal status of the Caspian Sea, which promoted multilateral agreements in place of a bilateral one. Important meetings of SWG were held in Baku in February 2003, and are continuing. (Islamova, 2015: 488). As a result, in November 2003, the Caspian Five agreed on “the Framework Convention for the Protection of the Marine Environment of the Caspian Sea,” which entered into force on August 12, 2006. It was the first successful agreement in establishing a legal regime in the area (Carletti, 2014).

Figure 4.2



Source: Warsaw Institute special report (2018), “Caspian Summit: Consequences for the region,” (online web) Accessed on 13 April 2019, URL: <https://warsawinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/09/Warsaw-Institute-Special-Report-Caspian-Summit-ENG.pdf>.

The SWG was created to intensify the negotiation process among the littoral states. Since its inception, five summits of the Presidents of the Caspian states have been held (23-24 April 2002, 16 October 2007 and 18 November 2010, forth in Astrakhan in 2014) and the fifth took place in Aktau, Kazakhstan in August 2018.

- I. **Ashgabat Meeting:** In April 2002, the first meeting of Heads of the Caspian states took place in Ashgabat (Turkmenistan). The meeting showed promise as all the Deputy Foreign Ministers agreed to protect the maritime protection, but it was ended shortly without any final declaration. There were plans to meet in two years in Iran; however, it got postponed following the deaths of Azerbaijan President Heydar Aliyev (2003) and Turkmen President Safarmurat Niyazov in 2006.
- II. **Tehran Meeting:** The second Caspian meeting took place in Tehran in 2007. The parties agreed to enhance their political, diplomatic, economic, commercial, technical, scientific, and cultural cooperation for the development as well as stability of the region. Energy and transportation remained the key focus. The states committed to not use armed forces against one another or let foreign nations put up military operations in the area. The Tehran Declaration put stress on safety from drugs, arms trafficking, and terrorism. Moreover, the five countries recognized the need for consensus. (Aliyeva, 2018: 19). Nevertheless, differences persisted in terms of jurisdiction and resource distribution. In light of these disparities, Turkmen President Saparmurat Niyazov stated that “The Caspian Sea smells of blood and each of us must realize it. It is not an easy thing to have a dispute over an oil field.” (Haghighy, 2003:32). After the Tehran summit in 2007, Iran proposed that the whole Caspian Sea be divided as per the justified and legal principles of ‘equity.’ On the other side, Iran opposed the Modified Median line (seabed of the Caspian be divided, and surface water be in common use by littoral states) on the method which was signed by Russia-Kazakhstan, Russia-Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan (Bahman Aghai Diba, 2010). As a turning point, this declaration forced the littoral nations to consider cooperation.
- III. **Baku Meeting:** The third meeting was held in Baku in November 2010 where Khalaf Khalafov, Deputy Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan, highlighted the agreement of cooperation on the security of the Caspian region against smuggling, illegal arms trade

and other types of trans-national crimes. Further, he said that they have already established a good mutual understanding and cooperation; however, they need to address issues such as infrastructural development, the climate in the region, and to create new corridors for the exportation of energy resources to world markets (Islamova, 2015: 488). In the Baku summit, the five presidents agreed to cooperate on the security matter, while recognizing individual sovereign rights synonymously.

IV. **Astrakhan Meeting**: In 2014, the Fourth Caspian Summit took place in Astrakhan, where issues associated with the legal status of the sea, biological resources, security, and environment were discussed (Gurbanov, 2014). The Caspian five countries agreed to form a 15 nm sovereign space from each country's shoreline, and the exclusive rights for each country to use water and water resources were granted an additional 10 nm. The rest of the lake/sea will be declared open water, but the use is yet to be decided (Boban and Lončar, 2016:85). Putin emphasized cooperation and coordination for future strategy involving legal regime, the demarcation of water areas, seabed, subsoil, fishery, navigation, and the common use of the surface. Further, he elucidated that "only littoral states have rights to keep the military fleet in the Caspian Sea while banning the entrance of foreigner troops." Iranian President Hasan Rouhani stated that "The decision-making process of the Caspian Sea depends on the consensus of the littoral states" (Gurbanov, 2014). These last two meetings of the Baku summit 2010 and the Astrakhan summit 2014 are considered a positive step in terms of cooperation. For example, new agreements such as "Agreement on Security Cooperation in the Caspian Sea, Agreement on Cooperation in Emergency Prevention and Response, Agreement on Conservation and Rational Use of the Aquatic Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea and Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Hydrometeorology" were signed. These deals go to show a new wave of multilateral strategy and planning on their part. (Parkhomchik, 2016).

V. **Aktau Convention 2018**: The Caspian Five meeting took place on August 12, 2018, in Aktau, Kazakhstan where five states signed a new "Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea" after a long wait of 26 years. This was marked as a 'landmark history' that opened new chapters of cooperation in the areas of energy, security,

transport, trade, and ecology. The convention rejected the idea of a sea or a lake as a legal status, while “the Caspian sea is a closed body of water with the special legal status of the sea means all five states are equally free to sail the sea’s waters.” Participants also rejected the idea of equal distances determined by the median line. Rather the surface and seabed were treated differently. The surface was accepted as international water whereas the seabed divided into territorial zones and consider a lake. (Aliyeva, 2018: 20). Putin called this occasion an “an extraordinary, milestone event.” He said, "It is crucial that the convention governs ... maritime shipping and fishing set out military cooperation among [Caspian] nations and enshrines our states' exclusive rights and responsibilities over the sea's future". (Gray, 2018). Further, he said, “the settlement of the Caspian Sea's legal status creates conditions for bringing cooperation between the countries to a qualitatively new level of partnership, for the development of close cooperation on different trajectories.” (RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty, 2018). They also discussed mutual trade, digitization of commerce, and logistics. Putin described transportation as a key to economic growth and cooperation of Caspian states. Although this convention determines general rules of the division of the Caspian Sea, it fails to specify the final division of the seabed and subsoil into national sectors.

The convention covered key issues such as the legal status of the waters, the subsoil, the seabed, natural resources, delimitation, navigation, and fisheries, securing individual rights. It barred non-Caspian states from the region. It divided the Caspian’s water into three zones: “territorial waters, fishery zones, and common maritime space.” The seabed became the determining factor for the jurisdiction of each state. They were allowed exploration and exploitation of their respective sector of the seabed, and consequently, its subsoil and resources (Müller and Betaneli, 2018).

Kozyrenko, N et al. (2018), illustrate the key points of the convention:

- Each state has a right to sovereignty over territorial water for 15 nm from their coastline, plus 10 nm of exclusive fishing zone, and the rest would be common;

but each sovereign state has a right to veto regarding the exploitation of energy in these common areas.

- Constructing underwater pipelines does not require ‘unanimity’. The state proposing to construct any pipeline will have to consult only those states where the pipeline will cross-territory. However, the remaining signatories must be informed about the route of the pipeline. The key condition for building pipelines must meet environmental standards and requirements, including compliance with the “Framework Convention for the Safety of the Caspian Sea's marine environment”.
- The Caspian Sea is declared a zone of peace, and it belongs to only Caspian states.



Source: "The Caspian Summit (2018), *RadioFreeEurope: Radio Liberty*, (online web) Accessed on 19 January 2019, URL: <https://www.rferl.org/a/the-caspian-summit/29430597.html>".

cting states can be resolved through negotiations and consultations. If this mechanism Essentially, all disputes regarding the application and interpretation of the Convention between the contrafails, then a dispute has to be resolved through other peaceful methods, which are provided by international law, at the discretion of the parties. Unfortunately, the resolution is left at the whim of the concerned parties instead of binding arbitration. Thus, the provisions of the Convention does not give an alternative solution in a case if disputes parties do not agree on a dispute resolution procedure. Thus, disputes still remain. (Müller and Betaneli, 2018). Invoking such a conundrum, Iranian President Hassan Rohani comments, "The delimitation of oil- and gas-rich Caspian seabed will require additional agreements between littoral states." Further, he adds, "The convention that prevents non-Caspian countries from deploying military forces on the Caspian Sea is saying The Caspian Sea only belongs to the Caspian states." (RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty, 2018). However, the dispute among the Caspian states has not yet stopped accessing the energy resources, but the deep exploitation of energy has been banned.

Article 8 (1) declares that the

delimitation of the Caspian Sea seabed and subsoil into sectors shall be effected by agreement between States with adjacent and opposite coasts, with due regard to the generally recognized principles and norms of international law. (Ibrahimov and Whitney, 2018)

This means that the long-running dispute will continue to remain an unsolved reality in the South of the Caspian Sea, for instance, Azerbaijan and Iran have disputes on the ownership of "Araz-Alov-Sharg oil field historically." On the other side, the convention may play a role in discussion in the expansion of TCP pipeline between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan on the issue of long-running dispute on the Sardar/Kyapaz region. While the Convention does not solve this issue directly, indirectly, this convention helps them to meet both states for their important strategic objectives. The Sardar/Kyapaz field holds 620 million barrels of oil, which is a strategic asset for both countries. The TCP project will provide an alternative export route to Turkmenistan, reducing its dependence on its only other choice (Ibid). Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbaev contemplated that, "The agreement allows for the construction of underwater oil and gas pipelines, as well as setting national quotas for fishing." (RadioFreeEurope Radio Liberty, 2018).

Aktau Convention: Who wins and who loses?

Demarcation of seabed boundaries needs multiple bilateral agreements. Sharing the smallest coastline, Iran has the highest chance of loss from this convention. Iranian social media users accused and blamed the Iranian government of being a 'sell-off' the Caspian Sea. Currently, the U.S sanctions have forced Iran to sign the convention in order to get political benefits and prevented the western military entry in the sea (BBC News, 2018).

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan will profit the most. If the convention implemented with goodwill, then it can facilitate essential energy projects including the long-discussed TCP project. It would carry some 30 bcm of Turkmen gas per year from Caspian to Azerbaijan then to European markets. Russia's energy gas export in Europe increased by 8.1% in 2018 to 194 bcm, currently accounts for about 37% of the EU's gas import. The Caspian Sea has been considered as a potential energy security source for non-Caspian states, but it could not access to markets due to lack of infrastructure as well as its geographical location. The SGC project has been under development for some times, which starts from Caspian through Turkey. The "Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline Project" is also in a slow process that delivers only ten bcm from Azerbaijan to Europe. This represents a small volume. But it could be possible if Turkmenistan starts to supply gas to this pipeline through TCP pipeline. Then the volume of exports can increase up to 40 bcm per year³⁰. However, seeing the complexity of this convention in future, Stanislav Pritchin, an executive partner at the Expert Centre for Eurasian Development, told Business Destinations that:

I wouldn't say that the agreement took too long because you can see examples in many parts of the world where negotiations concerning the delimitations of a sea are still ongoing. For example, the U.S–Canadian dispute involving the Beaufort Sea remains unresolved and Norwegian–Russian negotiations took several decades. What's more, these examples only involve bilateral negotiations. In the case of the Caspian Sea, we have five littoral negotiations". Further, he added, "This convention is extremely important for stability in the area because key principles for supporting regional security were agreed. The main one relates to conflict resolution and the other regarding military bases on the Caspian Sea. In addition, no single Caspian state can use its territory for military action against a neighbouring country. In case of a possible conflict, especially in terms of US–Iran tension, there are no threats to Iran from the Caspian Sea dimension. (Ballard, 2019).

Thus, the relationship of the Caspian states can be described as Positive or Cooperative-Mutually beneficial, Negative or Non-cooperative-Conflict/dispute or a mix of both. While

³⁰ The Caspian Treaty (2018), *IJSC*, Vol (24), (online web) Accessed on 11 June 2019, URL: <https://www.iiss.org/publications/strategic-comments/2018/the-caspian-sea-treaty>

Russia and Kazakhstan have a mutually beneficial relationship, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan have conflicting affairs. Russia and Turkmenistan consider themselves as good neighbours, whereas Azerbaijan has a confrontational position against Iran on most discords.

The Caspian Sea and the UNCLOS

The United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea 1982, also known as the “Law of the Sea Treaty,” governs the international waters. The Convention defines “the rights, rules, and responsibilities of nations to use the world’s oceans and resources” (“United Nation Oceans & Law of the Sea: 2017”). In other words, the convention presents rules for the division and exploitation of natural resources and the protection of the environment. It was signed in 1982, and effective since 1994. It dictated that the Caspian would be open to all littoral states along with other multinational petroleum corporations if it were to be characterized as a sea.

Under this convention, the littoral states of the Caspian will have “rights of sovereignty over the territorial sea, its airspace, bed and subsoil”. (Nadirkulova, 2012: 39). It also maintained that “each sovereign states would have a territorial sea, and the breadth of territorial water should be 12 nautical miles, 200 nm of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and continental shelf between 200 and 350” (Abilov, 2013:128). Under the EEZ, “each state has sovereign rights of exploration, exploitation, conservation and resources management of living –non-living natural resources” in water. It means each state have EEZ rights on 200nm. But Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan, situated less than 400 miles across, would overlap, which is, in fact, the case. (Dunlap, 2004). Due to this overlap, the continental shelf beyond the EEZ cannot be applied in the Caspian Sea.

Taking this into account, the median line was suggested to determine the boundaries of the economic zone. However, this makes it impossible for the coastal states to freely navigate, fly over, lay cable, or pipeline in the exclusive free economic zone. Nevertheless, the countries reserve rights to invite foreign companies for the development and exploration of their resources. According to the UN Convention, the fundamental principle of a sea must be connected to the high seas. Controversially enough, the Caspian Sea is far away from the high seas. (Demirzhi, 2012: 84). Favoring the landlocked countries of the Caspian, Part VII, Article 90 of UNCLOS, has given the right of navigation by stating that “Every State, whether coastal or land-locked, has the right to sail ships flying its flag on the high seas” (UNCLOS, 57). If the Caspian Sea is subject to the UNCLOS, then Azerbaijan will benefit, and Iran will be

disadvantageous. Article 122 of Part IX of the UNCLOS, which states, further complicates the issue:

enclosed or semi-enclosed sea means a gulf, basin or sea surrounded by two or more States and connected to another sea or the ocean by a narrow outlet or consisting entirely or primarily of the territorial seas and exclusive economic zones of two or more coastal States. (UNCLOS,67).

At present, this definition is applied to the Gulf of Mexico, the Black Sea, and the Persian Gulf, all of that, are connected to the ocean or sea by the outlets. The Caspian, however, is a different case. Because the provisions of the territorial sea, continental shelf, and exclusive economic right are strictly irrelevant to the Caspian due to its overlapping issues and its land-locked stature. Surprisingly, the convention is unclear whether the ‘narrow outlet’ has to be natural or artificial. It is well known that “the Caspian Sea is connecting to the Black Sea, Baltic Sea and the Sea of Azov by artificial canals and rivers” (Zimnitskaya and Von Geldern, 2011:3).

Figure:4.3

| Category | Brief description | Limit |
|-------------------------|---|---|
| TerritorialSea | An area of sea/ocean immediately touching the coastline where the coastal country has full jurisdiction | Up to 12 nautical miles from the baseline |
| Contiguous Zone | An area of sea/ocean beyond the territorial sea where the coastal country can exercise some police and other powers | Up to 24 nautical miles from the baseline |
| Continental Shelf | A natural extension of the landmass of the country, gradually sloping down under water, usually up to a depth of 200 meters | Up to 200 nautical miles, in certain cases up to 350 nautical miles |
| Exclusive Economic Zone | An area marked in parallel from the main shoreline where the coastal country has exclusive right over exploitation of natural and mineral resources | Up to 200 nautical miles from the shoreline |

Source: Saeedi, T.(2013), "Report: (Archive Material)— Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan Caspian Dispute – The Legal Position, News Central Asia, (online web) Accessed on 29 January 2018, URL: <http://www.newscentralasia.net/2013/07/06/archive-material-turkmenistan-azerbaijan-caspian-dispute-the-legal-position/>"

Moreover, the UNCLOS can be applied only to its member states, but except Russia and Iran, other states are not part of it (Ziyadzade, 2015: 328). It is important to make a note that Russia had, in any case, refused to call the Caspian a sea. Moscow is well aware of the internationalization of Volga and Don Rivers that connects the Caspian to the Baltic Sea and the Black Sea. Due to free navigation in the sea, security becomes a major parameter for Russia.

Figure 4.3: If the Caspian is a sea:



Source: Coffey, L. (2016), “Caspian Sea Ownership: Not an Issue the U.S. Should Ignore”, *the Heritage foundation*, no 4611, (online web) Accessed on 17 May 2018, URL: <https://www.heritage.org/energy-economics/report/caspian-sea-ownership-not-issue-the-us-should-ignore>

Additionally, Article 123 creates more confusion by describing the rights, as:

States bordering an enclosed or semi-enclosed sea should cooperate in the exercise of their rights and the performance of their duties under this Convention. (UNCLOS, 67).

This article seems rather a recommendation than a binding obligation. Though the UNCLOS provides rights of navigation in the sea to the international community, the Caspian Sea has no natural connection to any sea or ocean. Unfortunately, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan are landlocked countries. There is an additional concern in regards to international ships finding a way to reach the Caspian. Would Russia allow foreign states to

navigate through its rivers or canals to reach Caspian resources? Also, no country has the right to invite western countries for any pipeline construction or bring ships to the Caspian Sea using Russian waterways without the consent of Russia. Evidently, Russia does not allow this unless it serves personal interests. For instance, in 1994, the Yeltsin government declared “no entry of foreign vessels navigating through the Volga-Don canal”. (Zimnitskaya and Von Geldern, 2011:5).

Article 125 of the UNCLOS is applying only to landlocked states, which provides:

(1) The land-locked States shall have the right of access to and from the sea for the purpose of exercising the rights provided for in this Convention including those relating to the freedom of the high seas and the common heritage of mankind. To this end, land-locked States shall enjoy the freedom of transit through the territory of transit States by all means of transport. (2) The terms and modalities for exercising freedom of transit shall be agreed between the land-locked States and transit States concerned through bilateral, sub-regional or regional agreements. (UNCLOS, 68).

Now the question is if international law is an obligation itself, then what does it mean to have bilateral, sub-regional or regional agreements? The provision also does not define which of these organizations are applicable. If the emphasis is on cooperation among landlocked states and if the states cooperate, then why do they need international law to resolve their issues?

In a commentary made by “the International Law Commission on Article 26 of the 1956 draft convention on the Law of the Sea, Part II (the High Seas)”, lakes were only those large bodies which were entirely encapsulated by dry land while others would be seas. If the coasts of such stretch of water, “including those of the waterway giving access to the high seas, belong to a single state, they are considered internal seas.” Through the Volga-Don canal, the Caspian is connected to the Black Sea, and transit warrants exclusive permission of its owner state (Ghafouri, 2008: 86). Therefore, The Law of the Sea does not suit the characteristics of the Caspian Sea. Moreover, several key states, including the U.S (based on the ban of deep-sea mining) did not ratify the Law of the Sea, so there is a lack of international legitimacy (Haghayeghi, 2003: 34).

Professor Janusz-Pawletta, B. (2015:22), argued that “the Caspian Sea was a closed sea” and it has remained closed for other countries backed by the legal draft between Iran and the USSR. For example, Article 2 “Iran’s National Law on Exploration and Exploitation of the Continental Shelf of 1949” suggested that ‘any international provisions regarding the closed sea can be applied to the Caspian Sea.’ Iran reiterated the previous agreement officially in 1974 stating

that the concept of a “closed sea’ shall not be confused with the concept of the closed sea as defined in UNCLOS 1982”. Hence, it is not subject to the convention of 1982. Thus, the “Caspian Sea as closed sea” was fully exercised by two former littoral states without any restriction. In addition, “the extensive body of law relating to the oceans could not directly and fully apply to any inland sea, even in the preamble of the UN Convention Law of the Sea which refers to the term ‘the sea and oceans of the world, and Part IX of the Convention is entitled Enclosed or Semi-Enclosed Seas” (Ivy, 2002).

The Caspian as a ‘lake’

There is no international convention for the division of international lakes to resolve this long prevailing dispute. Therefore, usage rights, water management, shipping, and environmental protection, and so on rely on bilateral or multilateral agreements. As explained by Janusz-Pawletta, border lakes are parts of the internal waters of the states (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 24). In essence, "a lake is a body of water," which is entirely encompassed by land. If the Caspian be deemed a lake, then its water surface, shipping, biological and mineral resources should have to be equally divided among its surrounding states. According to the 1958 Convention on territorial waters, the Caspian will have to be a common property of its coastal states. There are three major principles for the demarcation of international lakes: thalweg (a line connecting the lowest point of a valley), coastal line, and median (middle) line. The thalweg line is generally applied to border rivers but has sometimes used for international lakes (Janusz-Pawletta, 2005:4). The coastal line has been in common use during colonization of tropical nations; however, it got replaced by the median line later on. The median line, so far, has been famously applied in the divisions of “Lake Chad among Niger, Cameroon, Chad, and Nigeria, the Great Lakes between Canada and the U.S, Lake Geneva between Switzerland and France and Lake Malawi among Malawi, Tanzania, and Mozambique.” Lake Titicaca is jointly owned by its littoral states, Bolivia and Peru (Oglu Shafiev, 2001:2).

Geographically, the Caspian Sea is considered the largest salt lake in the world. Its salinity is three times less than seawater. In 1994, the Russian Federation declared “the Caspian Sea has no natural connection to the world's ocean; therefore, it is a landlocked body of water.” Pertaining to this, Mamedov, R., (2001:226) writes "due to physical and geographical characteristics; the Caspian Sea was defined as inner continent closed basin that has no natural connection with any ocean." Overlapping issues has historically rendered laws, such as the territorial sea, EEZ, or continental shelf, quite inapplicable. The five states share boundaries

with the Caspian, but there is no legal basis for unilateral claims or actions. Supporting other experts of maritime law, Ganjaliyev, E, argued that the "basic principle definition for the sea is its direct connection with an ocean. Flowing rivers and canals are the direct subject matter of the affected states". According to the UNCLOS, "the Caspian Sea is around 1000 miles away from any ocean and has no natural connection to it, cannot be classified as the sea". (Ganjaliyev, 2012:15). Favouring this argument, Gafauri, M, an Iranian professor suggests that "In the absence of an international treaty concerning the international lakes, the historical practice should be considered as a primary source of customary international law. The Caspian Sea is the largest body of water which is surrounded by five states; therefore the littoral states must determine its legal status based on unanimity" (Gafauri, 2008:87).

In 1992, the "International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivers that in the absence of a treaty over condominium status, gulf or lake can be jointly owned by the littoral states". An apt example in this regard would be the Gulf of Fonseca, which remained under the joint ownership of three sovereign countries, Nicaragua, El Salvador, and Honduras, all part of the Spanish Empire before its collapse in 1821. A similar idea can be applied in this is the case by ensuring their economic benefits from exploration (Granmayeh, 2004:34). Apart from, Article 3 of the 1921 Treaty provides "the freedom to establish a Special Commission to finalize the issue of the U.Se of border waters as well as the resolution of all disputed border and territorial matters." In the absence of an international convention regarding the international lakes, the historical activities and the Treaties of 1921 and 1940 appears as a primary source of the international custom law for defining the legal status of the Caspian Sea (Janusz- Pawletta, 2005:2).

The Caspian as a 'Condominium'

The concept of Condominium became popular only after the collapse of the Soviet Republics. The treaties of 1921 and 1940 Soviet-Iranian created the concept of the condominium between both empires, which held the Caspian body as open to common exploitation by both countries. The reality was not so. Iran was only accorded with equal rights of navigation, and Russia took exclusive control over oil platforms and military forces. So much so, that the USSR unilaterally triggered the exploitation of oil in Baku without any consultation with Iran. According to this condominium principle, such acts are unacceptable for the riparian states. In early 1990, the condominium concept was exemplified by Russia and Iran. Initially, Turkmenistan supported it, but it kept changing positions, while Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan opposed this principle all together (Janusz-Pawletta, 2015: 16). With reference to this, Andrei Chernishev, Russian

Deputy Foreign Minister said, "Russia doesn't support the Caspian Sea's division and won't allow plunder of mineral resources of the Sea. Russia is insisting on cooperation, but against unilateral actions in the Caspian Sea, without the consent of five states. Thus, the interests of the Caspian Sea are our interests" (Mamedov, 2001:231).

The resolutions taken between Spain and France over Lake Lanoux are the stepping-stones for the basic principles of a condominium. An International Arbitral Tribunal judged that "restriction on the sovereignty of a state could only be admitted if there was clear and convincing evidence." In regard to such international practice, it is mandatory that there is an official agreement on the lake being under the jurisdiction of the parties (Ramazanova, E. 2012:17). However, the Soviet Union and Iran had not made any such consultations. Russia ended up exploiting the shore, Neftianye Karnoiin, and Iran followed suit in 1950 (Nadirkulova, 2012:57).

The Gulf of Fonseca is one of the rare cases where the International Court of Justice (ICJ) applied this principle. El Salvador, Honduras, and Nicaragua were to jointly share the Gulf of Fonseca under the condominium regime. However, "the three states were part of Spain before 1821. The ICJ gave a decision that the "Gulf is under jurisdiction except 3 miles zone from their coast". The difference lies in the fact that the Gulf was under the rule of the Spanish empire alone (Ramazanova, 2012:17). The Caspian Sea, contrarily, was under the jurisdiction of two empires, and the numbers of states increased after the breakup of the USSR, making it quite a unique case that is surrounded by five states.

Littoral States and the Legal Position of the Caspian

Russian professor Haghayeghi, M, (2003, 34) explains, "The littoral states were divided into two groups; as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan adopted the UNCLOS on the issue of delimitation, whereas Russia and Iran supported the joint ownership for the exploitation of the Caspian." As is evident, there varying opinions on the matter by the five concerned states.

Russia

Russia, playing a significant role, has signed several multilateral agreements establishing cooperation between the Caspian states to resolve the legal issue of Caspian. If the UNCLOS were to be applied, it would challenge the Russian sovereignty and imperil its national security (Boban and Lončar, 2016:83). Although Azerbaijan's recommendation of dividing the sea into sectors was rejected by Russia, it insisted on the establishment of joint ownership.

The official position of Russia is as follows.

- Russia always classified the Caspian as a unique body of water, which is not subject to the convention of the law of the sea 1982.
- In relation to the Soviet-Iranian treaties, Russia viewed all the Caspian states have equal rights on the Caspian sea and consider it as common property and also against unilateral action in the Sea" (Abilov, 2013:133). Russia accepted two definitions of the Caspian: a border lake or a closed sea. To Russia's benefit, no foreign intervention would be allowed. It would strengthen Russia's stance if it can force the Caspian states, especially Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to cooperate with Moscow to use Russian waterways for export of their oil and gas resources to European markets (Boban and Lončar, 2016:83).
- Russia classifies the Caspian Sea as a 'divided bottom', 'common water', which is to result in the sectoral division of the seabed leaving the surface water common (Dunlap, 2004).
- Like Iran, initially, Russia also supported the condominium principle, providing rights of equal access to all coastal states, thereby stopping any construction of trans-Caspian pipelines such as Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan (Oglu Shafiev, 2001: 4).

No matter the resistance from Iran and Turkmenistan, in all probability, the trilateral agreement (May 2003) will be moved to determine the future of the Caspian, supported by the fact that most gas and oil deposits and international projects are engaged in the northern Caspian. In 2014, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan also signed a similar over the seabed. Iran opposed it, but the plan was implemented in 2015 nonetheless.

If Russia's proposal were to be codified as international law, Moscow would be the most benefitted. This would mean, (a) securing a legal regime would allow stability in the region; (b) Russia's relations with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan would be stronger in all fields political, economic, social and cultural which will definitely reduce the instability in Chechnya; and (c) the solution of the legal status of the sea would enhance Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan's economic and trade relations with other countries. It would also result in the exploration and development of oil and gas fields in the region (Dunlap, 2004).

Kazakhstan

Being the richest oil region, Kazakhstan is very keen to resolve the problem of legal issue in the Caspian, agreeing to finalize the draft treaty of Moscow in 1994. Similarly, Kazakhstan accepted the agreement in 1995 regarding “the Conversation and Utilization of Biological Resources of the Caspian Sea”. Furthermore, the “Presidents of the Russian Federation and Kazakhstan signed an agreement on April 27, 1996, on the issue of the legal position of the Caspian and development of cooperation between the littoral states”. The aim was to emphasize cooperation among the littoral states in order to solve the legal problem of the Caspian. (Sinker, 2001:65). The following is the official stand of Kazakhstan:

- Kazakhstan characterized the Caspian as a ‘sea’; this would warrant the application of the UNCLOS. Borders were to include territorial waters extending 12 miles offshore and the rest were to be divided into exclusive economic zones. (Sanei, 2001:756).
- Kazakhstan supported the division of the seabed based on the median line, leaving the surface water for common use. (Ghafouri, 2008:87).
- Kazakhstan supported the idea that each sovereign state gets to explore and exploit the mineral resources of the Caspian shelf.

Turkmenistan

Turkmenistan is the only country that had not shown much interest in the matter, but interests grew in keeping with changing political situations and altering views. It was the first country to adopt the UNCLOS law by creating coastal water, 12 miles of the territorial sea, a 35-mile exclusive economic zone and leaving the rest for common use and management. (Saadat, 2012:84). Two years later, it also supported the condominium principle until all the littoral states agreed to the legal status of the Caspian. In 1996, Turkmenistan switched its position and supported the Azerbaijan stand of sectoral divisions. In the next meeting, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan agreed to divide the seabed according to the median line, but could not identify the point of division (Abilov, 2013:133). In March 1997, Presidents of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan made a joint statement that “both countries agreed on the sectoral division of the Caspian through the median line principle or equidistant line” (Bantekas, 2011:52).

Azerbaijan

Azerbaijan was the first country to demand national sectors based on the median line principle, claiming the "Caspian as an international lake". Adhering to this, Hasan Hasanov, the former Foreign Minister of Azerbaijan declared that "the Caspian is a lake and there is no international

convention for defining the legal status of lakes" (Abilov, 2013:131). The country rejected the principle of the condominium or joint sovereignty and considered the 1921 and 1940 Soviet–Iranian treaties as irrelevant in modern time (Sinker, 2001:61). Russia reiterated the condominium principle in the 1921 and 1940 treaties, but Azerbaijan rejected this proposal by claiming its invalidity in the present scenario where only two riparian states were in cahoots.

The official position of Azerbaijan is as stated below.

- The Caspian Sea is an ‘international lake’. (Kondaurova,2008, 78);
- The seabed should be divided in line with the equidistance or median line principle.
- On December 14, 1998, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Azerbaijan Republic, officially expressed its position on the Caspian by stating that "each sovereign Caspian state has rights to develop their mineral resources in their own national sector, while the Soviet-Iranian Treaties of 1921 and 1940 only covers the question relating to navigation and fisheries, do not talk about the mineral resources of the Caspian Sea". (Ghafouri, 2008:87).

The Caspian Sea was divided into Soviet and Iranian zones by the USSR in 1970. The sea was separated between Astara and Hosseingholi, where the Soviet sector was further divided into Russia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Azerbaijan claims, “This ‘inter-republic division’ was officially recognized by Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin in 1993” (Mehdiyoun, 2000:184). In this regard, the Azerbaijani Constitution and the Majlis (parliament) have codified “the principle of sovereignty over the Azerbaijan sector of the Caspian” (Sanei, 2001:755).

Iran

Iran seconded Russia’s 1990 proposal of a condominium. Undoubtedly, Iran would benefit from this principle in terms of transportation privilege (Askari and Taghavi, 2006:86). Due to isolation position, Iran changed its view after 1998 and called for "an equal division of the seabed". Iran highlighted that "the legal status of the Caspian must be defined on the ‘equity’ principle" (Bahman Aghai Diba, 2016). Supporting the condominium, Iran proposed that both the seabed and surface be divided equally. In effect, each of the sovereign states would have a twenty percent share (Haghayeghi, 2003:34). In 2002, Iranian Oil Minister, Bijan Namdar Zanganeh, argued that "In the absence of any legal solution, Iran would soon develop its 20%

of the sea and after that other state would not be allowed in the Iranian sector for exploration" (Askari and Taghavi, 2006:87). According to Mohsenin, M. M. (2001: 110), the legal regime of the Caspian Sea should be based on the following principles:

- The 1921 and 1940 treaties must be considered a basic tool for defining the legal position of the sea.
- The decision related to the Caspian Sea must be based on "the principle of equity and unanimity" between the littoral states.
- Demilitarization is essential for the Caspian Sea.
- The Caspian must be a source for trade, cooperation and economic convergence between the Caspian bordering states. A conversation of the environment is necessary for the Caspian Sea, and pollution from oil and gas pipelines must be prevented.

Apart from this, Former Iranian diplomat Granmayeh proposed two methods for the legal status of the Caspian Sea (Sinker, 2001:71).

- The Soviet-Iranian treaties of the 1921 and 1940 must be regarded as a legal source for defining rules and rights of the littoral states.
- The riparian states should form a regional organization to coordinate the activities in the fields, including the exploitation of oil and gas, fisheries, transportation, and prevention of pollution.

It is evident from the chapter that the Russian and the Persian empires fully controlled the Caspian Sea (treating it as a lake) throughout the Soviet period. After 1991, the number of concerned parties has increased from two to five, making the Caspian's legal status a fundamental issue. The legal status of the Caspian Sea has become a key issue of priority for the coastal states. Presently, Russia, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan share the northern Caspian through bilateral and multilateral agreement, but there is no defined sectoral division for Iran, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan. The littoral states face several issues such as the delimitation of the sea and disputes over territorial jurisdiction on oil and gas fields. Legal researchers have had difficulty in defining the legal status as the Caspian has common characteristics of both a sea and a lake. Hence, the littoral states have differing legal positions. If the Caspian Sea is defined under the UNCLOS, then the definition of the sea would not fit the Caspian due to overlapping issues as well as due to lack of natural outflow. The Caspian Sea cannot be defined

as a lake either. There is no international legal convention on defining a lake, so it would be divided equally among the littoral states. For that to happen, it requires cooperation and consensus on the part of all the five nations. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, however, have opposed this method.

Finally, in August 2018, the presidents of the five Caspian states defined it as “neither a sea nor a lake but a ‘special legal status’.” It is an instrumental step for regional cooperation. It will also enhance economic opportunity. Moreover, there is shared concern over the entry of non-Caspian states, which could endanger regional security. Therefore, they banned the entry of non-Caspian state in the region, indicates for the U.S and NATO. It is a big victory for Russia and Iran. The two countries are suffering the western sanctions. This convention is not a final dispute solver. For further resolution, they need another agreement for the delimitation of oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea. Most importantly, the five states solved the legal issue of the Caspian.

Chapter V

Russia's Relations with the Caspian Bordering States

Russia is the main priority of foreign policy of the Caspian and the Central Asian states. The division of energy reserves in Central Asia is unequal. Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, and Uzbekistan are the richest in oil and gas reserves, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan stock immense water resource and hydropower potential (Patnaik, 2016: 39). Russia is an important partner of all Central Asian countries, focusing greatly on developing relations with its neighbours. The foreign trade turnover between Russia and Kazakhstan amounted to 23.8 billion US dollars in 2011. Out of this, 7.5 billion US dollars came through exports from Kazakhstan and 16.3 billion US dollars through imports from Russia. The mutual trade turnover between Uzbekistan and Russia was over 7 billion USD in 2012. Exports from Uzbekistan fetched 5.17 billion USD, and imports profited to 2.45 billion USD. There have been favorable trade with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as well. Furthermore, Russia has been a supplier of considerable economic and military-technical assistance. For instance, Russia provided arms worth 1 billion USD to Kyrgyzstan in 2013. The Kyrgyz city of Kant hosts a Russian airbase with a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) mandate. There is another military base in Tajikistan (Rakhimov, 2015: 141).

With declining Russian population, migration between Central Asia and Russia is another important factor. According to the Russian Federal State Statistics Service, between 1992 and 2010, the national population has declined to around 12.7 million people. At the same period, approximately 6.5 million people migrated to Russia for employment. The Russian Federal Migration Service (FMS) estimated in January 2015, around 4 million Central Asian migrants' set base in Russia. The largest group of migrants arrive from Uzbekistan (2,215,780), Tajikistan (999,132), Kazakhstan (597,559), and Kyrgyzstan (544,956). The Central Bank of Russia claimed to have spent more than 5 billion USD worth of transmission to Central Asia in 2012, but economic sanctions were curbed, and the amount declined in 2013-14. (Rakhimov, 2015: 144). With the advent of the Ukraine crisis, trade relation in Central Asia was drastically affected by the trade turnover of Ukraine and Uzbekistan falling tenfold.

The increasing role of China and the U.S and the construction of pipelines have been playing a prominent role in Russia's relations with the Caspian states as well as Central Asia. Entering Central Asia, a global dream for the U.S, benefitted its broader strategy in relation to

Afghanistan, South Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, West Asia, South Asia, and the European Union. The U.S aimed to develop its relations with Central Asian states and bring all countries under Western influence. The U.S established a program called the "Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC)" in 1997. The Asian Development Bank mainly implemented this program. During 1997-2012, more than 100 projects were funded under CAREC. The well-established infrastructure attracted investments more than \$20 billion. Moreover, the U.S influenced the Central Asian countries to access to the WTO. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are already a member of the WTO member. Kazakhstan is also in this line. As former Kazakh Nazarbaev declared that WTO accession is "one of the nation's foreign trade priorities" in January 2014. Moreover, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan also expressed their desire to join it. (Rakhimov, 2015: 147).

Reflecting on China's role in Central Asia, Antony J. Blinken, US Deputy Secretary of State, argued that

Today, we have three important objectives for our engagement with each of the Central Asian states: strengthening partnerships to advance mutual security; forging closer economic ties; and advancing and advocating for improved governance and human rights. China looms large in the region with its ambitious plans to advance Asian connectivity through overland and maritime routes. It committed tens of billions of dollars to build roads and rails to better connect its factories and markets in Asia and Europe. And we support these efforts to connect the region, but we also urge that they advance trade in all directions and adhere to international norms. We don't see China's involvement in Central Asian zero-sum terms. Its development of infrastructure in Central Asia can be fully complementary to our own efforts. And in particular, we see an important role for China in supporting the transition in Afghanistan and advancing its own integration into the broader Asia region. (Antony, 2015; Rakhimov, 2015: 148).

Unlike the West, China is not interested in making a change in the government system in Central Asia. It primarily focuses on channelling socio-political stability through economic and infrastructural development.

Russia is interested in creating a multi-polar international system in Central Asia, such as the rise of China, India, and Brazil. In this context, Putin stated in 2007:

We are seeing a greater and greater disdain for the basic principles of international law. Moreover, separate norms, in essence almost the whole

legal system of one state, first and foremost, of course, of the United States, overstepped its national boundaries, and in essence, is imposed on other states in all spheres... (Muzalevsky, 2009: 27).

However, the multi-vector foreign policies of Central Asian states ended up opposing Russia's effort to reassert its influence in Eurasia. Besides oil and gas, Russia is also aware of Central Asia's workforce and growing economy. This increase in powerful nations in the area has affected Russia's stronghold in the market.

Map 5.1 Ethnic Russian Populations



Source: "BBC News (2014), "Russian-majority areas watch Moscow's post-Crimea moves", URL: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26713975>".

On the other hand, Russia has been pursuing security policies in the Caspian region as well as Central Asia through CIS, CSTO, EEC, and SCO. Russia has been known to promote peacekeeping, counterterrorism, and anti-missile defense in the CIS. However, Russia was pushed to remodel its security policies following the ineffectiveness of these organizations during the 'Chechnya conflict.' As a result, bilateral relations are preferred while dealing with regional threat (Muzalevsky, 2009: 32). The Caspian region and Central Asia is a platform for Russia to redeem its lost strategic influence in Eurasia and make itself as a strong pillar of the

reputed international system. Russia has been restoring its impact by several political, economic, and cultural considerations. Central Asian population with Russian ethnicity is a base for bilateral ties. Ethnic Russians make up 23.7% of the total population in Kazakhstan, followed by Kyrgyzstan (12.5%), Uzbekistan (5.5%), Turkmenistan (4%), and Tajikistan (1.1%). (BBC News, 2014).

Being rich in natural resources and bordering five states, the Caspian Sea is both a connecting and a dividing factor. Since the independence of the Caspian states, it has been a series of altering cooperation and disagreements for the littoral states (Ibrahimov, 2014: 93). The newly independent states of Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan lack diplomatic experience. In order to counterbalance the influence of Russia and Iran, these states have to prioritize the establishment of territorial integrity. For international and regional dominance, they had to concentrate on the use of energy resources (Dekmejian, and Simonian, 2003: 74).

The Nagorno-Karabakh enclave is the focal point of Azerbaijan's foreign policy and energy strategy. It has been seeking foreign investment in its oil and gas fields. For instance, the Aliyev regime tried to gather international political support in its struggle to recover Nagorno-Karabakh. Furthermore, Azerbaijan is dedicated to sustaining peaceful relations with its neighbors to secure oil and gas export venues. Contrarily, Kazakh foreign policy is determined by multiple factors, including the country's large size, ethnic Russians, proximity to Russia, and so forth. As a landlocked exporter, it is of the utmost importance to Kazakhstan that it pushes for regional harmony. Similarly, Turkmenistan needs to maintain balanced relations to export its gas production. Turkmenistan's geographical location aids in maintaining a balance between its two powerful neighbors – Iran and Uzbekistan (Ibid).

Being the largest and most powerful littoral state, Russian foreign policy's interests require special attention. The most prominent strategy that Russia has adopted is to hold control through state-owned companies like Gazprom, Transneft, and Rosneft as well as several private energy enterprises such as Yukos, Sibneft, and Lukoil (Bajrektarecic, and Posega, 2014:89). To preserve its political and economic interests, multiple bilateral and multilateral agreements have been signed by Russia. A 'round table' summit was held in Moscow on 17 February 2004, for the safety of the Caspian basin, which included members of State Duma, Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs and other experts. The summit concluded in only concentrating on the Caspian's oil and gas reserves and a no-tolerance policy for foreign presence (Cohen, 2006:5).

Putin gave a speech on "Russia as an energy super state" at the meeting of Russian Security Council in 2005, focusing on the prevention of the trans-Caspian pipeline, i.e., a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan and an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan. Presidents of Russia, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, signed an alternative agreement to construct a Caspian pipeline instead on December 20, 2007. Moreover, Russian, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan had agreed to expand the Central Asia-center gas pipeline system in May 2007 (Kazantsev, 2008:1084-1085). In terms of Russian foreign policy in the former Soviet Union, it has been known to promote stability in the region. Russia has a military presence in Central Asia countries like Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and the Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan. In February 1993, the former Russian President, Yeltsin urged the UN to provide peacekeeping troops to the Russian army to tackle conflicts in the former Soviet territory (Nassibli, 2004:142).

Russia and Kazakhstan

Kazakhstan is one of the largest oil producers in the Caspian and the most open to western investment. During the 1990s, western investors entered most of Kazakh's energy fields such as Tengiz Karachaganak and Kashagan. Kazakhstan shares a long border of 6,846 km with Russia, and so, it was the last to break free from the Soviet Union. These two nations share common, historical, cultural, geographical, and geo-economic features. Apart from this, Kazakhstan has been a land of economic, social, and cultural exchange among the major players in Eurasia (Chaudhury,2009:9). Kazakhstan joined the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC) with Russia, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Kyrgyzstan in spite of sharing strong ties with the U.S. Among several of its joint ventures, the most noteworthy would be its collaboration with Moscow on the Baikonur space-launch facility, its agreement with Moscow to divide the north Caspian in 1998, and joining the CIS Collective Security Treaty. Kazakhstan also united with the SCO to preserve peace and stability in the region (Kubicek, 2004:210-211).

Surrounded by Russia, Turkmenistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan's location is interesting, to say the least. It is also the only republic to connect Russia and China, making it a hotspot for both the nations. Chinese interests in Kazakhstan are manifold. First, China needs the energy resources for the development of its economy, and secondly, China needs Kazakhstan on its side to quell the separatist movement in Xinjiang Province bordering eastern Kazakhstan. In order to maintain its sovereignty and security of its natural resources, Kazakh president, Nazarbayev adopted a 'multi-vector foreign policy' since independence. It

helped to sustain balanced cooperation with major powers (Russia, China, U.S, and EU) against external domination. Due to its landlocked location, Kazakhstan needs to keep peaceful borders for trade and other economic activities (Henriksen, 2013:39). The Kazakh president may be pro-Russian, pro-Chinese or pro-American, but 'they are Kazakh first' according to Nazarbayev (Rapoza, 2017).

The Russian Federation and the Republic of Kazakhstan established their diplomatic relations on October 22, 1992, through several bilateral treaties. They were (i) "Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance of May 25, 1992; (ii) Declaration on Eternal Friendship and Alliance aimed for the 21st century of July 6, 1998. In addition, (iii) Protocol on Amendments to the Treaty on Friendship, Co-operation and Mutual Assistance on May 25, 1992. (This was signed on July 7, 2012, and ratified by both parties in June 2013)". (Diyarbakirlioglu and Yigit, 2014). Kazakhstan has remained a reliable strategic partner for Russia, from Yeltsin till Putin. This is the reason why Astana was Dmitrii Medvedev's choice for an international visit in May 2008. He said, "Russia values the genuinely friendly and mutually advantageous relations with Kazakhstan, our strategic partner." His counterpart Kazakh President Nazarbayev said that "This should be perceived as a natural phenomenon due to their close economic ties which bring both states together." Russia is Kazakhstan's largest foreign trade partner (Torjesen and Overland, 2010: 136).

There is much to be noted about the historical, geographical, and economic ties between these two nations. Kazakhstan has inherited infrastructure, pipelines, military facilities for nuclear weapons, economic interdependency with Russia and the Baikonur Cosmodrome. In the economic realm, both countries have a common energy infrastructure, which was built during the Soviet period. The transit fees that Russia receives contribute to its national budget. Russia aims to have control over the Caspian energy industry at large and Kazakhstan in particular. This allows Russia not only to acquire political leverage over European countries that heavily dependent on Caspian energy but also regain its political hegemony over the Central Asian states.

Economic and Energy Ties

Large Kazakh energy reserves lend itself greatly to the world's overall energy supply. So much so that without exactly calling itself an energy superpower, former Kazakh President Nazarbayev declared that Kazakhstan would become an energy security factor in Europe and Asia. Energy is one of the most important economic factors for Kazakhstan; it has developed

a well-functioning energy relationship with Russia. Kazakh oil and gas resources export through Russian territory, and both the countries have agreed upon a joint development of three oil fields in the Caspian Sea. More than 60 million tons of Kazakh oil has been exported through Russia in 2007 alone. In 2009, the overall exports to Russia were 35.4% from Kazakhstan, which was significantly ahead of China (22.1%) and Germany (8%) both (Zabortseva, 2014:312). Moreover, the countries concluded a bilateral agreement for demarcation of the Caspian Sea, for example, Moscow and Astana jointly developed three oil fields, which are situated in the north-western part of the Caspian Sea: Khalynskoe, Tsentralnoe, and Kurmangazy (Torjesen and Overland, 2010:137).

During the first official visit of the Kazakh President Nazarbayev to Russia in March 1994, he signed twenty-two documents, which raised bilateral relations to higher levels. The documents include "Agreement on the Enhancement of Economic Co-operation and Integration of Kazakhstan and Russia, the Agreement on the Basic Principles and Conditions of Use of the Baikonur Launching Site, the Memorandum on the Basic Principles which resolved issues of citizenship," and so on (Vinokurov, 2010:4). Apart from this, the Business Forum took place in Uralsk in March 2003 with the participation of around 150 industrialists from Kazakhstan and Russia, where participants discussed many issues including taxation, trans-frontier cooperation, and small business leading. The most noteworthy step towards maintaining this friendship took place through interregional cooperation meetings, which have been held annually since 2003. These meetings aim to discuss and resolve issues related to trade and economic fields and introduce new proposals and initiatives to strengthen bilateral ties. Consequently, under the Interregional Forum, in 2014, mutual trade between Astana and Moscow rose six-fold and reached 21 bln U.S dollars. Speaking at Moscow State University of Foreign Affairs, Nazarbayev said,

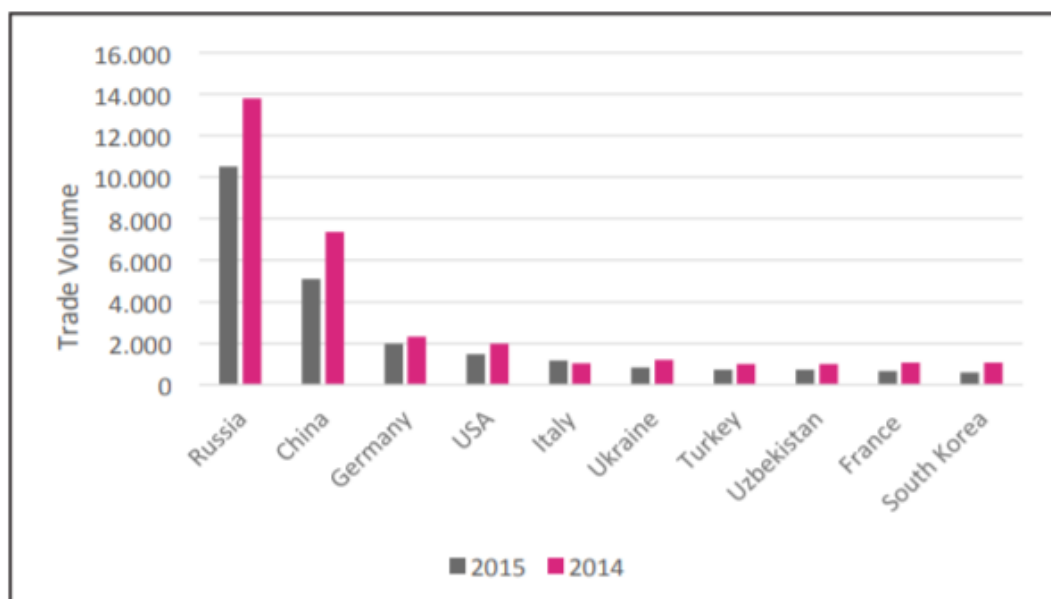
I have always been asked what bilateral relations I would like our countries to have. I want to answer this question citing John Kennedy, who said the following about the U.S. and Canada: Geography has made us neighbors. History has made us friends. Economics has made us partners, and necessity has made us allies. So, I would like Kazakhstan and Russia to enjoy the same relations, as the U.S. and Canada do³¹.

Shedding light upon their trade and economic relations, Russia and Kazakhstan signed an intergovernmental agreement on October 9, 2010, regarding the delivery of oil and gas products

³¹ "Kazinform: international news agency (2015), "Kazakhstan, and Russia- century-long friendship", (online web) Accessed on 15 January 2018, URL: https://www.inform.kz/en/kazakhstan-and-russia-century-long-friendship_a2828589"

till 2025. Furthermore, in 2011, around five hundred Russian companies took part in more than forty conferences, business missions, seminars, exhibitions, fairs, roundtables, and presentations in Kazakhstan. This fact solely reveals a strong bond between these countries. In 2012, several business missions from the Sverdlovsk and Saratov Kirov regions, the Altai Territory and the Republic of Bashkortostan, innovation forum on trans-frontier interregional cooperation, and multiple deals were signed between the Union of Small and Medium Enterprise between the two countries (Issabayev, et al. 2016; 9673).

Table: 5.1 Top Import Partners of Kazakhstan 2015 (in a million US\$)



Source: UN Comtrade.com, URL: <https://comtrade.un.org/>

Due to Kazakh's rich hydrocarbon resources, it attracts a hefty number of American companies such as Chevron, Shell, Mobil, Texaco, etc. who have set up base in Kazakhstan. On the other hand, Russia imposes a heavy tariff on oil transportation, which is unacceptable by Kazakhstan, no matter how convenient the transport route. As is evident, oil is one of the primary geostrategic interests of the U.S, Russia, and China in the Caspian region and Central Asia. However, Russia has a monopoly over the pipeline network even though it allows only 2 million tons of oil per year through Russian pipelines (Cohen, 2006:7).

Another cheap route for Kazakh's oil transportation is Atyrau-Samara pipeline to Russia, which is operated by Transneft, Russian state-owned company along with KazTransOil. This pipeline

exports Kazakh oil to Europe via Russia. In 2013, approximately 15.4 million tons of oil was shipped through this pipeline. Moreover, Russia and Kazakhstan use a sea route in the Caspian Sea between Makhachkala and Aktau to deliver 2.7 million tons of oil (Guschin, 2015). Consequently, Russian companies have expanded in Kazakhstan, especially Lukoil, Rosneft, Gazprom, and Transneft, to name the four most important ones. These companies make sure that Astana is under the influence of Russia, keeping out China and the U.S. Currently, Lukoil is operating seven projects in Kazakhstan and has a stake in the CPC pipeline. About 32.7 million tons of oil was transported through the pipeline in 2013, in which 28.7 million tons were exported from Kazakhstan (Guschin, 2015). As such, Lukoil is the largest investor in Kazakhstan with the investment of more than \$6 billion. In fact, the Lukoil Company extracted "around 5 million tons of oil and more than 2 billion cubic meters of gas" in 2008 (Zabortseva, 2014:317).

Moreover, both countries are expanding their economic ties through Custom Union, EEU, and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council organizations. Proposed by Nazarbayev, the creation of the Eurasian Union has doubled trade among its member states. Economists at the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) are of the opinion that the Customs Union is the first successful example of the regional economic integration of Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus for the former Soviet Union (Pyrkalo, 2012). The motive behind this Union provides an alternative of the Western model of modernization to the former Soviet states and shape a major 'poles' of the contemporary world, which can influence global politics.

Security Ties

Russian experts believe that Kazakhstan is the only Central Asian country is "unconditional partner and ally" to Russia. They have been partners through various regional economic organizations such as "Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), Custom Union and several political alliances such as Shanghai Cooperation Organizations (SCO), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia" (Sultangaliyeva, 2016;33). Not just that, Kazakhstan takes part in numerous security activities of the CIS, including "the CIS Anti-Terrorist Centre, the joint air defense, CIS Council of the Commanders of Border Troops (SKPV)" etc. It is active in SCO Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) in Tashkent, however, the CSTO is the most important defense organization for Kazakhstan (McDermott, 2012; 16). All these organizations ensure security and stability in this region, which is sparse with political and economic motivations.

Russia's major strategic focus lies on security. A military treaty was signed between Russia and Kazakhstan on 28 March, 1994. Since then, over 60 bilateral agreements have been signed to strengthen their relationship. These agreements have been modified over time. In fact, Kazakh soldiers received training in Russia from 1992 to 2005. In return for this loyalty, Kazakhstan takes arms from Russia, which is already the largest supplier of the military. After Russia, Kazakhstan has the second-largest military resources among CSTO states, which makes it a key partner for Russia. To maintain its historic military ties with Kazakhstan, Russia introduced the New Russian Foreign Policy Doctrine known as the 'Medvedev Doctrine' in 2008, which emphasized to regain its status in 'privileged sphere of influence' in the former Soviet space. Fortunate for Kazakhstan, it is keeping a balanced relationship with both Russia and the U.S because of its multi-vector policy. Kazakhstan is a member of NATO's PFP program, but Nazarbayev warned that cooperation with NATO does not mean that one day Astana will reduce Moscow's role in the country's security. However, Nazarbayev consistently demonstrated that 'Kazakhstan wants to stay away from the zero-sum game fields' (Rousseau, 2009).

Following the multi-vector policy, Kazakhstan has provided more than 11 million hectares of its territory to Russia on lease for the purpose of military facilities. It is important to note here that Russia has access to Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan and almost 70% space launches by Moscow. The first lease agreement, which was established in 1994, is currently extended to 2050. Russia has access to Kazakhstan's air force, and it majorly does trials for its new naval weapons in western Kazakhstan, essentially in Atyrau and Chkalov State Flying Trial Centre. Moscow even has access to places like Aqtobe, Zhambyl, Kyzlorda, and Karaganda to carry out tests on missiles and ammunition. Western security experts believe that the Kazakh's official 'multi-vector foreign policy' is questionable with its strong defense and security ties with Russia, but this approach saves the country from playing favorites. In this context, Former Kazakh Defense Minister Daniyal Akhmetov openly declared that "armed forces of Moscow are the main strategic ally of the Kazakh armed force" (McDermott, 2012:49).

During the Russian military show MAKS2007, Kazakh Deputy Defence Minister, Alтынbayev agreed to buy Russian missile defense system and military aeronautics equipment on August 22, 2007. This deal involved \$60 million worth of Russian equipment that included repair and modernizations of Su-25, MiG-31s, S-300PS, 300PMUS2 and MiG-29. Alтынbayev further commented, "We are a member of the CSTO, and we will concentrate on buying Russian military equipment in future" (McDermott, 2012: 58). Intending to unite Central Asian states

on security issues, Putin stressed upon the importance of CSTO in light of the present geopolitical environment. Putin gave his word to integrate military forces of member states and to sell military equipment without bias (Cooley, 2012:56).

In 2013, Kazakhstan approved new foreign policy document, prioritizing Central Asian countries' security, stability, and intraregional unification. The next in line was, of course, Eurasian integration. In part on "Country and Regional Priorities," the first priority was to build relations with Russia. The country is to strengthen its relations with Russia in all fields of political, cultural, trade and economic cooperation following the "Treaty of Good – Neighborliness, and Alliance in the XXI Century." Russia has sustained its ties with Kazakhstan even though the capital has been shifted from Almaty to Astana, and Kazakhstan has denied dual citizenship to Russians (Patnaik, 2016: 37).

Cultural Ties

Almost 21% Kazakhs with Russian ethnicity live in urban places, especially in the northeast of Kazakhstan. These people aid in keeping cultural and familial relations between the states. Apart from just residents, approximately twenty thousand Kazakh students pursue higher education in Russia (Sultangaliyeva, 2016: 34). Other than a lack of economic opportunity, Kazakh also prioritizes its state language and emphasizes local culture, so much; as a result, thousands of Russians left Kazakhstan. One feature of this government policy was to define the country as the national state of ethnically Kazakh people in Kazakhstan's first constitution in 1993 and again in the constitution of 1995 which defined "Kazakhstan both as the state of Kazakhstani people and as the state of Kazakhs" (Sébastien Peyrouse, 2007: 485).

By 1999, around 4,479,618 ethnic Russians dropped, which amounts thoroughly 30% of Kazakhstan's population. This trend peaked in 1994 when 344,112 ethnic Russian left Kazakhstan. Since then it constantly decreased, as a result, Putin met with leaders of the ethnic Russians in Kazakhstan at the beginning of his presidency in 2000. Despite these issues, Russians are still an influential socio-economic group in Kazakhstan and very active in the country's military, public, cultural and economic life. Although Kazakh is the state language, Russian is given an equal footing officially, which includes state and government institutional communication, arbitration court, constitutional documentation and military field of science. Kazakhstan is cooperating with Russia through Eurasian Economic Union. However, Russian protection of these Kazakh Russians is becoming a hindrance to Kazakhstan. For example, several ethnic Russians are found to be indulging in 'ethnic hatred' and inciting Russian

separatists movements in Ukraine. The Kazakh court has demonstrated a stern action by sentencing them to prison terms. The situation exacerbated when Putin publically declared in 2014 that “Kazakhstan is an artificial state that was created by Nazarbayev ‘on the territory where no state existed previously” (Stronski, 2016).

Complexities or Limitations

Notwithstanding the mutual kinship that Russia and Kazakhstan share, there are imbalances that have affected their social and economic ties. For example, in terms of trade turnover, Kazakh's share is only 2.7 %, whereas Russia's share is 19.1%, which reveals an immense gap. Inequalities are there in terms of investments as well, as Kazakhstan invested \$2.86 billion in Russia, whereas Russian investment was around \$9.7 billion in Kazakhstan (Sultangaliyeva, 2016; 36). The increasing role of Chevron in the development of Kazakh's oil sector is threatening to Russia. On the other hand, Kazakhstan is increasing its bilateral ties with western countries. Kazakhstan's trade is 96% with WTO members in which 46% of trade is with the EU, whereas only 17% each with Russia and China. Recently in 2014, Nazarbayev stated that ‘accession to WTO is one of the most foreign trade priorities of Kazakhstan' (Starr, et al., 2014: 31).

The Custom Union was formed to reduce Kazakh's trade with the rest of the world. However, Russia joined the WTO afterward in 2012, which irked Kazakhstan. Russia is also modifying its political stance using the Eurasian Economic Union through the imposition of certain sanctions on Western companies or products in the whole union. Kazakh economy stresses on the devaluation of the Rouble, and this gives Russia an edge in this race. This resulted in the dwindling value of domestic products such as oil, metal, etc. due to the availability of cheap Russian goods. Russian media has called this tussle a ‘trade war' between Astana and Moscow where both are imposing limits on importing goods from one another. This was the reason when Kazakh president Nazarbayev publically criticized sanctions against Russia and called them an "anti-economic" policy (Roberts, 2015).

Quite similar to the rest of Central Asia, Kazakhstan is threatened by several bordering issues such as Syria, Iran, and Ukraine crisis, self-declared Islamic state, the refugee crisis etc. While on one hand, Russia is implementing policies on Ukraine and Syria, Kazakhstan is trying its best to stay away from all this intervention. In such a scenario, Kazakh finds itself sandwiched between Russia and the West. The United States, NATO, and Europe have been very interested in Central Asia against the Taliban terrorism in Afghanistan. Now, these countries are largely

polled out of the region and concentrating their attention in other regions. Therefore, Kazakhstan is suspicious of Moscow's intentions and concerned about Islamic radicalism as well as the political instability of the region. Kazakhstan is also aware of the possibility of ethnic Russians who can challenge the security of the country by supporting integration with Russia. Growing Chinese influence in Kazakh's energy sector and Chinese-inspired One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative connecting both north-south and east-west routes, are also considered major threats to Russia (Stronski, 2016).

Throughout the Russian intervention in Ukraine, Kazakhstan has maintained silence on the issue. It also exercised abstention from the “United Nations General Assembly Resolution 68/262” in 2014, which invalidated Russia’s annexation of Crimea (Ibid). Both countries generally avoid commenting on their bilateral ties. The first time this silence was broken in July 2018, when the host of Russian state television, Vladimir Solovov expressed concern that Kazakhstan was hosting US military bases in two Caspian ports Kuryk and Aqtau. Later, the Foreign Ministry in Astana clarified that the U.S is only using its ports as a transit point for shipping of non-military material in Afghanistan (Kumenov, 2018).

Thus, mutual consultation and constructive dialogues have been the meeting point for these two countries on most occasions. Kazakhstan depends on Russia for various reason, and that is why the Kazakh foreign minister Yerlan Idrisov has said that Russia is an important strategic ally to Kazakhstan in economics, politics and security matters. The two countries ratified “Treaty on Good-Neighborliness and Allied Relations” in the 21st Century in 2014, which came into force in 2015. Signing this treaty, Idrisov stated, “Russia is a very important foreign trading partner of Kazakh’s goods and important transit space which allows us to enter international markets” (Shengelia, 2015). Putin made an official visit to Kazakhstan in 2015 where the two leaders discussed bilateral relations, including trade-economic, investments, and execution of large-scale projects in energy, space survey, transport, and industrial cooperation.³²

Russia – Turkmenistan Relations

Turkmenistan is landlocked in Central Asia, bordering the Caspian Sea in the West, Uzbekistan to north-east, Kazakhstan to the north-west, Iran to the south and Afghanistan to the south-east (Encyclopedia Britannica: Turkmenistan). Turkmenistan is one of the largest gasholders in the

³² Ibid.

Caspian region and contains significant volumes of recoverable oil. The economy of the country heavily relies on oil, gas, and petrochemical production. Approximately 85% of exports of the country are oil and gas (Hoeven, 2015:303). Turkmenistan shares around 1200 km of its border with the Caspian (Zonn and Glantz, 1997: 97).

After the independence from the USSR on October 27, 1991, Turkmenistan declared itself a “permanent neutrality” that was recognized by the United Nations in 1995. Although a fairly isolated country, it has deep ties with Turkey. Since 1994, it has been a member of PfP and signed a contract with the U.S oil company Mobil. Turkmenistan mainly exports gas to Russia and Iran since 1999 (Nygren, 2007:202). Its neutral status meant that Turkmenistan distanced itself from multilateral organizations. Therefore, in order to achieve economic potential, Turkmenistan has been inviting foreign investors for the exploration and exploitation of oil and gas resources as well as find out routes for transit into the world market. Russian elite believed that in October 1996, following the neutral policy, Turkmenistan’s leader Saparmurat Niyazov refused to participate in the Central Asian summit, which was held to discuss the potential threats of the Taliban in Afghanistan, while all the other Central Asian leaders were present (Milov, 2011:91).

Today, Turkmenistan's foreign policy is determined by various socio-economic and geopolitical factors. In other words, the neutral policy of the country, ample natural gas reserves, the exportation of natural gas and the disputed oil and gas fields in the South Caspian Sea, shapes the foreign relations of Turkmenistan with other countries. For Russia, however, Turkmenistan is a key component of its foreign, energy and economic policies, constantly competing with the U.S, EU, and China to access Turkmenistan's hydrocarbon reserves. Energy has been one of its major tools to regain its political and economic status in the region. Gazprom has become a more reliable partner in Turkmen's energy resources in order to fulfill its European gas contracts. Natural gas largely determined Turkmenistan's relations with Russia. Gazprom is the largest trading partner in Ashgabat, which buys around 70% of Turkmenistan's annual gas production (Boucek, 2009: 166).

Turkmenistan deems Russia as a threat to its domestic stability. While in the early 1990s, we see a budding bilateral relationship between Russia and Turkmenistan; by 1997, it changed when Turkmenistan stopped exporting gas to Russia. Moreover, Turkmenistan withdrew from the agreement on Visa-Free Travels among the CIS countries. Positive trends in the Russia-Turkmenistan emerged in late 1999 when they signed an agreement for exporting 20 bcm gas

to Russia in 2000 (Kamenev, 2002). After the September 2001 attack, Turkmen leader Niyazov, aware of his country's support of the Taliban regime and the possibility of becoming the next target of the U.S military actions, started moving closer to Moscow. This is exemplified in the two countries signing a 25-year Russian-Turkmenistan gas supply agreement (Milov, 2011;92).

Development of Relations between Russia and Turkmenistan

Russia and Turkmenistan concluded a treaty on 'joint measures to create the armed forces of Turkmenistan' on July 31, 1992, under which Russia guaranteed security to Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan is the only country in the post-Soviet republic, which is not involved in any military and military-political alliance (Paramonov and Stolpovski, 2008: 15). In this context, President Berdymuhamedov declared, "Turkmenistan will not join any military blocks and will steer its neutrality to solidify the climate of trust and mutual understanding in the region...will develop its huge energy resources and pursue multiple export routes" (Muzalevsky, 2009: 37).

The presidents of two states extended the Russian-Turkmen Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation 1992, on April 23, 2002. It stated that 'the two states will not allow their territory to be used against each other'. Both the states agreed on operation with regard to Special Forces, exchange of operational information, provision of legal assistance, and so on. They also decided to hand over individuals who commit or plan to act on terrorism. During the initial Putin years, relations between two states were at a low level. In May 2000, Putin with Gazprom head, Rem Vyakhirev visited Ashgabat and called Turkmenistan a 'leading partner' (Nygren, 2007:202). The Russian delegation visited Ashgabat in September 2002 for a meeting of the Russian-Turkmen Intergovernmental Economic Commission, which focused on the energy sector, transport, and agriculture. Russia expressed an interest in importing gas from Turkmenistan, and President Niyazov supported this proposal on gas purchase for the period up to 2020. Russia suggested that its companies Gazprom and Zarupezhneft take part in the exploration and exploitation in the Turkmen part of the Caspian (Jonson, 2004:106).

In April 2002, Presidents of Russia and Turkmenistan signed a bilateral Friendship and Cooperation Treaty. In 2008, Russian President Dmitry Medvedev and Turkmen Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov met and discussed the probability of future trade and economic expansion. The primary focus was on cooperation in energy and transport. In October 2017, President Vladimir Putin held a meeting in Ashgabat with the Turkmen President, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow, who expressed his desire for mutual cooperation with Russia in the region.

He said, "We respect and understand Russian's interests in Central Asia and we are ready to continue cooperation to stabilize the region". Turkmen leader also appreciated Russian's role in the development in Afghanistan. With Russian capital, more than 190 companies are operating in the Turkmen market and more than 240 investment projects were executed by both the countries (Aliyeva, 2017). Thus, the diplomatic relations between the two countries include a wide range of areas:

- ❖ The cooperation between the two countries comprises 115 interstate, intergovernmental, and 76 interdepartmental documents to preserve the regional and international security. Turkmenistan often cooperates with Russia and both countries are effectively dealing with current threats and challenges against international terrorism, cross-border crime, drug trafficking, and the like. (New Central Asia: the voice of greater Central Asia, 2017)
- ❖ The countries are developing trade-economic and cultural-humanitarian relations steadily and Russian support for its policy of permanent neutrality particularly in the fields of energy security, transit and transport has been appreciated by Turkmenistan.
- ❖ Russia and Turkmenistan have determined cooperation in the Caspian Sea based on the principles of good-neighborliness, mutual respect and the recognition of the interests of all littoral states. Moreover, both states have supported multilateral agreements relating to trade-economic transport in the Caspian Sea (Ibid.).
- ❖ The foreign ministries of Russia and Turkmenistan are regularly conducting meetings and have interaction to solve the problems of the legal status of the Caspian Sea and Afghan problems in the region (Ibid.).

Energy and Economic Ties

Turkmenistan was a major natural gas repository of the USSR, accounting for 30% of all Soviet gas exports. Since the disintegration of the USSR, Turkmenistan remained a key energy provider to Russia. In fact, Turkmenistan was the biggest natural gas producer in the whole of Central Asia in 2007 with an annual output of 72 bcm (Tromso and Overland, 2009:9). After signing an agreement in 2003, Gazprom was allowed to buy almost all-Turkmen gas for 25 years (Dubnov, 2016). Under this contract, Russia engaged to purchase 5-6 bcm in 2004, increasing to 6-7 bcm in 2005, 10 bcm in 2006, 60-70 bcm from 2007 and 70-80 bcm in 2009-

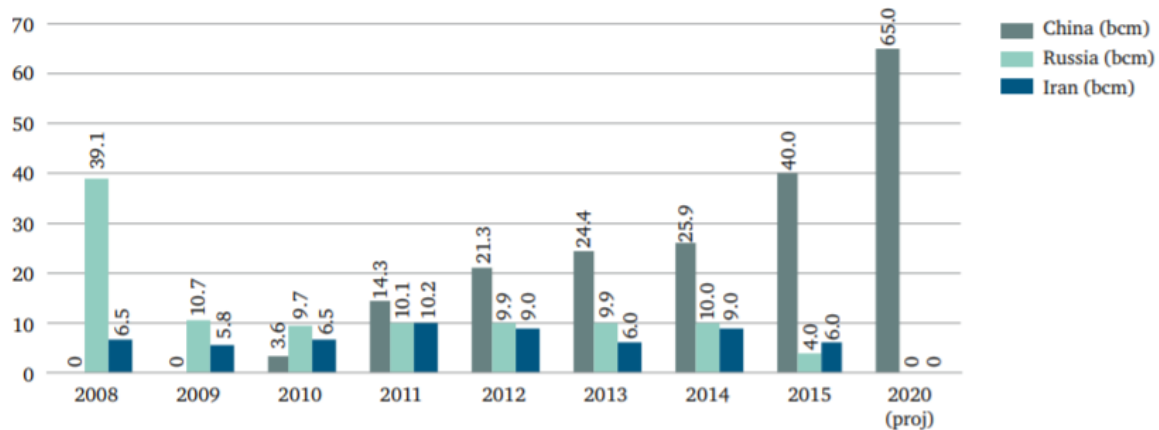
2028. Despite this agreement, Gazprom never bought more than 45 bcm a year (Vasánczki, 2011:8).

It is estimated that Turkmenistan reserves exceed 17 trillion cubic metres (cm) of natural gas (Shaku, 2018). Turkmenistan is under constant criticism from the west on account of human rights, and this has brought Russia closer, especially in the energy export sector. Turkmenistan has strong economic relations with Russia, depending on its export route heavily. It had a bilateral trade of \$453million in 2007, which was 46.9 percent higher than in 2006. (Muzalevsky, 2009: 37). Similarly, Gazprom depends on Turkmen gas for exports into the European markets. Without Turkmen gas, Russia will be at a loss in Europe. Hence, Russia has been accused of using energy as a weapon to restore its strategic interest in the former republic. Yet, the gas pipeline and gas prices are the main reasons behind the conflict between these two countries. For example, in the mid-1990s, Russia cut off all Turkmen gas exports to the West. In 2002, Russia and Turkmenistan agreed on a 15-year agreement. The plan was to kick start in 2005 but the states failed to fix the price of gas. On 17 August, 2002, Turkmen Foreign Ministry stated that the price of gas should be US\$44-45 per 1000 cubic meters. Before Putin's visit Turkmenistan in 2002, they had asked for US\$ 40 per 1000 cubic meters, whereas Russia was holding out for US\$32-33. They are demanding a high price of gas because Russia sells its gas to European markets at a price, which is three times higher (Jonson, 2004: 105). In September 2006, Gazprom agreed to increase the price of Turkmen gas from \$ 65 to \$100 per 1,000 cubic meters (Boucek, 2009: 160).

Turkmenistan and Russia annually exchange about 50 bcm of natural gas. However, when a natural gas pipeline that ran from Turkmenistan to Russia broke on 9 April , 2009, the transfer stopped suddenly, and the relationship between the two countries began to change. Russia reduced the import of natural gas due to various factors such as unusually mild spring temperatures, reduction in domestic economic demand, and decrease in foreign exports because of ongoing economic recession, but Turkmenistan was not informed of this change in import. Ashgabat continued to pump the stipulated amount through the pipeline resulting in the rupture. Moscow has called the situation an accident and has strongly suggested that there are no political undertakings for the pipeline explosion, but there have been a series of suspicious incidents following this³³.

³³ “Stratfor worldview (2009), “Turkmenistan: tense relations with Russia”, (online web) Accessed on 15 May 2018, URL:<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/turkmenistan-tense-relations-russia>”

Table 5.2: Turkmenistan’s gas exports, by destination



Source: “BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2010–15; Natural Gas Europe”.

Turkmenistan was initially angry at Russia's negligence, the country's external affairs ministry called the incident "reckless and irresponsible." Ashgabat decided to lash out against Russia by publically pursuing energy deals with the west. Turkmenistan signed an agreement with Germany's energy giant RWE on April 18, 2009, giving the company rights to not only export Turkmen gas to Europe but also to discuss the development of offshore energy deposits in the Caspian. Afterward, the European Union normalized its relations with Turkmenistan. The U.S also advocated its partnership and promoted for diversification of pipelines. However, the agreement with RWE to develop offshore natural gas was extremely complicated, mainly in the landlocked Caspian. It also required decades to complete³⁴, which automatically pushed the country back towards Russia.

Turkmenistan was never an active member of the CIS, in fact, Niyazov often publically distanced himself from the Commonwealth, and this announcement was a sign of deterioration of their relationship (Milov, 2011: 93). After the sudden death of President-for-Life Saparmurat Niyazov in December 2006, the vital importance of the country’s energy resources was again highlighted. Niyazov, known as Father of all Turkmen or Turkmenbashi, ensured a temperamental relationship with Russia throughout his presidency. He curtailed the Russian language, culture, and dual citizenship. He was interested in the diversification of Russian domination from Turkmen’s hydrocarbon resources (Boucek, 2009: 155).

³⁴ Ibid

In 2005-06, Turkmenistan officially declared that it would withdraw from the CIS during the summit of the CIS in Kazan, Russia on 26 August 2005. The Niyazov years were marked by repression, narcissism, mismanagement, and corruption. Recognizing the significance of Turkmenistan to Russia, senior representatives of Kremlin such as Prime Minister Mikhail Fradkov and former Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin attended Niyazov's funeral. The death of Niyazov and the new regime in Turkmenistan provided an opportunity to Russia to increase its position in CIS integration, counter-terrorism, Caspian delimitation, and other military-based security issues (Boucek, 2009: 161).

Unlike Niyazov, the new Turkmen government under Berdymukhammedov took initiatives to restore some rights of ethnic Russians, like promoting the re-introduction of Russian language schools. Berdymukhammedov met with Russian President Putin on several occasions such as in April 2007 on an official visit to Moscow, in June at a CIS summit, and in May for an energy summit in Turkmenbashi, where various issues were discussed including an expansion of Russian energy firms, closer military cooperation and more rights for ethnic Russians. In May 2007, Berdymukhammedov and Putin along with Kazakh president Nazarbayev declared that “gas pipelines from Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan along the Caspian coast to Russia will be expanded and upgraded.” For the country's development of hydrocarbon resources and economic growth, Berdymukhammedov felt the need to break out of its self-imposed isolation. Therefore, he started to re-establish its relations with its neighboring countries as well as others and expressed his desire for the construction of multiple export pipelines such as a ‘China-Afghanistan-Pakistan –India’ pipeline (Boucek, 2009: 162, 165). In 2007, Turkmen president Berdimuhamedow agreed to construct a pipeline along with shoreline of the Caspian Sea through Kazakhstan and Russia with the aim of transporting ten bcm of gas per year to Europe by 2010. With a spirit of diversification, Turkmenistan looked for other routes particularly east to China.

Price issues for energy exports create differences between these two countries. According to Reuters, the amount of gas exported fell from a 2008 high of “over 40 bcm to a 2009-2014 average of 11 bcm per year”. Gazprom announced that it would buy only 4 bcm of gas from Turkmenistan for 2015 (Putz, 2016). In 2015, Gazprom was paying Turkmen gas at US\$240 TCM, which was more than European prices of US\$200/tTCM, and in fact a lot higher than what China was paying, a mere US\$185/TCM. Needless to say, when TurkmenGas accused Gazprom of failing to fully pay for gas, it sued TurkmenGas in the International Arbitration Court (Blagov, 2016). In this scenario, Russia and Turkmenistan both expect China to resolve

their issues by becoming a viable energy partner. Turkmenistan has already had booming energy ties with China and by 2020 expect exports to grow over 60 bcm. Moreover, the country is also expecting to export gas to South Asia through the TAPI pipeline. Meanwhile, after a decade of negotiations, Russia and China have settled a deal worth \$400 billion in May 2014, under which “Russia will deliver 38 billion cubic meters of gas per year to China through the ‘Power of Siberia pipeline’”. (Putz, 2016).

Military Cooperation

Since the early 1990s, Russia and Turkmenistan have cooperated on the issue of border tension regarding the Caspian Sea. The revival of security ties between the two states can be explained through the expansion of military presence in the Caspian region. The competition for naval presence in the Caspian raised concerns of potential destabilization among the littoral states. However, both Russia and Turkmenistan have been working together for the stabilization of Afghanistan. Turkmenistan is continuing to work against the threat of terrorism emanating from the Afghanistan-Turkmenistan border. When Taliban militants killed a series of Turkmen guards, Russia offered military aid to Turkmenistan. In addition, Russia was ready to diplomatically engage with the Taliban, creating prospects for durable Russia-Turkmen cooperation in Afghanistan. Even Ashgabat granted permission to the U.S to access its military facilities during the 2001 war in Afghanistan. Furthermore, in 1999 and 2000, Ashgabat played a key role in hosting talks between the Northern Alliance and the Taliban under the Conservancy of the UN (Ramani, 2017).

Since Berdimuhamedow came to power in February 2007, Turkmenistan concluded numerous arms deals with the U.S in an attempt to displace Iran as the second-largest naval power in the Caspian region. Moreover, in September 2012, Turkmenistan displayed a major military drill in the Caspian Sea, which was opposed by the Azerbaijani government. The dispute occurred after Baku's opposition of a Turkmen oil-drilling proposal in the Caspian disputed areas. Russian President Putin and his Turkmen counterpart Berdimuhamedow concluded a landmark ‘strategic partnership agreement on 2 October 2017’. This agreement committed to end nearly a decade of tension between the two countries. It aimed to expand bilateral cooperation mainly on two key issues: the long-standing tension in the Caspian region and the resolution for stabilization of Afghanistan. Preservation of stability is the major priority of Putin's visit on October 2, 2017. Along with this trip, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and Turkmen

counterpart Rashid Meredov held meetings to resolve the Caspian Sea related disputes and encourage joint investment projects. (Ramani, 2017).

Russia–Azerbaijan Relations

The collapse of the USSR left Azerbaijan with the enduring task of restructuring and rebuilding its nation. Moreover, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia had worsened the situation in Azerbaijan. Since 1991, this conflict has affected not only territorial security but also socio-economic and demographic integrity of Azerbaijan. However, Caspian energy resources have aided Baku in resettling much of its security and geopolitical concerns. Nesibli, as a prominent Azerbaijani political analyst and politician reflects on this situation, "The establishments of democratic institutions enhance of the well-being of the society and reinstallations of territorial integrity of the country, have highly relied on the exploration and development of energy resources of Azerbaijan" (Özkan, 2006:59). Observing the importance of energy resources, Azerbaijani leaders Muttalibov, Elchibey and finally Haydar Aliyev started negotiations with western oil companies (particularly the United States and Britain) for the development Azerbaijan's energy resources. Azerbaijan is sandwiched between Iran, Russia, and Turkey, which always poses external influence and pressure on Azerbaijan. This rivalry has been increased by the entry of the U.S and EU eying the hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian Sea (Ismailzade, 2004: 1).

The foreign policy of Azerbaijan is largely affected by two issues; the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict and the legal status of the Caspian Sea. The economy highly depends on the oil sector; therefore, the "State Oil Company of Azerbaijan Republic (SOCAR)" was formed for the development of the hydrocarbon resources in the Caspian. Since its independence, the aim of Azerbaijan's foreign policy is to protect its sovereignty, territorial integrity, and to secure foreign investment in the energy sector. The Soviet government had control over Baku's oil reserves, but since Azerbaijan's independence, their relationship has been stressed. Their enmity was mainly centered on the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK) conflict because Azerbaijan blames Russia for supporting rebels against Azerbaijan. So in 1993, Aliyev withdrew from the CSTO and denied Russia's peacekeeping force in the NK (Salvati, 2015).

Major issues in Azerbaijan's foreign policy are social development, and economic and democratization processes, which poses challenges in domestic politics, energy security in the Caspian region, nuclear proliferation in Iran and the Karabakh conflict. The democratization process in the country is slow under the presidency of Ilham Aliyev (Ipek, 2009: 237).

Therefore, the relations between the two countries are heavily determined by oil and gas factors. At present Azerbaijan plays a vital role in formulating Russian policy in the Caucasus region and plans to stay away from Georgia and Armenia conflicts. Georgia and Russia do not have diplomatic relations; Armenia is a strategic ally of Russia.

Importance of Azerbaijan for Russia: Azerbaijani foreign policy is largely guided by its geography. The country is strategically important for Russia based on the following factors.

- ❖ Azerbaijan provides opportunities to Russia for strengthening its strategic interests in the Caspian region as well as access to West Asia.
- ❖ Soviet-era installation Gabala Radio-Location Station (RLS) made the country very important for Russian because Moscow keeps West Asia under control with ballistic missiles via this station.
- ❖ Russia could ensure its economic interests in the Caspian region by controlling its ample natural resources as well as overland, sea, and air.
- ❖ Russia can prevent the expansion of western countries, particularly the U.S, EU, and Turkey, only through control over Azerbaijan (Nassibli, 2004: 142).

There are several other factors determining Azerbaijan's relationship with Russia, particularly their strategic partnership. Both the countries share land (Dagestan for 284km) and sea (the Caspian) borders. Secondly, Azerbaijan provides energy trade links to Europe through the Caspian and West Asia through Iran (Markedonov, 2013). Thirdly, Azerbaijan is the fastest growing economy in the South Caucasus. For example, in 2012, the country was one of the top fifty countries in terms of economic competitiveness as stated by the World Economic Forum. Fourthly, the NK conflict warrants the involvement of Russia. Moscow has been trying to maintain the status quo by sending peacekeeping troops to mediate the conflict. And finally, diasporic factors also determine the bilateral relationship between the two countries. In 2010, more than 603,000 ethnic Azerbaijanis were inhabiting Russia, and around 1% of Russian origin were populating Azerbaijan, which is the second-largest ethnic group there. (Ibid).

Azerbaijan and Russia's relationship was anything but friendly after Azeri independence. Russia rejected the "Friendship and Cooperation Treaty" proposed by Azerbaijan, despite the fact that pro-Russian Ayaz Mutalibov was in power in Azerbaijan. But the situation changed gradually. On 3 April, 1992, Russian foreign minister, Kozirev visited Baku for the first time and on 4 April, 1992; Moscow officially recognized the country's independence, following

which they established diplomatic relations (Aslanlı, 2010:139). On the invitation of Boris Yeltsin, President Heydar Aliyev paid his first official visit from independent Azerbaijan to Moscow in July 1997 where the two presidents signed the "Treaty of Friendship, Cooperation, and Mutual Security" (Mehdiyeva, 2011:117).

Russia's interests lie on two factors; first, Moscow wants to regain its control over the border of the CIS with Turkey and Iran. Hence it felt the need to maintain troops in Azerbaijan similar to that of Georgia and Armenia. Russia has been trying to bring back Georgia under its influence by supporting the Abkhazian separatists. Likewise, Russia has influenced Armenia to create pressure on Azerbaijan so that Russia's political and economic influence can be restored. It promotes an arms race in the conflict. Secondly, Moscow's interest in Azerbaijani hydrocarbon reserve has caused it to vehemently oppose the 'Deal of the Century' signed in 1994 by Baku with western consortiums (Cornell, 1997:12)

Leaderships in Azerbaijan and Relations with Russia

Since the independence of the country, Azerbaijan has been facing security dilemma to preserve the peace and stability in the region, particularly the Karabakh conflict, which poses a national threat. From 1991 to 1993, Azerbaijan had three presidents who either resigned or left the presidency due to an ongoing conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan (Ipek, 2009:229). Supporting this argument, Nassibli, N. has illustrated and divided the relationship between Russia and Azerbaijan into three phases. The first phase falls under President Ayaz Mutalibov (1991-1992) who strived to get an impartial and neutral role of Moscow in resolving the Azerbaijani-Armenian conflict. For this purpose, he signed the document on establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). He emphasized strategic cooperation with Russia and Iran. But due to Russian involvement in the brutal massacre in Khojali city of Azerbaijan on 26 February 1992, president Mutalibov was greatly disappointed and resigned from his position.

Ayaz Mutalibov was succeeded by Abulfaz Elchibey who was known for his anti-Russian policy. With an aim to strengthen Azeri independence, Elchibey tried to expand ties with the west. He introduced the country's national currency unit, the Manat and used oil resources as an instrument for its foreign policy. Under his rule, two important contracts were concluded, one with BP-Statoil in September 1992 and another with Pennzoil-Ramco in October 1992 while keeping Moscow out altogether (Ipek, 2009:231). Furthermore, the Azerbaijani parliament rejected the CIS agreement on October 7, 1992, and signed a friendship and

cooperation treaty with the Russian Federation on October 12. He also proposed that Azerbaijan, Ukraine, and Georgia create an economic triangle as an alternative to CIS integration (Nassibli, 2004: 143). However, in 1993, Russia tried to implement its “near abroad” policy, thereby putting more pressure on Azerbaijan to collaborate within the jurisdiction of CIS. In 1993, the Russian trade tariff with Baku was higher than any other CIS countries. In March-April, with the direct Russian army's participation, Armenia seized Azerbaijan's Kalbajar province and tried to depose Azerbaijan's national democratic government. Elchibey denied Russia's peacekeeping force in Azerbaijan that ultimately ended in chaos. In view of the circumstances, Elchibey stated that he was upset due to Russia's plot, therefore in order to prevent civil war in the country, he stepped down (Ibid).

Heydar Aliyev who succeeded Elchibey was an experienced politician. In order to improve the relationship with Moscow, he immediately suspended all contracts with western oil companies and visited Moscow in 1993 as the acting president. He assured Yeltsin and other Russian politicians that Azerbaijan would implement a different foreign policy under his regime. He signed the treaty of CSTO and agreed to join the CIS. Aiming to create a pro-Azerbaijani lobby in Moscow, Aliyev invited the Russian oil company Lukoil to join oil fields in the Caspian. As a result, Lukoil got 10% of SOCAR's share of the Azeri-Chirag and Guneshi.

Nevertheless, Russia did not change its pro-Armenian attitude in the Karabakh conflict. Russia insisted that it would deploy its troops on the Azerbaijan-Iran border and the CIS anti-aircraft defense system will be established in the South Caucasus. By this point, President Aliyev had become convinced of Russian policy and attitude, and by December 1993, he began to look towards Turkey and western countries for alliance (Nassibli, 2004:144). In 1994, the Aliyev government restarted the negotiations with the western companies, and signed an agreement entitled ‘the Contract of the Century.’ The Russian company was allocated merely 10% of shares in this deal (Aslanlı, 2010: 141). Thanks to the Contract, western countries began to directly engage in the South Caucasus and Caspian affairs.

In 2003, current Azerbaijan President Ilham Aliyev took charge from his father as a president who had strived to maintain cordial relations with both Russia and the west (Ramani, 2016). Under his pro-western regime, two important giant energy deals – “the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan oil pipeline, and the Baku–Tbilisi–Erzurum gas pipeline” were signed which strengthened Azerbaijan's ties with the west. However, western contracts remained limited to the energy sector, and relations strained over time. It was stabilized in 2017 when a new Azerbaijan-EU

strategic agreement was signed. Consequently, EU countries were less vocal on the issues of democracy and human rights. One western diplomat commented that “it was better to be silent on democratic issues and strengthen cooperation rather than lose all contact with Baku, which can over time be influenced towards some reform agenda.” (Shiriyev, 2019: 8, 10).

No Russian presidents have visited Azerbaijan from 1991 until 2001. The beginning of a new relationship between Azerbaijan and Russia started when Putin came to power. Putin visited Azerbaijan on January 9, 2001, and in return Aliyev visited Russia in January 2002, where they established military cooperation. Aliyev acknowledged Putin's role in restoring severed ties between the two nations. They signed agreements on ‘the Status and Benefiting Principles of Gebele Radio Location Station, long-term economic cooperation until the year 2010’ (Aslanlı, 2010; 141). This was followed by consultations between the Ministers of foreign affairs on a regular basis. Russian Minister of Internal Affairs, Minister of Education and Science, Minister of Defense and Minister of Regional Development made regular visits to Azerbaijan to sustain this newfound kinship.

Border cooperation is a key factor of Russia-Azerbaijan relations, and in January 2002, an Interdepartmental Agreement on the Activity of Border Representatives was concluded. On December 4, 2006, an intergovernmental agreement on mutual protection on intellectual activity was signed. A similar agreement on “military-technical cooperation” was signed in Baku on February 27, 2003 (Cherniavsky, 2010; 33). On July 3, 2008, both countries signed an agreement on “Declaration on Friendship and Strategic Partnership” in Baku, which strengthened the current stage of Russian-Azerbaijani relations. At present more than 80 intergovernmental and interstate agreements have been signed between Russia and Azerbaijan (Cherniavsky, 2010; 31). In early September 2010, Russian President D. Medvedev signed up to six bilateral documents with Azerbaijan. These documents cover a large number issues including joint statements on the Caspian, distribution of water resources of the Samur River, delimitation of the state border, and the Main Conditions of a Buy-Sell Contact for Azerbaijani Natural Gas. Medvedev ignored the Nabucco project showing leniency towards Azerbaijan (Valiyev, 2010; 4).

Azerbaijan was disappointed and felt insecure, due to the weak position of the Western countries on the Russian's military actions in Georgia. After the Russian –Georgian war in 2008, Azerbaijan shifted its foreign policy. Gradually the relations between the two countries became stable, and Azerbaijan agreed to increase rent on the Russian radar station in Gabala

in 2012 (Ismayilov and Zesztow, 2015). Russia rented the station for ten years, which had paid an annual fee of \$7 million to Baku, following an agreement of January 25, 2002 (Aliev, 2004: 158). Moreover, Azerbaijan established close military cooperation with Russia following the 2008 Georgia war and signed an arms deal of more than 4 billion dollars (Alieva, 2017). From 2010-2015, Russia sold 85% of its arms weapons to Azerbaijan (Ramani, 2016). In addition to this, in October 2014, the two countries agreed to enhance military cooperation in 2015 and in August Russia, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan conducted a joint military exercise in the Caspian Sea. Interestingly, during the SCO meeting in Ufa, Putin declared Azerbaijan as an SCO 'dialogue partner country' (P. Tase, 2015).

Energy and Economic Relations

Taking notes from Russia on economic leverage, Baku has started using its petroleum sector to gain importance in the South Caucasus. Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan has been a net energy exporter. Initially, Azerbaijan relied on the Russian pipeline network for the oil and gas exports, but after the completion of BTC, Baku became independent of Russia. It was further strengthened by the completion of the South Caucasus Pipeline in 2006, which let Baku bypass Russian export routes altogether (Kjaernet, 2010:155). The countries signed an agreement on Free Trade in September 1992 and 1994. Azerbaijan's energy cooperation with Russian ministries and oil companies started in 1993. In October 1993, Yurii Shafrannik, Russian Minister for Fuel and Energy signed energy cooperation with Russian ministries and oil companies, according to Azerbaijan with the ACG offshore deposits in the Caspian. Furthermore, this contract provided a way for the entry of Lukoil into the AIOC, and an incentive for the company to lobby for the sectoral division of the Caspian (Mehdiyeva, 2011; 120).

In January 2002, "Intergovernmental Agreement on the Fundamental Principles and Vectors of Economic Cooperation" was concluded cementing the foundations for economic and trade ties between the two. Also, the interstate "Treaty on Long-Term Economic Cooperation" was signed in 2010 (Cherniavsky, 2010; 33). In 2004, trade between Moscow and Baku increased by 50%, and it was up to US\$1 billion in 2005. Putin visited Baku in February 2006 for the inauguration of the 'Year of Russia' in Azerbaijan, signing an oil exploitation agreement (Nygren,2008:112). Russia exported about 90% of its machine-operated and technical commodities, rolled non-ferrous metals, building materials, and chemical products to Baku. In 2008 the volume of reciprocal trade turnover increased to \$2.4 billion, of which Russian

exports to Azerbaijan was \$2 billion. Trade has flourished to the point where Azerbaijan export to Russia has reached \$411.4 million. Moreover, Baku resumed the export of gas to Russian on January 1, 2010. In 2011, Russia was the third-largest foreign trade partner of Azerbaijan after Italy and France. Regarding trade and economic and cultural cooperation, more than 30 documents at the interregional level were signed. Currently, more than five hundred branches and representative offices of Russian companies are actively working in the Azerbaijani markets (Cherniavsky, 2010;33). Approximately 600 Russian companies are working in Azerbaijan (Xinhua News Agency: 2016), of which around 200 companies are fully owned by Moscow. Furthermore, the direct investment of Russia in Azerbaijan is estimated at around \$1.4 billion. However, according to the Federal Customs Service of Russia, in 2015, Azerbaijan-Russia "trade turnover shrank by 30 percent, to \$2.8 billion compared to the \$4 billion in 2014"³⁵. In 2015, Putin visited Baku, where both presidents discussed economic opportunities in the Caspian Sea. Azeri president expressed that trade between the two states remains strong (Graeber, 2015).

Education and science is another field of cooperation. Currently, more than 5,755 Azerbaijani students are studying in Russian higher education institutes, and Russia is spending its own fund on 1,420 Azerbaijani students. A branch of Lomonosov Moscow State University opened in Baku on February 27, 2008, and around 15,000 Russian students are studying in Azerbaijan's higher education institutions (Cherniavsky, 2010;35).

Nagorno- Karabakh Conflict and Its Impact on Russia-Azerbaijan Relations

The territorial and ethnic conflict between Azerbaijanis and Armenians, living in the Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), a mountainous province (4,400 square km) inside Azerbaijan. The Nagorno-Karabakh region is predominantly of Armenian descent that came under Azerbaijan's control, which was given by the Soviet leader, Joseph Stalin in 1922 (Dennis, 2016). In the late 1980s, the situation became worse when Armenia renewed claims over Karabakh. In August 1987, a petition was sent to Moscow by a group of Armenian academics urging that both Karabakh and Nakhichevan be separated from Azerbaijan and incorporated into Armenia. Though Nakhichevan is situated within Armenian territories with a 90% Azerbaijani population, it was administratively subordinated to Azerbaijan. On February 20, 1988, the deputies of "Nagorno-

³⁵ Interview of President of Russia Vladimir Putin to Azerbaijan State News Agency AZERTAC, (2016), URL:<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/188>"

Karabakh Autonomous Region of Azerbaijan (NKAR)” asked the Supreme Soviet of the USSR and Azerbaijan to reallocate NK to Armenia from Azerbaijan, which was the starting point of the conflict (Malysheva, 2001). Consequently, an armed clash took place on February 27-29, 1988, in Sumgait city nearby Baku. Official estimates suggest that six Azerbaijanis and twenty-six Armenians were killed. Moreover, on December 1, 1989, both Armenia's Supreme Soviet and the NKAR passed and legalized a resolution for the reunification of NK with Armenia. Even though the legislative body of Azerbaijan denied this proposal, Armenia has continued its claim (Nassibli, 2004:144). Azerbaijan declared its independence on December 30, 1991. A referendum passed in December 1992 proclaimed NK as independent, following which vicious fights and war took place (Klever, 2013:4). As a result, Armenia occupied approximately 20% of the Azerbaijani territory and controlled Nagorno-Karabakh by 1993. Over than twenty thousand people were killed, and around 1 million were rendered refugees due to political displacement. To mediate the conflict, a Russian brokered ceasefire was implemented in 1994, which remains till date (Council on Foreign Relations, 2019).

Azerbaijan does not recognize the self-proclaimed Nagorno-Karabakh Republic and has been striving to maintain its territorial integrity. Some observers believed that NK conflict, to some extent, is determined by the struggle for the control over the Caspian's hydrocarbon reserves as well as existing pipeline routes for the exportation of this oil. During a summit meeting of the OSCE (Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe) in Istanbul on November 18-19, 1999, the presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, Turkmenistan, Turkey, and Kazakhstan signed several important agreements on the shipping of oil and gas (Malysheva, 2001: 259). During the summit, this group of countries took to stand in favor of Azerbaijan on the NK issue. Armenia was sidelined, to the point that the said countries created a blockade of transport communication links between Armenia and Russia. This link runs across Azerbaijan territory to Turkey. In addition, they made it difficult for Armenia to participate in the European Union TRACECA (“Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia”) project, even though some programs in Armenia are in fact implemented by TRACECA. In September 1998 during a TRACECA conference in Baku, former Turkish Foreign Minister Ismail Cem rejected Armenia's proposal of constructing a rail route from Kars to Tbilisi through Armenia and a second rail route from Georgian ports of Poti and Batumi to Iran via Armenia (Malysheva, 2001: 259).

In 1993, the UNSC adopted “four resolutions (822, 853, 874, and 884) and on March 14, 2008, the UN General Assembly took resolution 62/243, which urged Armenia to respect the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan and called for withdrawal of forces from occupied territories”

(Klever, 2013:8). However, all mediators have individual interests in the Minsk Group, be it economic, political, strategic/security, or energy-related. Agreements and negotiations have failed to resolve the NK conflict, which remains one of the post-Soviet Europe's 'frozen conflict'.

Map 5.2 Nagorno-Karabakh conflict



Source: Wills, C. (2016), "Understanding the Nagorno- Karabakh conflict; what this frozen conflict could mean for the future of Russia/ Turkey relations?", (online web) Accessed on 2 June 2019 URL: <https://www.theodysseyonline.com/the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict>".

The NK conflict has adversely affected the domestic stability of Azerbaijan. While Russia is playing a vital role in peace negotiation, it is important to remember that Russia has economic interests, which are directly linked to the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Azerbaijan is one of the biggest importers of Russian arms, and an agreement was signed in August 2013, which amounted to 4 billion USD. As is evident from all this, oil and gas factors largely determine Russian and Azerbaijan's relations. Conversely, Russia's energy and trade support to Armenia has caused tension to Azerbaijan. In this regard, some Azerbaijani politicians stated that Russia is the main cause of the conflict. Moscow is not only a mediator but also a party to the conflict which provokes rivalry instead of a solution (Klever, 2013; 16-17).

Russia's Role in Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

The Nagorno-Karabakh settlement has been traditionally one of the important factors for Russian foreign policy in the South Caucasus. Peace negotiations between Azerbaijan and

Armenia are led by the OSCE Minsk Group, which was created in 1992 to take a political decision concerning this issue co-chaired by the U.S, Russia, and France. Under the OSCE leadership, the presidents of the two states are directly talking to each other over the issue. Russia has been playing a mediator role to resolve the NK conflict by conducting visits, meetings, and signing agreements through the OSCE Minsk Group and through direct involvement. Several meetings organized by Moscow has brought the presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia together: once on 2 April 1999, then on January 24-25, 2000 and later, one more time with the presidents of Georgia and the acting president of Russia, Putin. In this last meeting, the four countries emphasized the principle of territorial integrity of both the sovereigns³⁶. In this regard, Putin said that “If the negotiations come to a successful end, then definitely Moscow would provide a compromise solution” (Malysheva, 2001:267).

On 31 May 2001, the CIS meeting in Minsk, a trilateral meeting took place among the President of Russia Vladimir Putin, President of Azerbaijan Heydar Aliyev, and President of Armenia Robert Kocharyan where they focused on the peaceful settlement of NK conflict. On July 10-12, 2005, the OSCE Group Co-Chairs diplomats Yuriy Merzlyakov of Russia, Bernard Fassier of France and Steven Mann of the U.S visited Azerbaijan and Armenia. They met with President Ilham Aliyev and Foreign Minister Elmar Mammadyarov and with Nizami Bakhmanov, as head of Azerbaijani Community of Nagorno-Karabakh in Exile³⁷. At the OSCE Minsk Group meeting held in St. Petersburg in July 2007, the presidents of the two states met and discussed initiatives to organize a joint visit among Armenia, Azerbaijan, and intellectuals from NK region. This was considered a major confidence-building step. On November 2, 2008, presidents of Azerbaijan, Armenia and Russia signed a Declaration in Moscow (known as Moscow Declaration), which emphasized that “the conflict should be resolved on the basis of norms and principles of the international law that include the UN Security Council Resolutions of 1993 and the UN General Assembly Resolutions of 2006 and 2008”. The countries also agreed on not executing any military power to resolve the conflict (Aslanli, 2010; 143).

In December 2009, the representatives of OSCE Minsk Group met in Athens, where they reaffirmed the previous Moscow Declaration for the settlement of the conflict. In June 2010, presidents of Ilham Aliyev of Azerbaijan, Dmitry Medvedev of Russia and Serzh Sargsyan of Armenia met in a meeting at the Konstantinovsky Palace in Saint Petersburg. Again, at the

³⁶ “Republic of Azerbaijan; Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2018), *Negotiations chronology between Azerbaijan and Armenia*, URL:<http://www.mfa.gov.az/en/content/856>”

³⁷ Ibid

invitation of the President of Russian Federation, D. Medvedev, presidents of Azerbaijan and Armenia met in Sochi and Kazan in 2011 as well as in 2012³⁸. Representatives of the Armenian and Azerbaijani governments urged Aliyev in Sochi in August 2014 to consider a settlement on the 'sore and longstanding' Karabakh problem. Responding to this, Aliyev thanked Moscow for attempting to solve the NK conflict (RadioFreeEurope; Radio Liberty, "Putin to Host Armenian, Azerbaijani Presidents in Sochi). Recently, presidents of the two states have met in Paris on January 16, 2019, emanating positive signals towards a peaceful settlement of the NK clash. They have met again in Davos on January 22, 2019, during the World Economic Forum.

Baku is of the opinion that the peace process between these two countries can go forward without the help of OSCE. The Aliyev government gave a clear signal by saying that "2019 can be a breakthrough year". Azerbaijan officials hope that economic pragmatism will make Armenia accountable to consider Baku's plan for a comprehensive peace agreement. They preferred six D formula: de-militarization, de-occupation, demining, deployment, development, and dialogue (Shiriyev, 2019). Putin's foreign policy has shown promise of an impartial treatment regarding the NK conflict. Aliyev is interested in maintaining a smooth relation with both Moscow as well as the west. Despite being a strategic ally of Yerevan, Moscow firmly supports the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan, and it is interesting to note here that Armenia is very much aware of the Russian stand. The entire CIS space and the South Caucasus became Russia's top foreign policy in 1995 under Yeltsin. The NK conflict kept Moscow relevant in the Caspian region and South Caucasus. In fact, Russia has made it invariably noticeable to international mediators that Karabakh conflict cannot be resolved without the help of Russia (Malysheva, 2001:266). Armenia is a loyal ally of Moscow and in 2013, Moscow successfully stopped Armenia from signing an Association Agreement with the European Union (Baev, 2017:72).

Complexities and Disagreements between Moscow and Baku

The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and Azerbaijan's inclination towards the west has caused disparities between Russia and Azerbaijan. While Azerbaijan accuses Russia of provoking the Armenian separatists, Russia blames Azerbaijan for supporting the Chechnya separatists, ultimately taking part in a menial blame game. Russia is alarmed by Azerbaijan's close ties with the U.S and Turkey on the development of natural resources in the Caspian Sea. Baku's integration with NATO is a direct challenge to Russia in the region. While Armenia is lacking

³⁸ Ibid

any political support, Azerbaijan is forming alliances with Turkey, Georgia, and the Islamic states. Under Ilham Aliyev's leadership, Azerbaijan's balanced foreign policy in the region was under scrutiny with his visits to Iran, France, and Russia. However, these rumors have been rejected by Nevruz Mammadov, the head of International Relations Department of Azerbaijan when he stated that Azerbaijan is maintaining a “balance of power” in the region (Aslanlı, 2010;143). From late 1980 to early 1990, Azerbaijan did not doubt Russia's involvement in the NK conflict. But in 1992, Abulfaz Elchibey the first democratically elected President of Azerbaijan relinquished all Soviet military presence exclaiming that Russia is the major obstacle to the country's independence. In an interview, the former Foreign Minister Tofiq Zulfugarov stated there is sufficient evidence of the Russian military involvement in the fights between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the ministry's archives (Alieva, 2017).

Russian participation in the trilateral format of co-chairmanship itself creates controversy, as the format of the Minsk Group is too rigid, and there is a lack of clearly defined priorities for international principles. This group indeed failed to achieve a solution for the conflict. In addition, Azerbaijani observers considered Russia as a ‘big brother’ to Armenia whose strategic alliance with Moscow dominated the Armenian economy. Azerbaijanis believe that Moscow has a pro-Armenian bias, which was confirmed in 1997 when Russia and Armenia signed a treaty of mutual military assistance if either country is to be under attack. (Kjaernet, 2010). Russia has a military base in Gyumri, Armenia. With the help of Russians, the Karabakh was captured and is controlled by the Armenians till date (Huseynov, 2016). On March 16, 1995, an agreement on Russian military base was signed with Armenia in Moscow, which enables Russia to keep a base in Gyumri including a squadron of MiG-29 fighter planes, around 3000 men equipped with Su-27 combat aircrafts and S-300 SAMs (Malysheva, 2001:277). On top of that, Moscow is still sending more modern weapons to Gyumri and has extended its lease until 2044, which is naturally a serious concern to Azerbaijan's security. As a guarantor of Armenia's security, Moscow has stationed around 5,000 troops in Armenian territory. As a response to this, Azerbaijan is expanding its strategic and security ties with Georgia, Israel, and Turkey by avoiding the membership in organizations such as CSTO and NATO (Stratfor Worldview: 2013).

Besides, Armenia is also a member of Russian led alliances such as CSTO and Eurasian Custom Union, which is cementing the bilateral relationship between Russia and Armenia. Consequently, Azerbaijan has distanced itself from these organizations. Although both Armenia and Azerbaijan signed the Tashkent Treaty, but in 1999 Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and

Georgia together declared their withdrawal citing disappointment in Russia for its role in the Karabakh issue as well as Russian supply of weapons to Armenia (Malysheva, 2001:268). In July 2015, in the context of Ukraine-Russia conflict, Russian Prime Minister D. Medvedev stated that Crimea had been fully integrated into Russia, which obviously created a big question on the Russian policy in 'near aboard' (Huseynov, 2016).

In 2015, Turkey shot down a Russian jet and the Turkish prime minister fully supported Azerbaijan in the NK conflict. Surprisingly, Azerbaijan declared its neutral stand of neither supporting Moscow nor Ankara (Ramani, 2016). At the same time, Russia was imposing fines on those who were denying the Armenian genocide. To sum up, Turkey is associated with Azerbaijan, while Russia is allied with Armenia. Azerbaijan provides oil and gas to Turkey and transports it to Europe through Turkish territory, while Russia has many military bases in Armenia. In all obviousness, these alliances and trade relations have created turmoil between Azerbaijan and Armenia (Wills, 2016). Another area of their disagreement is on the issue of the division of the Caspian. Russia and Iran demanded equal and joint exploitation of the Caspian resources while Azerbaijan with other coastal states claimed their rights of exploitation of their own territorial waters (Gül, 2015:60).

In a nutshell, Azerbaijan's foreign policy since 1991 initially served as a 'balance act' between the West and Russia. The government escaped full military integration and full regional economic integration with either side but gave preference to the west in cases of energy cooperation. The country also relied on western countries to diminish Russia's power. In recent years, the 'balancing act' has been hard to follow. The Georgia war 2008 has made the South Caucasus more comfortable for Moscow by increasing its presence in the region, especially with the decline of interest from the west. During the second term of Barak Obama, the U.S foreign policy changed. It is even clearer under Donald Trump's administration. Previously, the U.S strongly counterbalanced Russia's influence in the region. By strengthening Russia's position, the impact of American engagement and influence has enabled Moscow to see the South Caucasus as its 'backyard' so that the area is considered as 'the area of influence.' During Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014, foreign policy of Azerbaijan became less balanced as it tried to deepen its relations with Russia despite the dilemma (Shiriyev, 2019: 4). Apart from this, economic overdependence on the energy sector has been a driving force as Azerbaijani leadership has been under scrutiny in light of the lack of economic and political reforms. The economic collapse has the potential to push the country into chaos. Western countries consider the Caspian Sea as a promising source of oil and Azerbaijan needs foreign capital for the

development of energy fields. Thus oil and gas resources are the focal factors to establishing Baku's relations with the west. Notwithstanding several disagreements between the two countries, Azerbaijan cannot avoid Russia due to the following reasons: a large number of Azerbaijanis are working in Russia who sends remittances home and plays an important role for the social stability in Azerbaijan. Moscow's role as a mediator in the NK conflict reduces Baku's ability to avoid Russian demands. Moreover, Azerbaijan knows that the conflict of NK will remain unresolved until the time Russia's participation

Russia and Iran

Iran is part of Central Asia, West Asia, Persian Gulf, and to some extent South Asia because of its strategic geographical location. Hence, Iranian clearly concentrates on establishing security and neutralizing external threats. Iran security threat stems from its immediate and unstable neighbors – Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Armenia as well as the South Caucasus and Central Asia. Iranian politics is highly impacted by the perennial conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Nagorno-Karabakh. Iran also does not have cordial relationships with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan due to their competition over oil and gas. Moreover, hardened western policy compels it to maintain a healthy tie with Russia (Hunter, 2010: 105). Historically, Iran has not had a good run with any of its neighbours as it has been focused on becoming a regional leader. With Russia losing its stronghold on the Caspian after the collapse of the USSR, Western influence poses a threat to Iran. This collapse also opened up an entry point for Iran into the Caspian and even Central Asia. Unfortunate for Iran, Turkey, China, and the U.S also entered South Caucasus and Central Asia, forcing Iran out of this competition (Karimov, 2014:132).

There have been ups and downs in Russia's relations with Iran under Putin's presidency. Since 1992, Russia has started to take interests in Iran, hence shifted its foreign policy from pro-western and emphasized more eastern and southern countries. Russia has given priority to Iran over Turkey and cleared its position in favor of Iran by April 1993. During an official visit to Tehran, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev said: "a strategic parity had to establish between Iran and Russia to ensure stability in Transcaucasia and Central Asia." Moreover, American objections regarding the Russian-Iranian rapprochement was countered by Andranik Mihrean, an adviser to Yeltsin by declaring that "we will not let the West dictate to Russia how far it can go in its relations with Iran" (Dekmejian and Simonian, 2003:78).

Russia's interest in Iran is motivated by Iran's growing market of conventional arms. A partnership with Iran will give Russia an edge over Turkish and US influence in the region. In spite of historical doubt about Russia's intentions, Tehran developed its cooperation with Moscow with the aim to counterbalance U.S dominance and promote a multi-polar world. In November 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin met with Iran's Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei who stated that "the long-term plan of the U.S is against the interests of all nations especially our two nations, which can be circumvented by their close cooperation" (Geranmayeh, and Liik, 2016: 2). The West's current policies, as well as the U.S's sanctions against Iran, have brought the country towards close cooperation with Russia. This decision was first initiated by Iranian Presidents Ali-Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, later intensified by the supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and President Ahmadinejad after his victory in the Iranian presidential elections in 2005 (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2014).

Due to its unique geographical location between the Caspian basin and the Persian Gulf, the Islamic Republic of Iran is an attractive transit country. It is considered a cheap transit route by these new states. Previously the USSR and later Russia is situated in the north of Iran, so security and territorial integrity of northern Iran is a fragile issue. After the disintegration of the USSR, three states of the Southern Caucasus Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia got independence, and now these states form a buffer zone between Russia and Iran. This buffer zone protects the country from Moscow's imperialistic ambition. Undoubtedly, at present Russia considers itself a global competitor of the U.S. It has been trying to challenge the U.S hegemony in the Islamic world. Since 2005, Russia got an observer status in the "Organization of the Islamic Conference." The role of Iran in the Islamic world is an effective tool to create a friendly image in the Islamic world, which would strengthen Russian ties with the Islamic states (Khalifa-Zadeh, 2011:55).

Establishment of Bilateral Relations between Russia and Iran

Diplomatic ties between Russia and Iran date back to the 16th Century. The governments of the "Russian Soviet Federative Socialist Republic (RSFSR) and Persia" mutually recognized each other on May 20, 1920. Under Mikhail Gorbachev, the USSR had made several gestures to improve its relations with Iran such as Russia's role in the ceasefire agreement between Iran-Iraq war, the USSR's withdrawal from Afghanistan and the liberalization in Iran following Khomeini's death in 1989. Immediately after the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, Soviet

foreign ministers Eduard Shevardnadze visited Iran in February 1989, and Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, the Speaker of the Majlis, returned the gesture in June by a visit in Moscow. During this occasion, Russia and Iran signed agreements related to arms supplies. Most importantly, they signed their first agreement in the nuclear energy field (Shaffer, 2001: 12). On December 25, 1991, Iran expressed its readiness to continue its relations with Russia. Presidents of Russia and Iran signed a treaty on the principles of mutual cooperation on March 12, 2001, which was put into effect on April 5, 2002. This solidified their relation on a legal platform. There are shared interests in terms of international issues such as promoting a multi-polar world, strengthening the role of the United Nations in international affairs, combating ISIS and the Taliban regime, and promoting a peaceful settlement in Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan (Nikolsky, 2017). The Russian–Iranian partnership includes issues such as nuclear power, energy, oil, and gas industry, space, the environment, biotechnology, medicine, metallurgy, fishing, large-scale transport projects, trying to solve the demographic problems to ensure security and stability.

Putin got re-elected in 2012 and this set in motion a new phase of Russian-Iranian relations. On 7 June, 2012, during the SCO summit, Putin met Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, to discuss the situations in Afghanistan and Syria. They also discussed the Iranian-Russian nuclear cooperation, the Iranian nuclear program, and the development of economic ties and the legal status of the Caspian Sea (Kozhanov, 2015). In 2013, the two presidents discussed the necessity to tackle trade and economics better as they had been hit adversely due to the sanctions (Belobrov, 2014: 15). As Geranmayeh and Liik suggests, Moscow's attitude towards Iran is paved by multifaceted factors, such as Iran's relations with the U.S, the nuclear issue, national security, economic interest, the regional situation in Central Asia as well as the Caucasus and also the situation in the The West Asia (Geranmayeh and Liik, 2016).

Unlike the former president Medvedev, President Putin has been more affable with Iran, especially after his re-election. In this context, Dmitri Trenin, a Russian expert commented that “The entire Medvedev presidency was Putin's tactics of goodwill towards the West, which was an attempt to see what could be achieved by greater cooperation.” Russia was disappointed with the Western military intervention in Libya and the support for anti-Putin protests in 2011 and 2012 (Ibid.). Although Medvedev was very engaged with, the Obama administration of resetting its policy such as supported UNSC Resolution 1929 on harsher international sanctions against Iran. The 2010-2011 witnessed the decline in Russia-Iranian relations whereas the early 2000s, 2012 and 2013 were marked by frequent reciprocal visits of Russian and Iranian officials. In February 2012, the Russian Minister of the Interior visited Iran and in January

2013, Vladimir Kolokoltsev, the Minister of Internal Affairs of the Russian Federation visited Iran where the two countries signed a deal on a “legal alliance’ between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Ministries of Internal Affairs of Russia.” This alliance was the first to set methods and describe the nature of cooperation against crime (Ravandi, 2015:10).

The victory of Rouhani in 2013 raised high expectation in Iran and abroad. It was expected of Rouhani to make Iran more approachable in the world market and even in the local realm. Yet, the bilateral relationship of the two countries did not affect even after the shifting of presidential power in Iran from Ahmadinejad to Rouhani. In 2014, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov stated that Iran is a natural ally of Russia, especially in the fight against religious extremists in West Asia. Moreover, this period witnessed the growth of bilateral relationships, for example, during the fourth summit of the Caspian, littoral states Putin and Rouhani met in Astrakhan on 29 September 2014. On the sidelines of the SCO summit in 2013, they held negotiation in Bishkek, during the “Conference on Interaction and Conference Building Measures” in Asia in May 2014 in Shanghai and again at an SCO summit in Dushanbe (on September 12, 2014). In fact, Rouhani’s first diplomatic visit, which was in Bishkek revealed great interest on his part to build strategic, ties with Russia and China (Kozhanov, 2015: 10).

Role of Russia and Iran in the Caspian

Iran is the only country in West Asia to connect the Caspian with the Persian Gulf. The majority of the 70 million population is Shia Islam, which is the official religion of Iran. There are around 8-10% minorities, including Sunni Muslims with Christian, Zoroastrian, Jewish and Baha'i communities. Also, Azeri minority lives in the north-west, where Iran shares borders with Azerbaijan (Winstone and Young, 2005). The history of Russian-Persian relations over the Caspian Sea dates back to as early as the 19th century. The two empires have signed several treaties regarding trade and navigation rights in the Caspian, such as the Golestan Treaty of 1813, the Turcmachai Treaty of 1928, and the Soviet-Iranian Friendship Treaty of 1921 and the Soviet-Iranian Treaty of 1940. But after the 1991 event, both Russia and Iran have unanimously considered the Caspian as a lake and have opposed unilateral action by any littoral states to exploit the Caspian's resources (Belopolsky, 2009:122).

Russia and Iran continue to exploit oil and gas reserves in the Caspian. They signed an agreement in 2008 for joint development of Iran's gas and oil reserves (Flanagan, 2012:6). In 2014, Russia and Iran succeeded in making a consensus among the Caspian littoral states to block NATO's courting of Azerbaijan, and stop potential Western naval forces in the Caspian

Sea (Desai, and Wheeler, 2016). Iranian President Hassan Rouhani said, "It is our responsibility to maintain the security of the Caspian Sea and its surroundings against the Western forces." However, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Kazakhstan's strategic and economic ties with the West are detrimental to these strategies. On the one hand, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have cooperated with NATO in Afghanistan for many years, and on the other, Turkmenistan gets support from the U.S for the improvement of its military defense. In contrast, Iran and Russia are subject to international sanctions: Iran for its nuclear activities and Russia for its intervention in Ukraine (Kashfi, 2015).

Economic Ties

Russia and Iran are fully engaged in a wide range of bilateral, regional as well as international issues including energy, trade, and security. There is a limitation on Russian oil and gas companies in Iran, and Russia is reluctant in investing in the Iranian energy fields. Its only focus is in the Iranian pipeline network. Russia wants to become the biggest supplier of gas to Europe and thereby make European countries dependent on Russian energy, but Iran is its most important rival in the field. Moscow wants to remain the main export route for energy resources of Central Asia, and Tehran is its potential rival (Hunter, 2010: 106). Unlike Russia, Iran is a full member of OPEC, which has recently been influenced by Moscow's regular presence. Saudi Arabia feels threatened by Moscow, and so, it refuses to give Russia a full membership of OPEC. Notwithstanding the improvement of Russia-OPEC relationship, Russia and Iran have developed wonderful strategies to influence international oil markets. In 1997, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) and Russia national oil company, Gazprom signed several contracts to develop the South Pars gas fields. In 2003, Russia and Iran signed a deal for the creation of a joint venture for the expansion of gas production facilities in Iran so that it can supply the Iranian gas to global markets. This decision was taken during the fourth meeting of "Russian-Iranian Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation" with the participation of Gazprom (Belopolsky, 2009:113).

The second term (2009-2013) of Ahmadinejad marked a decline in the country's economy, and the Russian economy followed suit due to shrinking oil and gas prices. The bilateral relationship between Russia and Iran has been described as a 'vigilant partnership.' Bilateral economic exchanges between Russia and Iran were low during the Ahmadinejad presidency, the volume of trade was disappointingly around 3 billion US dollar despite an official target of about 5 billion dollars in 2010. Furthermore, the volume of trade between the two countries

went down to around 2 billion US dollars from March 2012 to March 2013. (Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2014). Trade between the two countries decreased from \$3.8 billion in 2011 to \$1.7 billion in 2014 due to international sanctions (Piotrowski, 2015: 2).

The economic relations of Iran expanded with Russia during the second term of Mohammad Khatami, particularly in the field of technology (nuclear and military). Their border relationship is highly dependent on their nuclear and high-tech cooperation. At the beginning of 2012, positive trends have emerged in the fields of trade and economic ties between Russia and Iran. In the first six months of 2012, Iran exported \$203.5 million worth of goods to Russia while in the same period of 2011, it was 9.3% (Ravandi, 2015:11). Moreover, in 2013 and 2014, both countries signed exploration, production, and infrastructure developments deals of around \$10 billion (Desai, and Wheeler, 2016). In 2014, Alexander Novak, who is both the “Russian Energy Minister and the Russian-Iranian Joint Trade and Economic Commission,” established good personal relations with the Iranian oil minister, Bejan Namdar Zanganeh and the head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Ali Akbar Salehi. On August 5, 2014, Novak and Zanganeh signed agreements of trade and economic areas in Moscow (Kozhanov, 2015: 10). During a press conference in 2016, Zanganeh stated that Iran signed a research and development MoU with Russian companies like Gazprom Tatneft, Zarubezhneft, and Lukoil for the expansion of seven Iranian oilfields – West Paydar, Chenguleh, Mansouri, Aban, Dehloran, Cheshmeh Khoshk, and Ab Teimour. Meanwhile, owing to trade and banking barriers, the bilateral trade turnover between these two nations is still around 1.5 billion USD (Hosseini Azari, 2016). Even though Russia and Iran depend majorly on oil and gas exports, evidently both of them failed to improve their joint investments in the field.

Defense Sector

Russia and Iran have a cooperative relationship in manifold fields including military, nuclear, science, technology, and other issues. After 1991, Russia took a pro-Western stand on the world stage. This allowed America to stop a major submarine sale to Iran by Russia in 1992. The economic relations of the two countries are largely influenced by America. It is important to acknowledge how the U.S has taken several measures to reduce and prevent Russian-Iranian cooperation in nuclear and military-technical fields. For example, the signing of the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement was the highest pro-Western inclination of Russia. Under this

agreement, Russia agreed to end all conventional weapons supply to Iran by the end of 1999. Notwithstanding of the Gore-Chernomyrdin agreement 1995 with the U.S, Russia continued to supply weapons to Iran by the year of 2000. In fact, in 2000, Russian defence minister Igor Sergeyev discussed the resumption of weapons sales with Tehran. The two countries agreed on arms sales valuing more than 3 billion USD over 10 years. At the invitation of Sergeyev, President Khatami accepted the proposal to visit Moscow in March 2001, which benefitted both in the fields of trade and technology. Moreover, Russia openly supported the peaceful Iranian nuclear development. Between 2000 and 2007, the amount of bilateral military cooperation between the two countries was \$ 7 billion. (DOI-Kurzanalysen, 2017: 6).

Iran is a huge market for Russian weaponry such as supersonic jets, submarines, and jets. According to a CIA report, Russia was aiding Iran in the development of ballistic missiles including the Shihab III with a range of 1,300 km that covers the U.S West Asian allies such as Israel, Turkey Egypt and Saudi Arabia (Freedman, 2006:3). Iran imported 36 MiG-29 fighters, a few dozen SA-15 and SA-22 air defense systems, 10 Su-25 bomber-fighters, three Kilo-class submarines, and 22 Mi-17 helicopters from Russia (Piotrowski, 2015:2). Moscow and Tehran bot felt the impending threat of the U.S troops deployed in Central Asia post 9/11. Regarding international issues, both countries are on the same page. For example, both support the Assad regime in Syria; both are against the U.Se of force in Yemen or the airstrikes in ISIL Syria (Ibid, 9). The Taliban regime has the capability to penetrate Central Asia and even Russia, so it is in the interest of Russia and Iran to oppose such intervention. The strategic aim of Russia and Iran is to eliminate instability as well as prevent U.S led military operations in the West Asia. Therefore Moscow justified its military intervention in Syria in September 2015 to restore the stability of the region and oppose the U.S from using force to overthrow Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. It is evident that Moscow is establishing itself as a key guarantor to maintain collective security in West Asia (Ramani, 2018).

In July 2015, the “Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)” on the Iranian nuclear program provided Iran with an entrance into world politics (Ivanov, 2016:4). The JCPOA is an international agreement of the nuclear program of Iran, which signed in July 2015 among Iran, P5, Germany, and EU. This agreement ensures that the nuclear weapons are not only peaceful, but it will be under regular verification by the International Atomic Energy Agency (“U.S. Department of State, diplomacy in action: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action”). This agreement eliminated certain ‘nuclear-related secondary sanction’ on Iranian business sectors. As a result, within six months of implementation of JCPOA, around \$4.2 billion in assets

heightened of the country and export earnings increased by over \$7 billion. Furthermore, oil exports increased by around 400,000 barrels per day for Iran (Ghorashi, et al., 2017). Putin also said that “This agreement will enhance the exports of Iranian enriched uranium and will help to modernize the nuclear facilities at Fordo and Arak. Russia resumes nuclear trade with Iran as sanctions lifted”. (BBC News, 2015). A major turning point occurred on May 8, 2018, when President Donald Trump declared its withdrawal from JCPOA. Since the withdrawal, the EU declared a blockade law on August 7, 2018, where America would no longer be allowed to make any sanctions on countries dealing with Iran. Russia and China also accused the U.S for violating the agreement. President Rouhani reiterated Iran's intention to abide by the terms of the deal and criticized the U.S for its history of not respecting international agreements (Landler, 2018).

Divergence of Relations

Beyond defence and nuclear power, Russia and Iran share a number of interests. Nevertheless, they are still rivals in the field of oil and gas. Iran, along with all the Caspian littoral states, has had long-standing disputes over the legal status of the Caspian. This makes the Caspian one of the top priorities of Iran’s foreign policy. Russia and Iran have a long complicated history of being geographical neighbors, rivals, competitors, and partners. Tsarist Russia expanded its territory towards Iran in Central Asia and the Caucasus. Under the Treaty of Golestan 1813, Iran lost Tbilisi and Baku. The khanates of Yerevan and Nakhichevan were granted to Russia following the 1828 Treaty of Turkmanchai. Moreover, following these treaties, Iran granted exclusive trading and navigation rights to Russia in the Caspian Sea, as discussed in the fourth chapter in detail (Pieper, 2012).

Iranian publications have considered the period of 2009-10 as the ‘cold winter of Russo-Iranian relations.’ Russia failed to deliver the promised S-300 missiles to Tehran, delayed the completion of the Bushehr power plant. Russia was even attempting to escape Iran's nuclear dossier issue (Hunter, 2010: 115). Concerning the Bushehr nuclear plant, Iran signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Russian company Minatom that finally concluded in 1995 and promised to complete the plant within 55 months. But by 2009, Russia had postponed the construction seven times, ultimately being accused by Iranian reformist of hypocrisy and duplicity. Some observers stated that ‘the Bushehr nuclear plant has been in the longest construction process in the international history of nuclear development’.

(Encyclopaedia Iranica, 2014). After repeated delays; finally, the Bushehr plant became operational in September 2011 after ten years (Vatanka, 2017).

Moscow decided to support the UN's sanctions on Iran in 2010, and that led to a downward spiral between Russia and Iran. Moreover, in 2006, Moscow supported the UNSC resolutions imposing economic sanctions against Iran for its nuclear program. Ukraine related western sanction against Russia opened a new door of affinity between Moscow and a fellow victim, Iran (Geranmayeh, and Liik, 2016: 2, 7). Duly enough, Russia redefined itself as a non-western power. This triggered a new alliance with China and heavy investments in the Eurasian Economic Union. In 2014, tensions between Russia and the U.S and EU erupted on the Ukraine issue, which forced Kremlin to expand cooperation with Iran. Russian authorities believed that good relations with the West Asian countries could save Kremlin from international isolation and compensate the sanctions imposed by the U.S and the EU. In this regard, Russia mainly laid stress on counterbalancing the anti-Russian campaign in the Arab media by engaging with Iran (Kozhanov, 2015: 11). Thus, tensions with the West have forced Russia to rethink its kinship with Iran.

Under the strict current international legal norms, Russian and Iran are developing military-technical cooperation. In 2007, the two countries have signed a deal for the delivery of S-300 surface-to-air missile system. But the deal got suspended on June 9, 2010, following the UNSC Resolution 1929 (Nikolsky, 2017). However, on January 19-21, 2015, during the Russian Minister of Defense Sergei Shoigu visit to Tehran, both countries signed agreements in the areas of military training, information exchange, counterterrorism coordination, education, etc. In addition, Putin lifted Medvedev's ban of exports of the S-300 on 13 April 2015. Thus, in November 2015, the S-300 delivery entered into force (Kozhanov, 2015: 12). However, in many areas, cooperation with Iran is required; oil and gas, atomic energy, electricity, petrochemical, and rail infrastructure. In light of this need, Iran and Russia signed a package of agreements in November 2014 regarding Russia's participation in the creation of 8 new nuclear power units in Iran (Ibid,11).

Evaluating the relationship between Russia and Iran, we find that historically, both states have been competitors in the Caspian Sea and the energy industry at large. However, western influence has brought together these two nations over time, especially the hegemonic presence of the U.S in West Asia, Caucasus, Central Asia, and the Caspian region. To aid to that Iran

has been under several international economic sanctions, which has motivated it to collaborate with Russia as well as China, Russia and Iran continue to be at odds over the Caspian. The two countries have closer military and nuclear cooperation rather than economic ties. Although the economies of Russia and Iran have relied on the oil and gas exports, they have a few investments in the energy sectors. The victory of Rouhani in 2013 marked a major shift in Iran's factional politics. However, the JCPOA agreement signed between Iranian President Rouhani and the U.S president Obama, along with P5+1, is considered a milestone success in international politics for the preservation of security and stability in the region. Predictably, Trump's negative comments on this agreement may adversely impact this camaraderie between Russia and Iran.

Relations among the Littoral States of the Caspian Regarding the Caspian Sea

Kazakhstan-Turkmenistan Relations

The transport of oil and gas play a vital role in forming the bilateral relation between Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. The diplomatic relations were established between the two states on 5 October 1992 (The ministry of foreign affairs, Republic of Kazakhstan). Both the states heavily depend on this sector, especially with rich hydrocarbon reserves both of them are looking to widening their horizon in the world market. In order to do so, they need an expansive network of the export route. This will aid in exploiting the Caspian resources to their profit. So, the aim of their foreign policy is to diversify the supply of energy (oil and gas) resources from the Caspian region. However, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan do not see eye to eye on their foreign policy efforts. For instance, Kazakhstan adopted an open economy for the outside world, while Turkmenistan is one of the closed countries. Initially, Turkmenistan adopted an official policy to be neutral and declared to stay out from organizations established under the Russian leadership. As a result, Kazakh's openness policy attracted western companies to invest in its energy sectors and transport networks. Tengizchevoil is first key agreements between Kazakhstan and Western companies. Moreover, Astana began to look towards the U.S for tackling the Caspian Sea legal status dispute (Assanbayev, 2014:144). Quickly realizing the regional isolation, Turkmenistan caved in to form bilateral ties and diversify its energy export bypassing Russia. Nevertheless, both countries suffer from geopolitical problems and are still dependent on Russia for the transport of their oil and gas. In light of this issue, China becomes a suitable guarantor for achieving their goals (Ibid, 145).

In June 2015, Kazakh parliament approved Turkmenistan's proposal of dividing the Caspian and rendering equal rights of exploration, development, and utilization of seabed and subsoil resources. The agreement also defined the Caspian maritime territorial border between Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. The document would help in the creation of free trade zone and open the possibilities of cooperation in the realm of transport in the Caspian Sea, which was discussed by Kazakh and Turkmen presidents in the Caspian summit in September 2014. The document would motivate the other littoral states to follow suit (Abbasova, 2015). Since the disintegration of the USSR, there are two possible solutions to deciding upon the legal status of the Caspian: delimitation based on the midline modified method or equal division into five states (Karbuz,2016:65). During the visit of President of Turkmenistan Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov to Kazakhstan in April 2017, celebrating the silver anniversary of diplomatic relations, presidents of the two countries stated that:

Kazakh and Turkmen people are bound by ties of the neighbourhood, partnership, mutual trust, and fraternity. Turkmenistan is an important partner and ally of Kazakhstan in the region. Furthermore, we are solving all border issues and we are the only two countries in Central Asia which do not have border issue remaining unresolved. (Orazgaliyeva, 2017).

The major challenge for Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan is the position of Iran, which has maintained an isolationist policy in order to avoid the speedy resolution of the international legal system of the Caspian Sea. However, any resolution is further slowed down by the active involvement of western countries and China (Assanbayev, 2014:158). During the Aktau convention in August 2018, the Caspian five countries gave the Caspian Sea a 'special legal status', paving newer paths for Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Azerbaijan. The convention gives free hands for cooperation in energy transportation and opportunity for Trans Caspian Pipeline from region to the west. In fact, it allowed the possibility for cooperation regarding seabed resources as well as the construction of energy pipelines.

Kazakhstan-Azerbaijan Relations

Azerbaijan has been the homeport of the maritime transport Caspian Steamship fleet during the Soviet period. Baku was in charge of the management of the entire fleet activity in the Caspian. Under the Soviet rule, Azerbaijan enjoyed collaboration with external powers and access to open seas even though the station was essentially limited to serve Soviet interests. However, the situation changed after the collapse of the USSR. The Republic of Azerbaijan

was the first to declare its sovereignty on 23 September 1989, but it was merely granted permission to form an international alliance in the economic field under the supervision of the Soviet Union. For instance, in the early 1990s, Soviet allowed Azerbaijan to make deals with western companies (mainly British Petroleum, Unocal, Statoil, and Amoco) for joint exploration and development of oil fields (Ibrahimov, 2014: 95).

Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are significant for each other. Relations between them are generally amicable due to their common interests and absence of perceivable tension. Moreover, Kazakhstan provides routes to Azerbaijan to access Central Asia and China, while Azerbaijan is seen as a bridge for Kazakhstan to access Turkey and Europe. Coincidentally, both nations share the same maritime border with the Caspian Sea. The Nagorno-Karabakh issue, along with other energy and economic factors pushed Azerbaijan to develop bilateral and multilateral relations with Kazakhstan. Moreover, around 100,000 Azerbaijani origin people live in Kazakhstan, a driving factor for their mutual amiability (Huseynov, 2017: 140).

In this context, Beybit Isabayev, Ambassador of the Republic of Kazakhstan to the Republic of Azerbaijan, stated that “Azerbaijan is an important strategic partner of Kazakhstan in the Caucasus region. The most important fields of our cooperation are the energy sector, agriculture and oil transportation and use of the Caspian Sea”. Concerning the Caspian Sea, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan have a similar approach. In the early 1990s, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan were ready for applying the UNCLOS to the Caspian by demanding a complete division of seabed and subsoil, water, and airspace. In September 1996, during Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev visit to Baku, both presidents issued a joint statement stating that "both nations agreed to work together to resolve legal issues of the Caspian Sea, supporting the open navigation and division of the seabed and waters into national sectors" (Szymansky, 2007). Similarly, in 1997, another joint statement was given out which declared the division of the Caspian through its middle. Turkmenistan, in the same year, started issuing licenses for offshore drilling rights in its twelve-mile zone (Karbuz, 2010). In 2001, the Caspian states barring Iran agreed on the median line method for the division of the seabed reserves. Iran held its ground in opposing western assistance in energy development in the region instead of concentrating on the legal status.

Moreover, between 2001 and 2003, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Russia signed an agreement to divide the seabed along the median line that afforded each state with their exclusive zones (Huseynov, 2017: 141). Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan made the first deal on this line on 29

November 2001. As a result, around 64% of northern Caspian seabed was demarcated, in which Azerbaijan received 18%, Russia 19%, and Kazakhstan 27%. Russia remained the only littoral states by 2010 to have its national sectors fully demarcated (Mehdiyeva, 2011:138). Inevitably, Turkmenistan and Iran criticized this move strongly. Apart from, the two countries share issues in fields of energy, agriculture, oil transportation, and the U.Se of the Caspian Sea. During the meeting in April 2017 with President of Azerbaijan Ilham Aliyev, Kazakh President Nazarbayev said that

There is a railway road built in Kazakhstan from the Chinese border to the Caspian Sea with a length of about 2,000 kilometres, as well as the Western Europe – Western China highway, which brings its results. At the moment, a question arose concerning sending goods from China to Europe through the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea. Thus, there is a huge potential for Azerbaijan. Kazakhstan is ready to supply metallurgical products to Azerbaijan, such as already exported locomotives. For example, the volume of imported vegetables from Azerbaijan increased 12 times in one year. Coordinated actions will help us to increase trade turnover up to \$500 million in the near future (Orazgaliyeva, 2017).

Despite their friendly relations, during the meeting of riparian states in November 1996, Kazakhstan felt the pressure of Russia and blamed Azerbaijan for blocking the new convention that divided the entire Caspian Sea. Kazakhstan has been interested in the joint use of the sea's surface and water resource, however, they agreed on their position during the foreign ministers meeting in Astana in October 1999. Besides, both countries are facing common issues related to their energy resource, the export of oil and gas, and foreign policy choices particularly towards Russia, etc. (Dekmejian, and Simonian, 2003: 91).

Kazakhstan-Iran Relations

Generally, Iran has positive relations with the Central Asian countries. The majority of the Central Asian countries' inhabitants are Sunnis, among which Kazakhstan is the most stable. Kazakhstan played an important role in hosting a round of the P5+1-Iran negotiations in 2013. In September 2014, during a meeting of international community related to Iran's nuclear program, Kazakh president Nazarbayev with Iranian president Rouhani stated that "Kazakhstan consider Iran as an important partner in the world and a good neighbor in the Caspian region. We are confident that the solution of the nuclear program will boost the Iranian economy as well as our relations" (Katzman, 2015:20, 26).

Kazakhstan is landlocked and as no direct access to any open sea, which makes it dependent on the pipeline for energy transport in the world market. If not for anything else, Iran comes in

handy for the sheer factor of transport routes. Hence, transportation is the key element for determining their relationship. Both the countries produce oil, so they have a shared agenda of oil distribution in the world. The Republic of Kazakhstan and the Islamic Republic of Iran established their diplomatic relations on 29 January 1999. They signed more than 60 intergovernmental, interstate, interdepartmental agreements that cemented their bilateral interaction. In October 2001, the two states opened a direct automobile and ferry communication on feeder vessels from Aktau to Iranian port Nowshahr/ Enzeli. Apart from this, an intergovernmental document was signed by Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan in December 2007 in Ashkhabad sanctioning the construction of a new railway line. This line starts from Uzen (Kazakhstan), goes via Kyzylkaya (Turkmenistan), Bereket, Etrek, and finally ends at Gorgan (Iran). The length of the railway in Kazakh territory is 146 km, Turkmenistan 700 km, and Iran 83 km. Kazakhstan-Iran relation is to provide a link from Central Asia to the Persian Gulf. (Ashoori, 2014: 1)

Another field of Kazakh-Iran cooperation is oil swaps. Kazakh oil is first transported to Iranian refineries from where it is shipped to world markets on the Persian Gulf. The payment is ultimately received by Kazakhstan, while Iran charges refining fees (Hays, 2016). This oil swaps operation has attracted many national and multinational companies over time. For example, in 1998, Turkmen exporters, represented by Drayun concluded an oil swap agreement with Iran and in 2000 and signed a new document for ten years. Total-FinaElf's Christophe de Margerie said that the "Iranian oil transport route is the most profitable" for most companies that are operating in the Kazakh sector. Canadian PetroKazakhstan Inc. is already transporting its share of oil, which is produced in the Kumkol oil field (Kzyl-Orda Region) to Tehran refinery along the Tedzhen-Serakhs-Mashhad railway line, under a swap contract (Auelbaev, 2004:84).

However, sanctions against Iran have disrupted this trade agreement, so much so that there has been no crude oil swapped between Kazakh and Iran over the past two or three years. Kazakh's ties with the U.S have become a hindrance in keeping its relationship with Iran. In 2016, during an interview of Ambassador of Iran to Kazakhstan Mojtaba Damirchiloo, he said that the U.S had been imposing sanction on Iran since the Islamic Revolution 1979, therefore sanctions work against their goals, because the U.S creates problems, particularly for the ordinary people by increasing their expenses. He further added that "Iran had been facing long-term sanctions in different areas including nuclear activities, shipping, oil, civil aviation, military activities,

banking, insurance and so on, which have direct impacts on different political, economic, legal and psychological areas” (Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Astana, 2016).

In a diplomatic visit to Kazakhstan in 2016, Rouhani explored a large number of issues concerning trade and economy, investments, transit, transport, and agriculture with Kazakh President Nazarbayev. Kazakh president emphasized that Iran was one of the first countries to recognize Kazakhstan’s independence, and that has led Iran to be its closest allies. He continued, “At present, we need to ripe our cooperation to get to a strategic level; for it, Kazakhstan is ready to cooperate.” In turn, Hassan Rouhani congratulated the Kazakh President on the 25th anniversary of the country's independence, expressing gratitude for their partnership. He then added that "Iran's policy has always favored in strengthening good neighborly relations with all neighboring countries”³⁹. However, it is important to shed light on the fact that Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are involved in projects with western countries that support energy export routes, which bypass Russia and Iran altogether.

Azerbaijan-Turkmenistan Relations

Since the disintegration of the USSR, the Caspian littoral states have been signing various agreements and negotiations on border issues. Regarding the sea borders and the division of the offshore oil and gas fields, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are against each other since the 1990s. Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan have had altercations over oil fields in the Caspian. Although Azerbaijan is actually dominating them, Turkmenistan does not recognize Baku’s claims. In the eyes of some Post-Soviet leaders, Russia has the rights of as major arbitrator in the area. Consequently, Turkmenistan President Sparamurat Niazov visited Moscow and asked Yeltsin for mediation but tensions between Ashgabat and Baku aggravated in 1997 (Shlapentokh, 2013).

Major clashes between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are a result of disputed energy fields that are mainly Azeri, Chirag, and Kyapaz (known in Azerbaijan) which are known as Osman, Oman, and Serdar respectively in Turkmenistan. When Azerbaijan signed the ‘Contract of the Century’ on 20 September 1994, with western oil companies, its relationship with Turkmenistan deteriorated and as a retort, Turkmenistan claimed its rights on the Azeri-Chirag fields. The disturbance carried over to another oil field called Kyapaz (known as Serdar in

³⁹ “Official Site of the President of the Republic of Kazakhstan, *“Meeting with the Islamic Republic of Iran President Hassan Rouhani, who arrived in Kazakhstan on official visit, 22 December 2016”*, URL: http://www.akorda.kz/en/events/akorda_news/meetings_and_receptions/meeting-with-the-islamic-republic-of-iran-president-hassan-rouhani-who-arrived-in-kazakhstan-on-official-visit”

Turkmenistan). In this regards, in 1997, when the State Oil Company of the Azerbaijan Republic signed a document with Rosneft and Lukoil for joint exploration and development of Kyapaz field, Turkmenistan strongly opposed this action and claimed that the fields are within Turkmen territory. The same year, late Azeri President Heydar Aliyev proposed to develop the field together with Turkmenistan, but his proposal was rejected.

In 2001, the situation escalated to a hostile level when both sides threatened military action. Both countries accused each other of illegal exploration and violating territorial waters. Baku went ahead and purchased two American military boats that resulted in an arms race. By 2003 and 2004, both countries were putting efforts for the diplomatic solution, but could not come to a long-term solution (Bajrektarecic and Posega, 2014: 95). The bilateral relation between the two countries reached an all-time low, at which point the presidents refused to meet for over a decade. During the presidency of Saparmurat Niyazov, Turkmenistan challenged Azerbaijan's activities in the Caspian Sea, disagreed with Azerbaijan regarding the legal status of the Caspian and refuted the demarcation of its borders. The late Niyazov never visited Azerbaijan and maintained cold relations with Azerbaijan throughout.

In 2009, Azerbaijan repeated its offer to Turkmenistan for the development of the field together but did not receive any response. The Turkmen president Berdymukhamedov declared that his government would go in the International Court of Arbitration against Azerbaijan to resolve this dispute (Karbuz, 2016:65, 66). This resulted in the oil fields being unexploited by both countries. However, the bilateral relationship between the countries has improved after Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow became the president of Turkmenistan in 2008. For example, in the early 1990s, the problem of the debt was solved. Because Azerbaijan imported Turkmen gas. The country re-opened its embassy in Baku. According to an agreement concluded in 2008, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan agreed not to start exploitation and development of the disputed field unilaterally, until a final decision was made. Azerbaijani Navy was compelled to force the Turkmen ship out of the area for violating the agreement. During the negotiation process on the construction of the Trans-Caspian gas pipeline, relations between the two countries had become worse. On 16 June 2012, Turkmenistan unexpectedly sent a research vessel for the seismic exploration in the Kyapaz field (Sadikhova,2017). In response, Turkmenistan's ambassador Toyly Komekov in Baku suspended by Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry. Deputy Foreign Minister Khalaf Khalafov accused Turkmenistan for violating of the 2008 agreement. Azerbaijan sent out a warning against Turkmenistan's unlawful activities. Next day, the Turkmenistan Embassy quickly responded that Azerbaijan's State Border Service took

unlawful actions against a civilian vessel that was doing research work in a non- Azerbaijani territory of the Caspian. The Embassy threatened to not stand such illegal actions on the part of Azerbaijan (Valiyev, 2012).

Despite such vitriolic relations, both countries share a common cultural root, being of fraternal Turkic descent. In June 1992, diplomatic relations were established between Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. Both countries have constructive cooperation in the fields of political, cultural-humanitarian, and economic trade. At present, both countries have concluded more than 50 bilateral documents comprising the normative-legal basis of intergovernmental partnerships (Aliyev, 2017). Turkmenistan's President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedow's visit in August 2017 to Baku and Aliyev's subsequent visit to Ashgabat boosted the bilateral ties and opened a new chapter for their relations in the Caspian Sea. During this visit, the two countries signed several agreements, including economic, trade, agriculture, environmental protection, defense, tourism, port development, emergency operations, energy, and transport. (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan). Addressing the press conference, President Aliyev commented, "This visit plays a very important role in Azerbaijani-Turkmen relations, which shows that the relations are at the highest level. The signed strategic partnership is the major tool of bilateral relations which covers all major sectors". Furthermore, President Aliyev emphasized on the construction of seaports on both sides of the Caspian, which would enhance trade and commerce via transport corridors (Ismailzade, 2017).

Turkmenistan-Iran Relations

Politically and economically isolated countries have been developing energy ties. Iran's isolation is due to the U.S containment policy, while Turkmenistan's isolation is self-imposed in its foreign policy doctrine as 'positive neutrality.' The Post- Soviet independent states see to it that the Iranian route is the cheapest, safest and the most environment-friendly for oil and gas transportation. Turkmenistan takes a special interest in Iran for the transport of its raw material, as they share borders. In 1996, a new railway was inaugurated, which joined the city of Tejen to the northern Iranian city of Mashhad. This connects landlocked Central Asian states to the Persian Gulf. It incorporated this area in the larger railway system connecting Asia from Turkey to China (Bohr, 2016: 84).

Most importantly in 1997, Iran's president, Muhammad Khatami, and Niyazov officially opened a 200-km gas pipeline (mainly built with Iranian financing) offering 11-12 bcm/y of capacity, although the amount of gas delivered to Iran was relatively little. In 2006, both states

agreed to increase the supply from 5.8 bcm to 8 bcm. In 2010, the opening of a new pipeline, with a throughput of 12 bcm/y, from the vast gas field of Dauletabad in southern Turkmenistan to the Khangiran of northeast Iran (expanded to Songbust that year) helped in the increase of delivery capacity. Dauletabad had supplied Russia for 20 years until exports declined in 2009 and the gas supply got diverted to Iranian fields (Ibid).

The Caspian dimension is an important factor for determining the relationship between Iran and Turkmenistan. Iranian pipeline offers the cheapest and the safest routes to world markets, particularly the Persian Gulf. For example, ‘the Korpeje-Kordkuy pipeline’ is a 200-kilometer-long natural gas pipeline, which runs from Korpeje (Turkmenistan) to Kordkuy (Iran). Standing at around 8 billion cubic meters is the annual volume of deliveries of this pipeline, it was built in 1997 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Turkmenistan; the main gas pipelines of Turkmenistan). The second ‘Dauletabad-Sarakhs-Khangiran gas pipeline’ will initially allow Turkmenistan to supply around six bcm to Iran annually. Besides, Iran has announced to increase 20 bcm gas supplies from Turkmenistan (Pipeline & Gas Journal, 2010). This illustrates that Turkmenistan is diversifying its gas export routes and doubling the nation's export of gas to Iran. Turkmenistan is on the rise to establish itself as a reputed trade partner in the Caspian belt (Shustov, 2017).

During a conference in 2007, the Caspian five countries stated that ‘they would support each other's rights for peaceful nuclear programs. In a meeting held on 24 June 2010, in Tehran, Iranian foreign minister Manouchehr Mottaki stated that "Iran and Turkmenistan are strongly supporting on the demilitarization of the region as well as the world", as portrayed by Iran's Far News Agency (A. Farrar-Wellman, 2010). In 2008, the total investment of Iran was around \$1.5 billion in Turkmenistan. In 2008, trade exchanges between Turkmenistan and Iran reached over \$2.9 billion, which increased compared to the previous year. Turkmenistan is the largest among Central Asian countries, shares commercial as well as technical cooperation with Iran. Iran is the second-largest trade partner of Turkmenistan after Russia (Farhad Atai and Hamidreza Azizi, 2012:747).

In 2015, presidents of the countries agreed to enhance the trade turnover to \$60bn in the following decades, according to Euro Asia Daily news agency. In July 2008, Rasit Meredow, the Turkmen Foreign Minister, said that they are in favor of Iran's peaceful nuclear research program. On the other hand, Turkmenistan has become the largest natural gas exporter to China. In 2016, the country exported 25.6 billion cubic meters, while Kazakhstan exported

only 322 million. Rouhani visited Ashgabat on 27 March 2018, where he held talks with Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdymukhamedov, where they discussed bilateral and regional issues including energy, transportation, and transit. Rouhani stated that "new cooperation in the field of oil and gas in the Caspian Sea and providing loans for the development of transport between the two countries can be new steps in economic relations between the two countries." Citing their cultural and historical ties, he laid stress on developing cooperation in fields of communications, terrorism, science, research, and technology. The Turkmen president favoured Rouhani's proposal by declaring the Caspian as a sea of peace and security, therefore, cooperation between two countries must further develop at the shores and waters of the Caspian and special economic zones⁴⁰.

One has to acknowledge that Turkmenistan's relation with Iran is not without tension. Within five years for the third time in 2012, Turkmenistan reduced around 50% of its gas supplies without prior notice. Iranian oil minister announced that the disruption was the result of a breakdown in negotiations on purchase terms. Turkmen energy officials argued that the supplies were suspended at Iran's request due to repair work of pipeline. However, Iran did not stop the purchase of Turkmen gas. In 2013, Turkmenistan supplied 6-bcm gas to Iran and 9-bcm in 2014. In August 2014, Iran announced that it would no longer require Turkmen Gas imports to increase domestic gas production by 2015. In November of that year, Iran withdrew its statement after cracking a new purchase agreement with Turkmenistan. Through Iran, Turkmenistan can export gas to Europe, Turkey, and the Indian subcontinent. (Bohr, 2016: 85). The relationship between the two countries turned sour in 2017 when Iran blamed Turkmenistan's state gas company, Turkmengaz for cutting gas supplies to northern Iran, which violated a twenty-year agreement. As a retort, Turkmenistan claimed that Iran had not paid a debt of \$2 billion. Both countries are still seeking international arbitration to settle this dispute (Putz, 2018).

Azerbaijan-Iran Relations

Azerbaijan is always careful to build its new relationship with its 'big neighbors'. Baku is known for its balanced approach in its foreign policy, which tries to manage the balance between Russia, Iran, Turkey, and the U.S. After the disintegration of the USSR, Iran was among the first countries that recognized the sovereignty of Azerbaijan (Alili, 2015). Iran is

⁴⁰The Iran Project (2018), "*President Rouhani in Ashgabat to review issues of mutual interests*", URL: <https://theiranproject.com/blog/2018/03/28/president-rouhani-in-ashgabat-to-review-issues-of-mutual-interests/>

located in the southern part of Azerbaijan and the two states share around 618 km of land borders, and both share borders with the Caspian. Notably, after Iran, Azerbaijan has the second-largest Shia population in the world (Nassibli, 1999). Iranian foreign policy, especially in the South Caucasus, was seriously tested by the Azerbaijan-Armenian Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. Iran has notably shown support towards Armenia over Azerbaijan, keeping aside ideological and religious sentiments (Karimov, 2014: 134). Iran's relations with countries of South Asia, Caucasus and Central Asia are significantly diverse, from close ties with Afghanistan to sheer enmity with Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan and Iran have territorial differences over the Caspian boundaries. Azerbaijan has been a key ally of the U.S; therefore, its oil and gas export routes bypass Iran (Katzman, 2015:20). Bilateral ties between Iran and Azerbaijan is hampered by Azerbaijan's close energy ties with western countries as well as contradicting positions on defining the legal status of the Caspian.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Iran had adopted an aggregative campaign to claim the greater portion of the Caspian and its resources. Iran also opposed the involvement of external powers in the Caspian Sea. For example, in 2001, on behalf of Azerbaijan, BP research vessel prospecting in the Araz-Alov-Sharg field in Southern Caspian, which was threatened by Iranian jets and warship. In 2009, an Iranian oilrig entered Azerbaijan's water (Kuchera, 2012). Since these incidents, both countries considered diplomatic means to establish a boundary. With the aim to settle the conflict-related the Caspian Sea border with Baku, an Iranian delegation led envoy Mehdi Safari held a three-day talk in Baku in June 2002.

Similarly, in March 2010, Azeri President Ilham Aliyev's met with the Iranian President's Special Envoy Mehdi Safari in Baku, where both agreed on continued alliance regarding the Caspian and ensuring security among the members. President Aliyev concurred with Mr. Safari on the significance of security and cooperation between the Caspian states. Consequently, Russia, Iran, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan agreed to finalize the draft of the security agreement. Concluding the negotiation, a spokesperson of the Iranian Embassy in Baku said that "There are no problems between two countries and technical issues being resolved." However, Khalaf Khalafov, Azerbaijan's Caspian representative, said that "no progress was made in the diplomatic border negotiations" (A. Farrar-Wellman, 2010). An interview with Azertac, Mir Shams Mominzade, Mayor of the Iranian city of Anzali said that:

Iran is interested to increase cooperation in the Caspian Sea with Azerbaijan. Furthermore, he said that Iran intends to expand bilateral ties in the fields of security and protection of public order of

the Caspian littoral states. Iran and Azerbaijan have enough infrastructures on the seafront, which could help to enhance cooperation in the fields of economy, transport and tourism”⁴¹ .

Besides, Azerbaijani's navy visited Iran in 2017 for the first time, which signalled warm ties between the wary neighbors. Azerbaijani's patrol ships visit to Iran considered a big step regarding the Caspian Sea between two countries. Noticeably, Iran is becoming more active in the Caspian Sea; for example, Iran made its first-ever naval visit to Kazakhstan in 2016, and Kazakhstan reciprocated later (Kucera, 2017). On March 28, 2018, Iranian President Rouhani visited Baku and met with Azerbaijani President. Iran and Azerbaijan signed an MoU on joint development of hydrocarbon areas in the Caspian Sea. Moreover, the Aktau convention 2018 banned the entry of non-Caspian states in the region. It was mainly directed against the U.S and NATO, which are a relief for Iran and Russia. Currently, Azerbaijan is in conflicts with Iran and Turkmenistan over Caspian oil fields. Due to the possibility of conflicts, the Caspian five are engaged in a naval build-up in the Caspian region. Azerbaijan, with imports, from Israel, is quickly expanding its navy to compete with the largest naval base which is owned by Russia. Azerbaijan and Israel have come together to fight a common rival, i.e., Iran. Iran is increasing its navy and military and plans to create a submarine fleet in the Caspian. (Shlapentokh, 2013).

Evaluating the whole chapter, we find that among the Caspian states, Russia has been playing the role of a ‘big brother’ in the region. As a permanent member of UNSC, Moscow has been striving to restore its influence in the post-Soviet space. Russia mainly aims to diminish western influence by uniting the littoral states. Apart from American involvement, Israel's increasing ties with Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan poses a threat to both Russia and Iran. Russia shares a close tie with Kazakhstan due to geographical proximity and common ethnic descent. Natural gas prices determine Russia's relations with Turkmenistan. Azerbaijan has maintained a balanced foreign policy with Russia and the U.S. In spite of its pro-western nature, Azerbaijan does not want to deteriorate its relationship with Russia. Azerbaijan is well aware that Russia is the only country that can solve the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict. In the case of Iran, the U.S

⁴¹ “An interview with *Azertac*, Mir Shams Mominzade, Mayor of the Iranian city of Anzali, 8 October 2017, “Iran keen to develop cooperation with Azerbaijan in the Caspian Sea”, URL: <https://www.azernews.az/business/120157.html>”

continues sanctions on Iran, which has brought Iran close to Russia. Uniting against the U.S, both countries have started looking towards China.

In the case of interstate relations of Caspian states, all the five littoral states have disputes over the territorial claim on the Caspian Sea. Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan have already started their major projects in their parts of the Caspian. Under pressure from Russia and Iran, Turkmenistan has been able to do very little in the matter. However, with the help of Western companies, Turkmenistan has been developing its own sectors, especially the Trans-Caspian–pipeline. Russia and Iran have jointly opposed this project, citing environment and ecological concerns. However, the Caspian five have finally agreed on the legal status of the Caspian, ultimately giving it a ‘special legal status.’ It will provide opportunities, especially to Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, to diversify their export routes. Even though such productive actions have been taken, the demarcation of energy resources will require another agreement among the Caspian states. On May 14, 2003, Kazakhstan, Russia and Azerbaijan signed an agreement on the delimitation of adjacent parts of the Caspian Sea. In 2004, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan concluded a document to define territorial water, which came into effect in 2015. But the most disputed areas lie in the southern part of the Caspian. Azerbaijan has disputes over oil and gas sector with Turkmenistan and Iran, though the northern Caspian is divided among Russia, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, and Iran have to come to terms with one another in order to solve disputes over oil and gas in the southern Caspian.

Chapter VI

Conclusion

Historically, the Caspian region because of its geographical attributes and mercantile interests, especially during the period of colonisation served as a bridge that connects and facilitates trade between all the regions of the world. In recent decade, because of the abundance of energy resources (gas and oil) and more importantly in context of the dwindling energy resources; and the inability to cultivate a more environmentally friendly alternative source of energy; and the security threat arising due to international terrorism would only enhance the geopolitical and commercial significance of the region in the 21st century. Given all these reasons above, competition and rivalry between the major powers in the contemporary international politics, in all probability would become more intense, unless scientific progress could identify and develop some form of perennial source of energy such as harnessing solar energy more effectively. This is to say; the “New Great Game” is set only to become more complex and dynamic in due course of time.

The strategic concerns of all the major contemporary powers in the “New Great Game” would most likely be played out in the region that encompasses most of the Central Asian, Transcaucasia, and the North Caucasus and its surrounding states mainly Turkey, Afghanistan, Iran, China, and Pakistan. Likewise, prior to the discovery of the natural energy resources, in the nineteenth century, the Caspian Sea for its strategic location, and economic and political consideration had become an object of interests for both Russian and British empires. This resulted into the competition between both of these empires known as the “Great Game”. However, the rivalry between British and Russian empires was never directly played out, or say both never confronted each other in open war. Instead, the rivalry took place "silently and secretly," in the heart of Central Asia or more precisely in Afghanistan. Given this equation then, and the region being the center of communication between the eastern and western parts of the world, the development of civilization in the Caspian region was directly correlated with the role, the region played in the trade of spices and exotic materials and more importantly the changing dynamics of power relations between Russian and British empires.

However, in the 21st century, the geopolitical importance of the “Caspian Region” is not only due to the geographical peculiarities but more importantly, because of the abundance of natural

energy resources. As a result, the active phase of the geopolitical game in the region or more aptly the “New Great Game”, started in mid-1990 when the major western countries began to exert its influence and competed with Russia to over construction of pipelines and also gaining control over key energy reserves.

This study contends that understanding the nuances of the ongoing “New Great Game”, would first require to a thorough examination of the historical antecedents of the political and economic development of the region; this means ascertaining the role of Russia in the flow of events in the region. The period after the Russian Revolution, or say prior to the dismemberment of USSR, the region was more or less under total Soviet control. This means the disintegration of Soviet Union, the political independence of the Caspian states and more important discovery of more reserves of natural energy resources catapulted the region to become the spotlight in the global politics in an unprecedented way. Given the fact, that Caspian region instead of being demarcated into two political entities in Soviet-era has multiplied into five new states with poorly demarcated borders, which remains a source of conflict among the newly formed states. This study also found the renewed geopolitical importance of the region and the ongoing conflicts among the Caspian states with regard to the exploitation of natural energy resources are subject to changing dynamics of power relations mainly between Russia and western powers. To put it otherwise, the relations of the Central Asian and Caspian states with the wider world is subject to the changing dynamics of the “New Great Game”. Therefore, the dependence of the economy of the Caspian states, primarily on energy resources has its own pros and cons that determine the character and nature of the unfolding political and economic processes within each of the states of the region. For example, the economic fate of Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan are totally dependent on Caspian reserves, whereas, it contributes around 94% in the Kazakh economy. In the case of Russia and Iran's share of the contribution of the Caspian energy to the overall economy is not significant or relatively far less. Both countries have energy resources located elsewhere within their borders. In this context, in the immediate run, Russia and Iran's interests in the region seems more political than economic. On a speculative note, this study projects that the focus could potentially shift to the economy once the energy resources in other parts of the world is exhausted in the future.

Leaving this aside, the study found that the prosperity and economic growth of the littoral states are dependent on the exploitation of hydrocarbon reserves. However, the current state of affair is far from ideal, the lack of willingness to resolve the boundary disputes and the complex and

often cumbersome process of negotiation with regard to defining the legal status of the Caspian Sea has prevented the Caspian and the Central Asian states from optimally utilising the natural energy resources for its economic growth. The study also found that the entry of the external powers such as the U.S, EU, China, Turkey, Iran, and India with its own specific agendas has further complicated the negotiation process among the littoral states. The primary reason for the current state of affairs is that external powers have also been trying to gain control over the energy resources by tinkering the political and economic process of the states in the region. These powers believe that 'the region's natural resources have the capabilities to fulfill the energy demands of the world in the first half of the 21st century'. Consequently, the study found that currently, major western companies such as Chevron, Exxon, British Petroleum, Shell, Elf, and Agip have entered in the Caspian and signed deals to extract and develop the energy resources of the region particularly oil-rich countries such as Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. There is a symbiotic relation between Western countries looking to meet its energy demands and the Caspian and Central Asian countries are dependent on western capital and technology to exploit the energy resources, which is otherwise not accessible in a cost-effective manner.

Moreover, the study also found that the September 2001 incident rapidly altered the geopolitical realities of the region and affected the regional political dynamics. After this event, the U.S managed to gain unforeseen sympathy and support from the Caspian states, China and even Russia. In this sense, the 9/11 terror attack opened a new door for the U.S to get involved in Central Asia and the U.S has used this opportunity to further its foreign policy objectives on energy security and also increased its wherewithal in combating international terrorism. However, the struggle to control the region's natural resources and marine reserves (fisheries and other sea species, importantly Sturgeon) among the regional powers and the major powers have complicated the security scenario. Consequently, on the pretext of ensuring the regional security, the engagements of the U.S and Russia in security-related matters of the region has continued to expand. Apart from the competition between Russia and the U.S, China's has also been consistently increasing its engagements and the BRI project would further complicate the geopolitics of the region. It would not be farfetched to imagine that through the BRI project, if not exceed the U.S and Russia; China could definitely become one of the dominant powers in the future. In such circumstances of ever-intensifying competition among the major powers, the Caspian states particularly Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan is in a pole position to derive the maximum opportunity to fast-forward the economic growth. Two hypotheses

tested in the second chapter proves that "the geostrategic location of the Caspian Sea region plays an important role in determining Russian foreign policy towards its neighbors and other powers". The third hypothesis "New Great Game' in the Caspian region indeed provides opportunities for the bordering states to achieve economic progress and international significance", is also proven to be correct.

For instance, Russian foreign policy in the Caspian region is to reassert its lost status in the former Soviet republics. Therefore, Russia introduced "Near Abroad' policy", which asserted special rights for Russia in all the post-Soviet spaces. Putin prioritized the Caspian region in his foreign policy and started to strengthen and deepen ties. To restore its influence as well as to protect ethnic Russians in the breakaway former entities of the Soviet Union. In doing so, Russia took bold steps such as supporting the Karabakh Armenians fight against Azerbaijan, providing aid to the separatist Abkhazia province against Georgia and in Eastern Ukrainian conflict and symbolically important annexation of Crimea in 2014. In all its dimensions of Russian policies towards the region consideration for geopolitical security and protection and promotion of economic interests in the region are the predominant priorities. In other words, Russia focused on factors, which are important for the country's national interests. Likewise, Russian views that protection of strategic interests in the Caspian and Central Asian region is better served by mainly concentrating on three states; Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, that holds an enormous quantity of commercial reserves of hydrocarbon reserves. This approach stems out of the fact that the Russian economy is also unduly dependent on the export of oil and gas reserves not necessarily the export of energy resources the Caspian and Central Asian states.

Leaving this aside, though, given the competition, Russia does seek to gain an absolute control on the pipelines network to export energy. Under the Putin presidency, Russia adopted energy document titled "Russian Energy Strategy unto 2020". It was approved in 2003 and the document acknowledged that fuel and energy would be the basis of long-term economic development, which could be affected by the scarcity of energy. Another important document is "Energy Strategy of Russia for the period up to 2030", which was approved in 2009. The goal of these documents is "to maximize the efficient use of natural energy resources and the potential of the energy sector in order to sustain the economic growth, improve the quality of life of the citizens and also help strengthen its international economic position". These documents guide the country to formulate both internal and external policies. Apart from this, Putin formed numerous organizations such as "Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC),

Eurasian Gas Alliance, the Custom Union, and Eurasian Economic Union” to strengthen cooperation. Given these, second hypothesis of this research “Putin’s foreign policy in the Caspian region is to reassert the Russian influence in the region in terms of its security, commercial and diplomatic interests and to tackle the security threat posed by the external actors” is also proved to be correct.

Besides, and more importantly, Russian foreign policy geared towards the creation of a multi-polar world order, which means it, focuses on the reduction of the supremacy of the U.S. The impetus to realise this goal and also the fact the nearly 25 million ethnic Russian still continue to live in the post-soviet spaces has led the Russian policies to prioritized the CIS states. All the Russian policy's doctrines (announced in 2008, 2013 and 2016) highlighted the singular necessity of creation of multi-polar world order. In keeping with the objectives earmarked in the doctrines, the phase of Russian foreign policy from 2007 to 2017 is considered as a period of protestation and intervention. Putin's anti-American speech at Munich in 2007 marked as a precursor of a definitive shift in Russian foreign policy. In this phase, Russia became more cautious towards the West and blamed the U.S and NATO for creating instability in West Asia, for reigniting a nuclear arms race and of setting an undesirable precedence of bypassing international institutions. In this context, this phase marked the beginning of Russia charting a new pathway for adopting an independent foreign policy. Indicatively, Russia discarded the pretence of cooperation with the U.S, by intervening in Georgia, Ukraine, and Syria. The Western countries were clueless and shocked by each of the intervention and were cornered to announce economic sanctions to Russia. These events clearly show that Russia has managed to take control of domestic squabbles and is set to become a prominent actor in global politics.

Unlike many contemporary states, which have become a multi-ethnic, multi-religious, multi-lingual and multi-cultural society because of the mass movement of people Russia society inherently exhibited these characters. Thus, security is a very important role in the sustenance Russia and in doing so it has often relied on the use of military force. In the context of this precedence, Russia currently has a military presence in the Western part of the Caspian Sea region, particularly in Georgia (Abkhazia and South Ossetia). As Georgia and Azerbaijan have been trying to limit and reduce Russian influence. As a result, these states in order to counterbalance the Russian influence have been trying to build stronger ties with the U.S, Turkey, and other external powers. Likewise, Azerbaijan and Georgia both have blamed Russia for provoking the ethnic conflicts in their territories. On the other side, the U.S has been

introducing various policies in the Caspian region in order to reinforce its position and also to challenge Russia and Iran.

The fundamental objective of the U.S is not only to ensure energy security but also to promote a market economy and also support the principle of the democratic form of governance. So far, building multiple pipelines and developing political and economic ties with the Caspian and Central Asian states have been the key instrument to achieve the U.S strategic objectives. Therefore, America has supported the development of a southern corridor, export routes that connect Europe via Turkey, which includes two pipelines; the BTC and the South Caucasus pipeline. The U.S has also endorsed a future pipeline ‘the Trans-Caspian Pipeline. Although so far, the TCP project has not moved forward. In December 2012, a US Senate Foreign Relations Committee Minority Staff Report insisted that Turkmenistan need take a concrete decision on this project and also called out to major Western and international firms to make the investment to kick-start the project. In the unfolding dynamics of the ‘New Great Game’, with regard to the construction of the pipeline and charting out prospective export routes, many international companies and petroleum consortiums have signed several contracts. In other words, in the “New Great Game”, construction of pipeline projects are seeming determined by geostrategic concerns rather than commercial interests. Therefore, pipeline politics has become a diplomatic and political battleground between various regional and major external powers.

In this context, Russia, the U.S, China, EU, Iran, and Turkey are the main players in the pipeline politics. These powers have been trying to diversify the export routes so as to enable them to gain a relative advantage in the competition to gain control over the energy reserves of the region. In this regard it must be noted that Russia and Iran lost pipeline war in when the BTC project role out. Consequently, China and Russia began constructing new pipelines to reinstate the relative advantage (“Power of Siberia Natural Gas Pipeline”). Given these, it is important to note that the U.S policy of sanction against Iran and Russia and the promotion of Turkey as the only export route is incompatible with Caspian state's political and economic realities. Besides, the U.S denial the approved the cheapest, shortest and economically safest Iranian route has kept Russian influence alive in the region. Further, the U.S position with Iran has prevented the market forces to play out unhindered and this, in turn, has compromised the capacity of the Caspian states to gain economic leverage in the ‘New Great Game’. It is a clear and visible game that arises out of clashes of interests between regional and great powers. Evidently, almost all multi-state-pipelines projects are highly politicised.

Consequently, in anticipation of the pipeline politics to turn into a 'hot war', Russia and major Western powers have tried to increase its military presence in the region. Therefore, NATO has been increasing its activities in the Caspian and Central Asian region. Since 1997, under the joint NATO-PfP program, NATO in collusion with some of the regional powers has been conducting joint military exercises. In this light, the eastward expansion of NATO in 1999 was to create a new order of the U.S primacy in the region. Moreover, the Baltic States also became members of NATO in 2004 and with further enlargement that incorporated Ukraine and Georgia; the U.S has been successful in creating a buffer zone against Russia. In fact, after the inauguration of BTC and South Caucasus Pipelines, respectively, in 2005 and 2006, US diplomatic manoeuvres apparently succeeded in pulling away Azerbaijan and Georgia from the clutches of Russian dependence. On the other side, under the SCO umbrella, China, Russia and other member states have moved in with various initiatives in order to challenge the increasing influence of NATO in the region. Given these ever-intensifying activities, the role of Kazakhstan is very important in the competition energy geopolitics in Eurasia or say the future course of the "New Great Game".

In the changing dynamics of the 'New Great Game', the Central Asian states, in particular, have followed a multi-vector foreign policy. In practical sense, the foreign policy of these states has tried to maintain balanced relations with great powers, so as to enable them to play both the sides in such a way that it maximizes their national interest. Thus, Caspian and Central Asian states given the rivalry among themselves have charted routes in their foreign policy that is mainly driven by specific national interests. This unfolding uncertainties or unpredictability of the behaviours of the Caspian and Central Asian states have pushed Russian foreign policy to often be reactive and not be proactive in dealing with the increasing role of western powers. Given all the factors discussed above which has been analysed in more details in the preceding chapters.

Apart from the above discussion, the legal status of the Caspian Sea continues to be a key issue for the littoral states. The ability to deal with the contradictions with regard to the legal status of the Caspian Sea would no doubt have an impact on how the "New Great Game" would be play out in the future. So far, the riparian states have signed a large number of treaties and agreements raising optimism for possibility of a settlement that is acceptable to all the concern parties. Subsequently, several steps have been undertaken through the multilateral framework on issues concerning with the sea. After a series of decisions arrived through bilateral and multilateral agreements, the northern side of the Caspian is shared among Russia, Kazakhstan,

and Azerbaijan but there is no such defined sectoral division for Iran, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. One reason behind this lack of clarity or the problem of undefined jurisdiction on other side of Caspian Sea due to the problem of not being able to come up with an acceptable definition of the legal status, the problem has stalled because concerned parties are divided. Because of this currently, the Caspian has characteristics of both a sea and a lake. This situation has hindered the proper demarcation of the territories, which in turn led to contestation over certain areas.

Currently, the littoral states continue to have differing legal positions and the search for an acceptable solution goes on and the international law related to sea and lake also did not provide a distinctive solution. For instance, if the Caspian is to be defined as a Sea then the provisions of the UNCLOS could not fit. As per UNCLOS, “each sovereign states would have a territorial sea, and the breadth of territorial water should be 12 nautical miles, 200 nm of the exclusive economic zone (EEZ) and continental shelf between 200 and 350”. Further, within the EEZ, each state has jurisdiction over 200nm, on which the states can exercise its sovereign power to decide on the suitable manner with respect to rights of exploration, method of exploitation and more importantly, conservation that means effective and sustainable form of management of living–non-living natural resources is found in this zone of the Caspian Sea. But the provision that allows each state to have EEZ rights on 200nm cannot satisfy Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan because both are situated less than 400 miles across causing a jurisdiction to overlap and thus cannot be acceptable legal precedence for both the states. Further, due to the problem of overlapping jurisdiction, division of the continental shelf beyond the EEZ does not provide a window to come up with an acceptable solution with regard to the division of the Caspian Sea.

If it is defined as a lake, there is no international convention for the division of international lakes or it would be divide equal to all littoral states. For that to happen, it requires cooperation and consensus on the part of all the five nations. Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, however, have opposed this method, because both countries have the longest of the maritime borders with the Caspian Sea. In this context, the two countries would be the biggest loser if the waterbody is legally defined as a lake. This lacuna arising out of the existing legal framework has hindered the resolution of the conflict arising out of the legal problem. The current status is that the Caspian Sea cannot be defined neither as a lake nor as a sea. Nonetheless, from the perspective of conflict resolution and negotiation theories, as a first step finding a final solution of the legal

status of the Caspian Sea would essentially have to begin with the cumbersome process at least identifying the issues on which consensus could be attained.

The geopolitical rivalry and to maximize their national interests, the Caspian states were not able to reach out a final solution. However, recognising importance of the region in 21st century and understanding the necessity of finding a solution, the five littoral states met at Aktau in August 2018 where all five states rejected the current status of neither being a sea nor lake, but they instead claimed that the waterbody have a 'special legal status'. They agreed on the status that "Each state has a right to sovereignty over territorial water for 15 nm from their coastline, plus 10 nm of exclusive fishing zone, and the rest would be common, but each sovereign state has a right to veto regarding the exploitation of energy in these common areas". It must be noted that this convention managed to determine general rules of the division of the Caspian Sea, however, the convention failed to specify the final division of the seabed and subsoil into national sectors. It has to be mentioned that the convention took place when Russia and Iran were facing the U.S imposed sanctions. Although, Iran was in favour of equal division. But the continuing sanctions forced Iran to sign this agreement in return for political as well as economic benefits. On top of this in order to compete effectively in the global arena, Iran need to be aligned with Moscow. This convention is viewed as extremely beneficial for Russia because it has made Russia a *de facto* military power in the Caspian Sea. More significantly, this convention banned the entry of non-Caspian states, which means the U.S and NATO are prohibited from entering the region. This event is also viewed as a big achievement for Russia and Iran. In order to resolve the remainder of the issues, there is need for a specific agreement for the delimitation of oil and gas resources of the Caspian Sea. Most importantly, the five states agreed to recognise the waterbody with a 'special legal status' of the Caspian.

Prior to 1991, Tsarist Russia and also during the era of the Soviet Union and Iran were geopolitical rivals for centuries. In the context of understanding the nuances of the unfolding "New Great Game", however, instead of the traditional rivalry, Russia-Iran relations have been growing rapidly and this has created tension for the western countries, particularly the U.S. The two countries share the common agenda to keep the western countries at bay from the Caspian and the region of West Asia. Moreover, both are aiming to increase the energy exports to the European as well as Eastern markets. Further, it has to be accounted that out of the among the Caspian states, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan are pro-western countries, despite the recent growing cooperation, Russia and Iran are essentially still rivals. Furthermore, Turkmenistan is a self-proclaimed neutral country, but of late it has been moving towards China and western

countries for transportation energy. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan has also focused on getting rid of the dependence on the Russian pipelines. Besides, an equally important factor needed to be considered is the growing presence of America in the Caspian Sea and also the strong ties of Israel with Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. These developments have become a major concern for Russian and Iranian foreign policy.

The study also found that the presence of ethnic in the post-Soviet spaces also determines Russia's foreign policy. For instance, Russia shares a close tie with Kazakhstan due to the geographical proximity many ethnic Russians continue to live in Kazakhstan. In fact, ethnic Russians made up to 23.7 % of the total population of Kazakhstan. This proximity has been playing an important role in cementing bilateral relations. However, it has to be noted that there are vicissitudes in foreign affairs between Russia and Turkmenistan as with threat of cutting off the transport lines. The bilateral relations between the two countries is largely determined by the price of the Turkmen natural gas and this has often led diplomatic tension in the relations. In the case with Azerbaijan, due to the apprehension or say fear of Iran and Russia, it has moved closer to western countries. The Nagorno-Karabakh conflict has kept Russia and Azerbaijan apart. Azerbaijani observers believed that Russia has been playing the role of a 'big brother in Armenia and in a strategic sense, Moscow dominates the Armenian economy. In this regard, Azerbaijan views Russia has a pro-Armenian bias. Evidently, the validity of this perception was confirmed in 1997 as Russia and Armenia signed a treaty that commits both the states to provide mutual military assistance if either they come under attacked. Given this, Azerbaijan is well aware that Russia is the only country that can guarantee the resolution of the Nagorno-Karabakh territorial dispute. Quite expectedly, under OSCE mechanism, Russia has already been playing the role of a mediator between Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Currently, Azerbaijan has conflicts with Iran and Turkmenistan over Caspian oil fields. In order to deal with the unwanted possibility of direct military conflict and in addressing the concern of security, the five Caspian states are engaged strengthening their respective naval power. Currently, Russia has the largest navy; however, Azerbaijan has been rapidly increasing its navy power by importing advanced weapon system from Israel and the U.S. Besides, Iran had also been increasing its navy and military preparedness. In fact, Iran is planning to create a submarine fleet meant to guard its interests in the Caspian Sea. Thus, in the "New Great Game" increasing militarization of the Caspian Sea would in all likelihood further complicate the issue of regional security especially in the context of the ongoing dispute over the southern Caspian areas among Azerbaijan, Iran and Turkmenistan. As a matter of fact, in the "New Great Game",

Syria has become some sort of extended 'battleground' to play out the competition to become the dominant power in international politics, mainly between Russia and the U.S. In fact, in the entire span of the Syrian crisis, Russia fired 30 cruise missiles from the Caspian Sea. All of these events indicate that 'not only Ukraine but also Syria has become an area of 'New Cold War' between the U.S and Russia, where both countries are competing to impose global supremacy.

With regard to the current status of Russia in the international system, it is no more a superpower as it was during the Cold War period. Russia has a growing international prominence as supported by the World Bank, which deems Russia as the only transition economy in the region to have moved to the top level. Potential military and political capabilities and currently, being a permanent member of the UN Security Council, Russia is still a great power that dares to challenge the hegemony of the U.S in the world. Russian interventions in Syria and Ukraine are the best example. More specifically, Russia is an accessible power in the Caspian region and most of the Caspian states are apprehensive on maintaining balanced relations with Russia and the west. The study found that Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan foreign policy has focused on balancing between Russian and US agenda in the region.

In short, all the factors mentioned above, plus the recent political and economic developments in the region have made the Caspian states as one of the main priorities of Russian foreign policy, if Russia is to reassert its lost position due to the dismemberment of USSR. Besides, Russia goal to reshape the international system to create a multipolar world order is apparently dependent on enhancing the Russian influence in the region.

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