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**ИНТЕГРАЦИОННЫЕ ПРОЦЕССЫ И
ПОЛИТИКА
МЕЖГОСУДАРСТВЕННОГО
СОТРУДНИЧЕСТВА В
КАСПИЙСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ В
КОНТЕКСТЕ ИЗМЕНЕНИЯ
СОВРЕМЕННОГО
МЕЖДУНАРОДНОГО ПОРЯДКА**

**THE INTEGRATION PROCESSES
AND POLICY OF INTERSTATE
COOPERATION IN THE CASPIAN
REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF
CHANGING THE MODERN
INTERNATIONAL ORDER**

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Аннотация

Статья исследует процессы превращения Каспийского региона из ареала постсоветского распада в место реализации стратегически выгодных экономических проектов. Используя аналитические рамки теории «наступательного реализма», данное исследование показывает, что баланс больших и малых потенциалов создает позитивные возможности для реализации многообещающих экономических и инфраструктурных проектов. Автор доказывает, что в настоящее время Каспийский регион демонстрирует всему миру действия на практике принципов многовекторности и многополярности. При этом дипломатическим службам каспийской пятерки приходится действовать именно в условиях разновекторной внешней политики, которая имеет специфические особенности, соответствующие изменяющейся природе современной международной обстановки.

Ключевые слова: Каспийский регион, энергоресурсы, реализм, интеграционные процессы, многовекторность.

Abstract

The article explores the processes of transformation of the Caspian region from the area of post-Soviet collapse into a place for the implementation of strategically beneficial economic projects. Using the analytical framework of "offensive realism" theory, this study shows that the balance of large and small potentials creates positive opportunities for the implementation of promising economic and infrastructure projects. The author proves that at present the Caspian region demonstrates to the whole world the practical application of the principles of multi-vector and multi-polarity. At the same time, the diplomatic services of the

Caspian five have to act precisely in the conditions of a multi-vector foreign policy, which has specific features that correspond to the changing nature of the modern international situation.

Key words: Caspian region, energy resources, realism, integration processes, multi-vector approach.

Introduction

The natural wealth of the Caspian region is both the main advantage of the coastal states and their main problem. Dignity - because they provide energy independence and are the main source of income; a problem - because it awakens the greed and selfish interests of national and international political and economic groups. As domestic political scientists noted, well-known experts in Russian regionalism A.K. Magomedov and A.A. Vartumyan, the very physical data and political and geographical characteristics of the Caspian region indicate its exceptional character [7, p. 77; 3, p. 202-204].

Thus, according to expert estimates, "explored oil reserves in the Caspian Sea amount to 48 billion barrels, and gas reserves are estimated at 8.7 trillion cubic meters. At the same time, possible reserves (hydrocarbon potential of the sea), according to various sources, are 3-4 times higher than the volume of explored resources. Thus, the Caspian countries account for about 17.5% of the world's oil reserves and 45.9% of gas reserves [2, p. 89; 17].

After the collapse of the USSR, many of the former republics of the Soviet Union took to us to strengthen their independence and independence through integration into the world community in order to free themselves from Russian influence. To this end, the newly independent states used their natural resources and communication capabilities very actively.

The post-Soviet decades have shown that the Caspian countries, overcoming their peripheral position, began to turn into influential players in regional politics. Many former republics of the Soviet Union are pursuing a multi-vector course to preserve relations with both Russia, the collective West and China. In this diversity, they are trying to achieve a certain balance and balance of power necessary to ensure their own economic independence and sovereignty.

This evolution of Caspian policy raises the following questions: what is the nature of the political and economic incentives for global and regional players involved in the region's politics? To what extent do these incentives work for the construction of an integration model of international political interaction in the Caspian area?

Methodology, materials and research methods

Using the analytical framework of the theory of "offensive realism" by the American political scientist John Mearsheimer, set out in his book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" [16, p. 2], this article will answer the above questions, focusing on the integration processes in the Caspian Sea region. Offensive realism best describes the complex realities of the post-Soviet Caspian transformation because it does not accept unipolarity as a defining principle of international relations, but views events in one particular region as components of the international system as a whole. Offensive realists portray the international system as a free market in which security and influence are the main commodities. Like corporations seeking to increase their profits, nation-states are driven by a competitive imperative that gives rise to what American publicist and political scientist Farid Zakaria has called "political influence-maximizing behavior." [18, p. 66].

Another theoretical principle that we are guided by in this article is the concept of "meso-region", proposed by the Russian political scientist, professor of the Russian State Humanitarian University A.K. Magomedov. This concept allows us to consider the Caspian area not as a closed local system, but as a new geopolitical and geo-economic unit of the 21st century with promising resource, communication and infrastructure potential [8, p. 22-23].

The empirical base of the study is represented by political, informational and media documents reflecting the features of integration processes and interstate cooperation of the Caspian states in the last decade.

Research results

The Systemic Weakening of Russia in the 1990s led to the fact that for some time a vacuum was formed in the Caspian Sea region, for the filling of which an open competitive struggle began between global and regional and centers with silts. However, the economic attractiveness and energy self-sufficiency of the Caspian region allowed the countries to maintain their sovereignty at their own expense. The states managed to maintain their influence and establish a regional integration process. But most importantly, they managed to avoid a big war that befell the regions of the Persian Gulf and the Middle East. In many respects, this was facilitated by the active peacekeeping mission of Russia, whose diplomatic corps took part in the settlement of many regional conflicts.

In addition to Russia, other states of the Caspian region also adhere to the principle of multi-vector foreign policy. Each country has its own explanation for this principle. Thus, according to Kazakh experts, the reasons for the multi-vector nature of Kazakh foreign policy were as follows: 1) Kazakhstan's location on a vast territory between two major powers, such as the Russian Federation and China; 2) Undefended borders and unresolved border issues; 3) Lack of direct access to the world's maritime communications, access to which is possible only through the territories of neighboring states; 4) The pressure of world centers of power and regional powers; 5) The richest natural resources, which were looked at by close and distant neighbors; 6) Relatively small size of the Kazakh economy compared to the size of the territory; 7) Military weakness; 8) Dispersion (dispersion) of the population. Official Astana is trying to pursue such a foreign policy that would allow it to "correct" natural geographical disadvantages and use certain advantages." [4, p. 42].

It should be noted that the Russian Federation has repeatedly stated that the development of the Convention on the Legal Status of the Caspian Sea should be carried out exclusively by the countries of the Caspian five. Russian Foreign Minister S. Lavrov in this regard noted that "unconstructive attempts by individual states located far from the region to impose their line of conduct on the Caspian states are not helping the cause, all the more unacceptable is the military presence outside the regional states." [5].

So, integration processes are taking place all over the world, and all over the world integration is a constructive association on mutually beneficial terms of various countries, divided by ethnic, political, cultural and other grounds, but united by the common idea of mutually beneficial cooperation. The countries of the Caspian region are no exception to this rule.

In this paper, we are primarily talking about regional integration within the Caspian area with the states adjacent to the reservoir. The countries of the Caspian region have real resources for such growth. Frozen ethno-political conflicts (such as the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia) may turn out to be an obstacle on this path.

Integration is recognized by the Eurasian countries as the only acceptable way of their constructive development, which reduces the risks of military-political conflicts. It is integration projects that expand the zone of political, economic and cultural cooperation between the countries of the Eurasian space that have experienced many wars in the past due to the inability to agree and build their relations in a constructive way. Back in 2016, President of Russia V.V. Putin stressed the need to form a Eurasian partnership "with the participation of the EAEU and countries with which we already have close partnerships - China, India, Pakistan and Iran." [6, p. 106].

Since the 1990s the leading politicians of this region were concerned about the search for the ideological basis of the Eurasian political and economic union. There was a certain "general dissatisfaction with the development of integration processes in the post-Soviet space. The search for an ideological platform to stimulate centripetal tendencies and new models of interaction became a common thing for the political elites of that time." One of the first to formulate the idea of a common Eurasia was the former President of Kazakhstan N.A.

Nazarbaev. In the book *The Commonwealth of Eurasia*, he wrote that “the Eurasian Union can help revive the Eurasian tradition of tolerance. ... The idea of forming the Eurasian Union implies a civilized solution of both interethnic and interstate problems and contradictions.” The Eurasian Union was conceived by him as a broad integration project, uniting the political, economic and cultural resources of the countries participating in this project [9, p. 5; 10, p. 32].

In assessing the level of security and integration of the Caspian region, it is also important to take into account the role of the Caspian Sea as a geographical factor. The very fact of the presence of the Caspian Sea plays an important role in the economic development of these countries. According to empirical estimates by international organizations, the economies of landlocked countries are growing at a slower rate of 1.5%. Their turnover is on average 30% lower, transport costs are about two times higher than those of countries with access to the sea. And, although the Caspian does not have access to the oceans, its communication value plays a leading role. The thing is how effectively the countries of this region use its logistical capabilities and take them into account in planning their strategic foreign policy courses.

Russian experts note that “transportation services can become one of the largest Russian exports after oil and gas raw materials ... This is possible only with the integrated development of large transport corridors in the directions “West-East” (using the Trans-Siberian Railway), “North-South” (the coast of the Baltic sea - the Persian Gulf) and the “Northern Sea Route”.

The problem of integration rests on the issue of regional leadership. The US is afraid of losing in open competition for the region. For the countries of the Caspian region, the United States offers its own integration project, in which their own national interests are presented in a veiled form. First of all, these projects are aimed at counteracting the influence of countries such as Russia, China, India, Iran, which together are capable of seriously competing with Washington and irreparable reputational costs. The key principles of US foreign policy are to preserve “geopolitical pluralism” and limit the possibility for Russia to become the dominant country in the Caspian region. At the same time, American analysts acknowledge that their own policy in the region is fragmented, conventional, and volatile. [15, p. 16-17]. The White House pays little attention to this region, as it is busy regulating other regions that are more important to it.

The European Union also has its energy interests in the Caspian region. For the economies of the EU countries, the Caspian region is a significant exporter of energy resources, as well as a specific bridge that allows access not only to the resources of the region, but also direct access to Central Asia and China. The main goal pursued by the EU in the Caspian region is to ensure and strengthen the energy security of the countries of the European Union. The influence of the EU in the Caspian is realized mainly through cooperation with Azerbaijan.

Another leading geopolitical player, the People's Republic of China, shows a stable interest in developing economic and political ties with the countries of this region. Through the Silk Road Economic Belt project, China intends to develop various inter-regional ties, which would promote regional cooperation and create a new pressure model that will open China's western regions for development, as well as for reforms in China's east.

As a leader in terms of investment among Asian countries, China is a profitable partner in trade and economic cooperation [13, p. 142]. In the first decades of the XXI century. The Chinese government has been able to secure meaningful participation in several oil projects in Central Asia and establish direct energy supplies from the region. Thus, in 2004, an agreement was signed on the construction of the Atasu-Alashankou oil pipeline (Western Kazakhstan - Western China). In 2009, the main gas pipeline “Turkmenistan - China” was also put into operation.

Chinese analysts admit that “the process of building the Eurasian Economic Partnership cannot go smoothly and will inevitably face both predictable and unforeseen difficulties. First, Russia is concerned that China's huge economy could hurt EAEU integration processes and that the competitiveness of Chinese goods could put huge external pressure on the EAEU economy; secondly, after the SCO recognizes newcomer countries, disagreements between the Indo-Chinese and the Indo-Pakistani may adversely affect the effectiveness of the mechanisms for multilateral cooperation and consultations within the SCO.” [14, p. 98].

It is obvious that Russia, within the framework of its integration project, seeks to maintain its influence in Central Asia and the Caspian region. The Russian elite is trying to achieve two goals: to maintain political supremacy in the post-Soviet region, thereby preventing other players from gaining a foothold without Russia's consent; and expand Russia's influence beyond the post-Soviet region. The Chinese elite understands regionalism in a functional sense, while Russia creates regional cooperation in a specific space. The Chinese vision of regionalism reflects economic priorities, while political influence remains key for Russia.

In the scientific literature and in the media, one can find ambiguous assessments of the activities of the most important integration project in Eurasia - the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Its creation began in extremely difficult geopolitical conditions. This project is still in its infancy, so today it is difficult to talk about its real results. There are achievements. But there are even more problems in the way of its development.

As political practice shows, defending the national interests of EAEU members sometimes leads to internal conflicts of interest. For example, the Republic of Belarus insists that the liberalization of oil prices should follow the liberalization of production, and not precede it [12, p. 5].

Russia must act taking into account the profound and global systemic changes taking place in the world. According to Russian analysts, “deindustrialization has been a problem for Europe and the US since the 1990s. Soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the share of industrial production in the structure of national GDP and world industrial production began to decline steadily. In 1990, Europe and North America accounted for 40.7% and 23%, respectively, of industrial value added, compared with 27.8% in the Asia-Pacific region. However, these figures have changed by 2014 to 27.5% and 20.9% for Europe and North America, respectively, and to 44.6% for the Asia-Pacific region (according to UNIDO).” [6, p. 106]. The Russian political elite must clearly respond to such changes and adjust its foreign policy in the light of these new data.

Conclusions

As recent political history shows, only those who survive and show their viability will take part in history. In a more advantageous position are those who have civilizational projects, those who have retained the imperial political consciousness and a comprehensive vision of the geopolitical situation will survive. And Russia has good chances here. The whole question is whether she will be able to use them for her own good and not to the detriment of others. In the context of the global economic crisis, the temptation to survive at the expense of others is growing. This is the way the US and its satellites are going. But this path is unacceptable for Russia, which has completely different cultural and civilizational codes of development.

The analysis carried out proves the correctness of the research tools we have chosen. The theory of "offensive realism" proves the subjectivity of all players in the Caspian policy, including the Caspian states, which were previously underestimated according to the logic of the "Great Game" in Central Asia. It can be seen from the above material that integration is the most important element in building a system of regional security. The algorithm of their actions is not to limit themselves in attempts to put forward and implement new projects aimed at forming full-fledged allied relations in the future. At present, the unions of the countries of this region are

situational in nature, and are largely determined by the influence of third countries that do not abandon attempts to impose their globalist will on this region. The attempts of the leading powers of this region (primarily Russia and Iran) to convince their partners that such interventions harm the general idea of the Greater Caspian Sea do not always meet with proper understanding and support. To many, cooperation with these old hegemonies still seems preferable to developing their own integration schemes.

The concept of "meso-region", formulated by A. K. Magomedov, made it possible to single out the Caspian area as a viable integration unit. The idea of Caspian integration is based on the principle of commonality of political, economic and cultural factors in their history and modern development; To what extent are these countries interested in being regionally unified? Integration depends on how many positive (constructive) ideas are shared by the participants of this association, whether they have become their own for everyone, or have been recognized only formally. What integration ideas can we name in this regard?

Traditionalism is one of such unifying ideas of this region: 1) the dominance of conservative values (religion, family, cultural and historical identity, rejection of the Western liberal doctrine of LGBT, etc.), 2) national traditional democracy, 3) traditions of a strong executive authorities. Each country has its own understanding of these values, but in general they are of fundamental importance for them.

The leading countries of the Greater Caspian region (primarily Russia and Iran) are also characterized by the historical tradition of the empire - the search for and approval of their national doctrine as a self-sufficient dominant international factor. It is precisely because of this that they show a very persistent resistance to someone else's dominance, especially if this dominant is outside their world competence and imposes its expansion on them.

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