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## EVALUATION NOTE

THE GEOPOLITICS OF THE TURKIC WORLD AND  
AZERBAIJAN'S STRATEGIC ROLE

Geopolitics occupies a central place in the literature of international relations as a discipline that explains not only the influence of geography but also the decisive impact of history, culture, identity, and civilizational imagination on states' foreign policies. It serves as a conceptual framework for understanding and interpreting how major political organizations—such as the state, hegemony, empire, and civilization—structure their relations with their surrounding environment and develop modes of response to conjunctural conditions.

In other words, geopolitical plans and theories have historically been constructed as strategies whereby great powers sought to consolidate their own domains of authority by neutralizing potential rivals that could restrict their expansion, forging pragmatic alliances with other actors, and establishing hegemony over targeted geographies and societies. Alfred Thayer Mahan's *Sea Power Theory* is essentially a design for British maritime hegemony. Friedrich Ratzel's conceptualization of *Lebensraum* ("living space") constituted the theoretical foundation of the German imperial vision. Halford John Mackinder's *Heartland Theory* and approach to land power provided one of the intellectual cornerstones of the American global power project. Karl Haushofer's *Continental Bloc* doctrine, aimed at expanding German living space, likewise amounted to a German global imperial project. Nicholas John Spykman's *Rimland Theory* served as a complementary pillar of American global strategy. Aleksandr Dugin's Eurasian geopolitical theory, in the modern era, emerges as a renewed imperial design for Russia. Zbigniew Brzezinski's *The Grand Chessboard* and Thomas P. M. Barnett's *The Pentagon's New Map* represent

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geopolitical blueprints of the United States' (U.S) efforts to sustain its global dominance. A careful examination of all these theories reveals that nearly all of the powers behind them are actors pursuing claims to hegemony or empire, seeking to construct a civilizational order by placing their own geography at the center.

When envisioning a geopolitical design in the context of the Turkic World, it must not remain confined to the classical "hard power" elements (military, geographical, natural resources); rather, it should rest upon a multidimensional conceptualization that also encompasses "geoculture" identity components shaped by shared historical memory, language, belief, and symbols. In this regard, to reflect on the geopolitics of the Turkic World is not merely to formulate a regional policy; it is to design a long-term civilizational project that integrates historical references, cultural codes, and politico-economic structures.

The Turkic World, once united around a center, can emerge as an actor at first the regional and global levels. The geopolitics of the Turkic World constitutes a strategic design and process of construction that places security at its core, strengthens strategic ties through energy and economic corridors, promotes common identity and cultural integration by bringing religious and ideological networks under control, and generates conjunctural influence on both regional and global scales through multilayered diplomacy—ultimately aiming to transform the Turkic states into actors not only at the regional but also at the global level. The geopolitics of the Turkic World must be gradually formed from an integration centered on Anatolia and extending into Turkestan, the Caucasus, and the Middle East. This center can function as a "hegemonic field of attraction" that holds together the geopolitical hinterland.

### I. The Geopolitics of the Turkic World and Geoculture

Classical geopolitical approaches have emphasized geography and natural resources as the primary factors determining the fate of states. Yet in the context of the Turkic World, geopolitical understanding cannot be reduced solely to these material components. It must also encompass the determinative role of culture, ideology, identity, and systems of meaning in shaping political designs. For a community to become a geopolitical actor, three fundamental conditions are required:

- **Cultural Codes:** A shared language, belief system, historical memory, and values.
- **Institutional Capacity:** The ability to integrate through political, economic, and legal institutions.
- **Management of Conjuncture:** The capacity to interpret regional and global balances, to win allies and partners, and to offset threats.

These elements demonstrate that, for the Turkic World, a geopolitical design represents not merely a foreign policy strategy but also the ambition of constructing a "world" in its own right.

### II. Recommendations for the Geopolitics of the Turkic World

For the geopolitics of the Turkic World to be successfully constructed, several fundamental principles are necessary. These necessities may be articulated under the following headings:

1. **Anatolia- and Azerbaijan-Centered Core:** The Turkic World requires pioneering forces and a more central leadership among equals. This leadership can be shaped through the shared vision of Türkiye and Azerbaijan.
2. **Energy and Transportation Integration:** Projects such as the Middle Corridor, the Zangezur Corridor, and the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan pipeline can serve as the economic backbone.
3. **Cultural and Academic Cooperation:** Advancing a common alphabet, student exchange programs, media and academic networks, along with the development of scientific infrastructure and technology transfer.
4. **Construction of a Common Security Architecture:** Joint military exercises, defense industry collaborations, and intelligence sharing. The Second Karabakh War in 2020 revealed Azerbaijan's military capacity and strategic flexibility. This victory also underscored the necessity of building a common security framework for the Turkic World.
5. **Management of Conjuncture:** Establishing balanced relations with powers such as Russia, China, the U.S., the European Union (EU), and Iran, in order to emerge as an independent geopolitical actor.

In the light of these principles, the geopolitics of the Turkic World must be designed from a perspective of a “middle world,” integrating not only along economic or military dimensions but also through identity, culture, and historical continuity.

### III. Azerbaijan's Role in the Geopolitics of the Turkic World

Azerbaijan occupies a central place in the Turkic World both geographically and culturally, assuming a pivotal role in the realization of this geopolitical vision.

#### 1. The Caucasian Bridge

Azerbaijan constitutes the most critical point of connection between Türkiye and Central Asia. The Zangezur Corridor will physically consolidate this bridge function and accelerate the integration of the Turkic World.

#### 2. Energy Geopolitics

Azerbaijan is not only a bridge country in the geopolitics of the Turkic World but also one of the fundamental pillars of energy security and geoeconomic integration. The abundant oil and natural gas resources of the Caspian basin have positioned Azerbaijan as a key actor in both regional and global energy politics.

##### a) Caspian Energy and the Gateway to the West

Azerbaijan's vast hydrocarbon reserves have elevated the country to the status of a strategic supplier for the EU's energy security. In 2021, Azerbaijan accounted for approximately 4.3% of the EU's total crude oil imports, and in 2023 it supplied 5.9% of the EU's natural gas imports excluding LNG. These figures demonstrate that Azerbaijan occupies a pivotal position not only in the South Caucasus but also within the broader Eurasian energy order.

### b) Energy Corridors: BTC, TANAP, and TAP

Energy diplomacy forms the backbone of Azerbaijan's foreign policy vision. The projects developed in this framework have not only expanded Azerbaijan's economic capacity but have also consolidated the infrastructural foundations of the geopolitics of the Turkic World:

- **Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) Pipeline:** Delivering Azerbaijani oil to the Mediterranean via Georgia and Türkiye, this pipeline carried Caspian energy resources to global markets for the first time by bypassing Russia.
- **Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP):** Transporting Azerbaijan's Shah Deniz gas to Europe through Türkiye, TANAP institutionalized the energy integration of the Turkic World.
- **Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP):** As the continuation of TANAP, TAP delivers Azerbaijani gas to Europe via Greece, Albania, and Italy.

These projects have transformed Azerbaijan into an **energy bridge** while simultaneously reinforcing its strategic partnership with Türkiye.

### c) The East–West Corridor and the Silk Road Narrative

Azerbaijan's energy diplomacy also reflects the ideological dimension of its geopolitical vision. As Heydar Aliyev stated, *"The Caspian Sea is at the center of the Great Silk Road... Azerbaijan is the most important strategic region connecting Europe to Asia and the West to the East."* This discourse demonstrates that Azerbaijan positions its energy resources not merely as economic assets but as a **geoeconomic meta-narrative** that integrates the Turkic World.

### d) Energy Revenues and Military Capacity

Since the mid-2000s, rising oil revenues have enabled Azerbaijan to significantly increase its defense budget and modernize its armed forces. This process played a critical role in the military success achieved during the **Second Karabakh War** in 2020. Energy, therefore, has been decisive not only for economic development but also for the construction of security capacity.

### e) Integration with the Turkic World

Energy diplomacy has also steered Azerbaijan toward closer relations with the Turkic republics of Central Asia. Within the framework of projects developed under the Organization of Turkic States (OTS), the themes of energy and transportation reinforce both Azerbaijan's economic advantages and the strategic integration of the Turkic World.

## 3. Geocultural Centrality

Azerbaijan is an indispensable component of the geopolitics of the Turkic World not only by virtue of its geostrategic position but also through the role it has played in the intellectual and cultural construction of Turkic identity and nationalism.

- **Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209):** With his work *Khamasa*, he became one of the greatest poets of classical Islamic literature, playing a central role in the synthesis of Turkic-Islamic identity with universal values. His writings contributed to the formation of a shared cultural memory across the Turkic World.

- **Fuzuli (1494–1556):** As one of the pinnacle poets of Turkic literature, Fuzuli elevated Azerbaijani Turkish to the ranks of the most powerful languages of classical literature. Through his works on love and metaphysics, he deepened the spiritual identity of the Turkic World.
- **Mahammad Amin Rasulzade (1884–1955):** As the founding figure of the modern Azerbaijani state, Rasulzade became a symbol of independence and nationalist ideals in the Turkic World with his famous words, “*Once raised, the flag will never fall.*” His thought played a pioneering role not only for Azerbaijan but also in shaping the modern nationalist discourse across the entire Turkic World.
- **Ahmet Ağaoğlu (1869–1939):** A leading intellectual of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, Ağaoğlu advanced the ideas of Turkism, modernization, and civic rights. His thought laid important foundations for national consciousness and the political culture of the wider Turkic World.
- **Ahmad Javad (1892–1937):** Through his poem *You Trembled, O Black Sea* (*Çırpınırdın Karadeniz*), he symbolized the brotherhood between Türkiye and Azerbaijan, exalting the shared ideals of the Turkic World in literary form.
- **Bakhtiyar Vahabzadeh (1925–2009):** With works that boldly articulated Turkic identity and the longing for independence during the Soviet period, he kept Azerbaijan’s national consciousness alive and became a literary representative of the idea of “Unity.”
- **Huseyn Javid (1882–1941):** A significant figure in the development of modern literature and thought in the Turkic World, Javid addressed issues of identity, freedom, and civilization in his theatrical works.
- **Uzeyir Hajibeyov (1885–1948):** As the composer of Azerbaijan’s national anthem and the author of its first opera, he contributed to the construction of nationalist identity in the Turkic World through music and the arts.

These figures demonstrate that Azerbaijan is not merely a historical bridge or an energy hub, but also a foundational pillar in the geocultural construction of Turkic World identity.

Azerbaijan’s geocultural role stands out in three dimensions:

1. **Identity Construction:** The reconstruction of Turkic identity through shared literature, poetry, and music.
2. **Nourishment of Nationalist Discourse:** From Rasulzade to Vahabzade, numerous thinkers articulated the ideals of independence and unity.
3. **Cultural Bridge with Türkiye:** As seen in the works of Ahmad Javad and Hajibeyov, the Türkiye–Azerbaijan partnership has also been consolidated on the cultural plane.

Accordingly, Azerbaijan assumes the function of a **geocultural center** within the geopolitical structure of the Turkic World.

### Conclusion

The geopolitics of the Turkic World is not only inter-state cooperation; it is a multidimensional project shaped by the integration of history, identity, culture, and civilizational elements. In the realization of this project, Azerbaijan is poised to undertake a pioneering role particularly in the following respects:

- Providing physical connectivity as a **bridge country**,
- Constituting the economic backbone as an **energy hub**,
- Upholding the identity dimension as a **cultural focal point**,
- Supporting the security structure with its **military capacity**,
- Managing conjuncture with its **diplomatic flexibility**.

Thus, the geopolitics of the Turkic World can be designed in a way that enables Azerbaijan to spearhead the construction of a “New Turan” world, which will secure regional integration against Russia’s Eurasianism, China’s *Belt and Road Initiative*, or Western imperial hegemony, and connect Turkestan with Anatolia. This will generate a new balance, market, and actor formation between West and East, and between China and the United States. Moreover, for Türkiye, it will offer the opportunity to open up to a shared and new world beyond the conflict zones in which it is constrained in the Middle East. Building a “world” in which geopolitics and geoculture converge while preserving the sovereignty of states within the Turkic World will also represent a new hope and market for an aging Europe.