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CHAPTER 22

STRATEGIC COOPERATION BETWEEN AZERBAIJAN AND TÜRKİYE IN THE NEW WORLD ORDER: NECESSITY AND PROSPECTS

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Abstract

The bipolar international system that emerged after the Second World War was defined by a balance of power between the United States and the Soviet Union throughout the Cold War period. The dissolution of the Soviet Union marked a transition to a unipolar international order, in which the United States assumed a predominant role in global politics. This systemic shift had far-reaching implications not only for the distribution of power but also for prevailing approaches to security, alliance formation, and regional interaction. In the contemporary period, the international system has increasingly exhibited characteristics of a multipolar and multilayered structure, in which regional actors play a more prominent role. Intensifying competition in areas such as energy, security, and trade has further contributed to the reconfiguration of foreign policy priorities and alliance patterns. Against this background, the present study analyzes Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within the framework of structural transformations in the international system. By examining the historical development as well as the diplomatic and legal foundations of bilateral relations, the study seeks to identify the main political, economic, military, and cultural factors that shape the strategic partnership between the two countries. In addition to the bilateral dimension, the analysis situates Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within broader regional integration processes, with particular reference to the Organization of Turkic States. In this respect, the study contributes to the literature by offering a systematic assessment of the role of regional institutional frameworks in sustaining and deepening strategic cooperation.

Keywords

Türkiye–Azerbaijan Relations, Strategic Partnership, Multipolar International System, Organization of Turkic States, Regional Integration

Introduction

World War II, which went down in human history as the last major global armed conflict, marked a turning point in world politics and international law. In addition, it profoundly shook the global socio-economic structure and paved the way for long-term transformations. The widespread destruction of infrastructure, population losses, and material damage experienced during the war significantly affected the economic development policies and social structures of many countries, not only at the end of the war but also in the years that followed.

The Allied victory in World War II not only ended the conflict but also marked the beginning of a profound transformation in the international system. Following this victory, the world evolved into a bipolar order shaped by two rival superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union, competing ideologically, politically, and militarily. Within this framework, the United Nations Organization was established in 1945 with the contributions of Soviet, American, and British diplomats, aiming to establish international peace and security (Gromyko, 2016, p. 32). Since its establishment in 1945, the UN has served as a “forum” for discussing international issues and helping to ease tensions, but for a long time during the Cold War, it was also the stage for states on opposing sides to accuse each other and engage in ideological struggles (Sander, 2014, pp. 204-205).

This power struggle, based on ideological, political, and geopolitical foundations, became clear from 1946 onwards and led to a period known as the Cold War. This situation paved the way for the formation of a bipolar world system between the Western Bloc, consisting of anti-communist countries, and the Eastern Bloc, consisting of communist countries (Tokatli, 2022, p. 379). In the bipolar system, various strategies were employed to maintain security, stability, and peace; during this process, a qualitative transformation took place in international relations. With the development of military technology and the proliferation of nuclear weapons, the option of total war, especially among nuclear powers, ceased to be a rational tool in inter-state relations (Vyatr, 2012, p. 16).

The advent of the nuclear arms race, which gradually supplanted conventional methods of warfare, produced a profound and structural transformation in the conduct of war. During the Cold War, this transformation effectively rendered large-scale armed conflicts virtually unfeasible. As Belousov and Manikin (2021, p. 101) note, neither superpower ever crossed the critical threshold that could have triggered direct and widespread military confrontation. At the same time, the evolution of nuclear war doctrines did not diminish the relevance of conventional strategies; rather, as Davutoglu (2010, p. 108) observes, it simultaneously heightened the strategic significance of limited and localized conventional warfare. Historically, therefore, large-scale and highly destructive wars gradually gave way to regional and localized conflicts, carefully calibrated and controlled within the broader framework defined by global power centers.

The destructive nature of modern warfare during the Cold War produced a deterrent environment that strongly shaped the strategic doctrines of both the United States and the Soviet Union. According to Davutoglu (2010, p. 108), while long-term strategic planning increasingly emphasized nuclear targets as a central component, short-term tactical objectives remained grounded in conventional, limited engagements. In this framework, deterrence-anchored primarily in the mutual threat of nuclear retaliation and coercion-emerged as the core security paradigm of the bipolar international system (Vyatr, 2012, p. 17). Accordingly, the era of total wars waged with traditional means came to an end; states faced the necessity of resolving global disputes through means other than military methods. This transformation marked the beginning of an era in international relations where, in addition to diplomacy, new instruments such as economic sanctions, proxy wars, and hybrid threats came to the fore.

On the other hand, the fact that the US and the USSR, which were allies in World War II, had different political systems, such as liberalism and communism, prevented real peace and cooperation after the war

(Shahin, 2025, p. 43). Indeed, the accelerating East-West polarization paved the way for the emergence of two major military alliances in the international security architecture. Led by the United States, on April 4, 1949, with 12 founding members, primarily Western European countries, the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established “as the European leg of the policy of encircling and controlling the USSR, which had emerged as the central power of the Eurasian continent (Davutoglu, 2010, p. 226). The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) was established on April 4, 1949.”

In response, the USSR established the Warsaw Pact on May 14, 1955, together with countries with which it had previously signed bilateral agreements (Shahin, 2025, p. 47). This alliance, formed to defend socialist regimes in Eastern Europe, served as a tool to institutionalize the Soviet Union’s political and military control in the region. The mutual existence of the two alliances shaped the security dynamics of the Cold War era, primarily the nuclear arms race and proxy wars. During the Cold War, international tensions escalated to the point of nuclear conflict (Pilkov, 2008, p. 48). So much so that the Cuban Missile Crisis in October 1962 brought the US and the USSR to the brink of nuclear war, and as a result of mutual concessions, the USSR missiles in Cuba were removed. Furthermore, during the Berlin crises of 1948–1949 and 1961, the escalation of tensions between the two blocs made the outbreak of large-scale armed conflict highly probable. On the other hand, “in a bipolar world, the leaders of alliances and blocs formulated their strategies and policies entirely in accordance with their own interests” (Waltz, 2015, p. 212). However, concurrently with this process, the dissolution of the bipolar system was also gaining momentum. “For the prerequisite for this system to function stably was a relative balance of power and influence maintained by the US and the USSR for many years” (Belousov & Manikin, 2021, p. 110). Ultimately, NATO gradually evolved into a security architecture operating on a global scale, transcending its original boundaries. Conversely, as an inevitable manifestation of the ideological and political disintegration within the Eastern Bloc, the Warsaw Pact officially withdrew from the historical stage on July 1, 1991.

In the post-war period, the competition between the two superpowers, particularly the United States and the Soviet Union, was clearly evident through the economic policies they pursued. Many European countries directly affected by World War II experienced a deep economic collapse after the war, which directly impacted the reconstruction processes. High unemployment rates, inflation, and serious difficulties in fuel and food supply were widespread problems. In this context, establishing global economic stability was critical not only economically but also in terms of political and social security. The establishment of an international payment system capable of addressing the financial needs of the post-war period led to the creation of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank, formalized through a founding agreement signed by representatives of 44 countries in July 1944 at Bretton Woods, New Hampshire (Ozkaya, 2009, 2/104). The Bretton Woods system, whose foundations were laid during this conference, is widely recognized as having played a central role in maintaining global economic stability in the immediate post-war era. This system was designed to enable countries to pursue independent monetary policies while simultaneously preserving the exchange rate stability anchored by the gold standard (Jomert, 2016, p. 119). Within this framework, which remained operative until 1973, the US dollar emerged as the principal reserve currency, thereby consolidating both the economic and political preeminence of the United States in the global order.

As a result of the conference, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) was established to ensure post-war international economic stability, stimulate international trade, maintain exchange rate stability, and provide financial support to member countries (Ozkaya, 2009, 2/104). In addition, the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), established to support the reconstruction and development processes of countries devastated by the war, quickly became one of the key actors in international financial relations and was later incorporated into the World Bank Group. The shaping of US hegemony was achieved through IMF and World Bank programs (Sarıpek & Buyukerkan, 2024, p. 82).

The post-war transformation laid the groundwork for the Marshall Plan, a financial assistance program initiated by the United States in 1948 to support European countries. According to Chinar (2018, p. 333), European beneficiaries implemented the aid according to specific national plans. Active between 1948 and 1951, the Marshall Plan played a crucial role in revitalizing economies severely affected by the devastation of the war. Strategically, the program aimed not only at reconstructing physical infrastructure, agriculture, and industrial production but also at ensuring political stability and curbing the spread of communism. In this context, the Marshall Plan can be seen as a precursor to broader regional integration efforts, culminating in the Maastricht Treaty of 1993, which formally established the European Union-recognized as one of the most successful and effective regional unions of the contemporary era (Valiyev & Asadov, 2012, p. 176).

In response to the economic cooperation between Western Europe and the United States under the Marshall Plan, the Soviet Union institutionalized economic integration among socialist countries through the establishment of the Council for Mutual Economic Assistance (CMEA) in 1949 (Popov, 2025, p. 105). Trade within the CMEA was conducted under conditions deliberately set below world market prices, providing short-term advantages particularly for less developed member states. Nevertheless, the Soviet Union's central and decisive role in economic decision-making frequently conflicted with the national interests of other members, undermining the long-term sustainability of the system. While Soviet media consistently portrayed the activities of the CMEA positively, reporting on the European Economic Community was generally framed critically (Kamenskaya, 2020, p. 114). These ideological constraints, rigid planning structures, and the overarching dominance of Soviet hegemony exacerbated internal contradictions within the CMEA, ultimately contributing to the acceleration of the socialist bloc's dissolution.

Geopolitical Changes in the Context of the New World Order

From the late 1980s to the early 1990s, debates concerning the emerging world order gained considerable momentum. As Davutoglu (2000, p. 491) emphasizes, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar international system, which had been grounded in ideological competition, produced profound global changes and generated various uncertainties. The formal conclusion of the Cold War in 1991 not only marked the dissolution of the realist system based on bipolar power distribution but also initiated a fundamental transformation in the structural characteristics of the international system. This shift facilitated the emergence of a unipolar order, consolidating the hegemonic position of the United States, particularly in military affairs and, to a lesser extent, in political influence. The transformation also stimulated renewed scholarly debates regarding the stability of unipolarity within the analytical framework of neorealist theory. In this regard, Emiroglu (2017, p. 339) asserts that post-1990 world politics has undergone some of the fastest and most profound transformations in modern history. Consequently, this new international environment has rendered it necessary to reconsider both theoretically and practically the classical approaches to security, alliance structures, and sovereignty that had long dominated international relations.

The notion of a "new world order" was first articulated by US President George H.W. Bush in his 1990 address to the US Congress, a rhetoric that, according to Istomin (2020, p. 409), served to legitimize US intervention in Iraq. In this speech, Bush characterized the Gulf War as the initial test of the emerging order and underscored that the post-war period would establish its foundational principles (Emiroglu, 2017, p. 340). This development consequently influenced both the balance of power and broader geopolitical dynamics. Indeed, numerous theoretical and empirical studies have contributed to a consensus that the post-Cold War international system has evolved into a unipolar configuration, with this period widely referred to as the new world order (Kantarci, 2012, p. 58).

On the other hand, the shift towards unipolarity following the end of the Cold War necessitated a redefinition of the position of the hegemonic actor, which in turn required a comprehensive restructuring at both the normative and institutional levels. Furthermore, the increase in the number of leading powers today and the deepening of differences between these powers regarding the fundamental parameters of the future

international order and the conditions for its construction have given special significance to the issue of leadership. The United States has risen to become a central and indispensable actor in shaping this new era thanks to its high economic growth potential, technological production capacity, and military superiority (Istomin, 2020, p. 405). However, the issue of leadership has become even more topical and controversial, particularly at a time when the US has positioned itself as a global leader with a long-term perspective and claims that a major war was prevented in the second half of the 20th century thanks to its policies.

From an American perspective, the modern imperial model acknowledges, at least in principle, that “new colonies” may possess a certain degree of autonomy and influence; however, as Shakleina (2015, p. 9) notes, in practice these actors are not afforded genuine freedom. This observation illustrates that the United States, alongside other Western states, operates within the paradigm of a “unipolar world,” formulating policies while largely disregarding the actual dynamics of global events. Moreover, Shakleina (2015, p. 8) emphasizes that, following the collapse of the bipolar order, persistent debates have arisen regarding the role and significance of the United States within the international system, questioning whether it functions as an empire, a leading global power, a global leader, or a hegemon.

On the other hand, the acceleration of economic integration, the increased effectiveness of multilateral institutions, and the promotion of democracy-based governance models have been among the defining characteristics of this period. However, this process has also paved the way for increased homogenizing pressures on non-Western societies and the deepening of structural inequalities. The claim of universality of the liberal international order has gradually been questioned both ideologically and practically. Therefore, the global acceptance of this normative framework has not only reflected a set of ideals; it has also served as a hegemonic tool that legitimized the interests of Western powers. In this context, the new world order actually represents a contradictory process that emerged with the restructuring of capitalism (Sapancali, 2001, p. 124).

Furthermore, many countries within the dollar system have been facing economic stagnation for a long time; this situation eliminates the guarantee that these countries will maintain a crisis-free and stable economic structure. In this context, the failure to achieve economic development brings with it significant structural problems at both the national and international levels and poses a serious challenge to the sustainability of the global economic order. Thus, the new world order is increasingly transforming into a structure where inequality is institutionalized; distortions in income distribution are increasing significantly both between countries and within countries’ own internal dynamics (Zafer, 2021, p.673). Therefore, accelerating economic development in the countries concerned and creating a crisis-resistant economic structure is of vital importance for the stability and functioning of the global economic system.

With the end of the Cold War and the consolidation of US victory, numerous American scholars have argued that the United States emerged as the dominant global power, transforming the international system into a unipolar structure (Kantarci, 2012, p. 60). In line with this perspective, Washington continued to advocate the establishment of a cooperation-based international order, adopting a strategy aimed at disseminating longstanding Western institutions on a global scale (Istomin, 2020, p. 410). These institutions, heavily shaped by US influence, effectively institutionalized American geopolitical and economic interests at the international level. Consequently, the United States’ maneuverability within the global geopolitical arena increased substantially, enabling it to assert global hegemony as the sole superpower. The decade between 1990 and 2000 thus represented a comprehensive transitional period, characterized by the spread of “globalization” across multiple domains and the worldwide adoption of US economic and political models along with their social extensions (Chiftchi, 2009, p. 209).

This new era also witnessed a renewed focus on identity and cultural consciousness, with the traditional distinction between “us” and “them” becoming increasingly pronounced across various spheres (Emiroglu, 2017, p. 339). The imperialistic dimension of American foreign policy became particularly evident during the Iraq War and the operations in Afghanistan in the 2000s, serving as a concrete demonstration of the United States’ hegemonic strategies and significantly shaping the global strategies of other major powers.

The optimistic atmosphere following the fall of the Berlin Wall, coupled with the discourse on a new world order, generated expectations that the strategic relevance of military alliances such as NATO would diminish (Davutoglu, 2010, p. 229). Nevertheless, as Nikitin (2018, p. 38) observes, the conclusion of the Cold War and the collapse of the Soviet Union required the international system to adjust to new configurations of power, yet rather than establishing a stable equilibrium, a structural imbalance emerged. Consequently, the post-Cold War world order has been marked by instability, characterized by multi-actor, multi-dimensional, and dynamic interactions rather than by a homogeneous and predictable system.

In this context, understanding geopolitical transformations necessitates attention not only to the distribution of power among major states but also to regional dynamics, identity-driven conflicts, and global governance challenges. Ideological confrontations of the past have increasingly been supplanted by efforts to universalize liberal democratic principles and market-oriented economic models, a process commonly referred to as the “liberal international order.” However, this unipolar framework has simultaneously produced structural inequalities and promoted Western-centric norms as purportedly universal values. Furthermore, the post-Cold War period has witnessed significant shifts in threat perception, with traditional threats being replaced by a more diverse and uncertain array of security challenges (Emiroglu, 2017, p. 339).

In the post-Cold War era, geopolitics has been redefined not only as a contest for influence grounded in military power but also within the broader contexts of energy security, technological superiority, economic integration, and strategies of cultural influence. A significant aspect of this transformation is the growing impact of non-state actors—including multinational corporations, international organizations, non-governmental organizations, and terrorist groups—on international relations. These developments have facilitated the evolution of the international system into an increasingly multi-layered, multi-actor, and complex structure characterized by interdependent relationships. Plashinskiy (2017, p. 16) notes that the decline of the so-called “American era of peace” can be attributed to internal systemic challenges faced by the United States amid China’s rising power and the broader process of Eurasian integration.

Simultaneously, the generally unilateral orientation of US policies has contributed not only to rising anti-American sentiment globally but also to the weakening of democratic governance principles and the proliferation of undemocratic practices in various regions (Chiftchi, 2009, p. 217). The shortcomings of the US-led peacekeeping mission in Somalia, coupled with persistent military tensions between the United States and Iraq, have highlighted both the possibilities and the limitations of American global leadership. Furthermore, the military and economic setbacks experienced during the US intervention in Iraq have significantly challenged the sustainability of the unipolar system and undermined assumptions that American hegemony could be established in an absolute manner (Efegil & Musaoglu, 2009, p. 642).

For the reasons stated above, the unipolar order did not last, and in the early 2000s, new world order concepts based on Western hegemony began to clash with the actual processes in the international system. As Western countries’ economic growth and roles in the global system weakened, the importance of the rest of the world, particularly developing countries, increased (Grinin, 2015, p.11). Influenced by rising powers such as China, Russia, and India, the international system has shifted toward a multipolar structure. This transformation has led to significant shifts not only in the balance of power but also in the structural dynamics that determine the functioning of the international system. The shift toward a more balanced distribution of power and the increased visibility of regional actors in the international system have supported the formation of a multi-centered global structure. However, normative value conflicts have also become more pronounced during this process, deepening polarization in international relations.

Developments during the period between 2000 and 2010 clearly revealed that the United States’ capacity to act and implement decisions unilaterally in domains such as trade, competition law, and financial regulation—without the consent of other major global actors, including the European Union led by Germany and France, Japan, the Russian Federation, and China—was significantly constrained. These dynamics have prompted critical evaluations of the universality of the US-centered liberal order, leading to the increasing

prominence of alternative normative frameworks and regional integration initiatives within international relations. In this context, Washington has characterized the emerging global environment as “a new era of competition among great powers” (Mikhaylenko, 2020, p. 130). Looking forward, China and Russia, both seeking to establish a revised global order, are expected to assert themselves more robustly in opposition to the United States (Kishi, 2025, p. 253).

In the emerging international context, the global community no longer relies on the United States as a sole leader, nor on a dual American–European leadership model. Trends increasingly suggest that the new world order will assume a distinct character, evolving into a system without a single hegemon while encompassing multiple centers of power and influence. Within this framework, the United States can no longer assert itself as a superpower or hegemon, but may only be regarded as “first among equals.” Efeğil and Musaoglu (2009, p. 15) note that, although the European Union supports the establishment of a liberal world system akin to that advocated by the United States, it opposes the US assuming hegemonic dominance in a unipolar world and instead defends a multipolar vision. Accordingly, addressing current trends of instability and insecurity necessitates the development of more inclusive and effective mechanisms of cooperation. Şakleina (2015, p. 17) emphasizes that this new world order requires not only a fair and balanced restructuring of power relations but also the prioritization of international law, the protection of human rights, and the promotion of sustainable development.

Such a collaborative environment will encourage trust-building among states, prevent regional conflicts, and pave the way for developing joint solutions to global threats. However, issues such as reducing economic inequalities, addressing environmental problems, and the equitable sharing of technological developments are also emerging as priority agenda items in the process of restructuring the current international order. Therefore, the establishment of a sustainable world order necessitates the creation of multidimensional cooperation mechanisms and inclusive policies. This will make it possible to increase global prosperity, minimize the risks of conflict and war, and ensure long-term peace. The world’s leading states must cooperate in establishing and maintaining such a world order that provides solutions to global problems, keeps the world free from conflict and war, and guarantees stable economic and political development (Şakleina, 2015, p.17). The construction of a new world order based on democratic principles and excluding any hegemonic tendencies requires strengthening the role of the spiritual and moral dimension in global social life. In this context, recognizing and institutionalizing the priority of universal human values is of vital importance for the legitimacy and sustainability of the new order. A global structure based solely on power balances or national interests cannot produce lasting stability and inclusiveness.

All these analytical considerations indicate that the formation of a world order capable of adequately responding to the normative and structural realities of the twenty-first century cannot be explained solely by the limited political will and institutional capacities of the most influential power centers. On the contrary, the effectiveness and legitimacy of global governance in an increasingly multipolar international system necessitate the growing role of middle and regional powers, their integration into collective action mechanisms, and enhanced coordination among them. In this sense, the ongoing transformation process is not confined to a mere redistribution of power balances but also encompasses profound structural changes that redefine the normative foundations of international relations, the security perceptions of actors, and their strategic priorities.

These transformations directly affect the decision-making logic of political elites as well as the ways in which societies perceive and interpret international processes. Under conditions of increasing uncertainty, normative fragmentation, and institutional inefficiency, states are compelled to construct their foreign policies on more flexible, multilevel, and context-sensitive strategies. This dynamic further strengthens the interdependence between domestic political stability, legitimacy, and economic resilience, on the one hand, and the scope for maneuver in foreign policy, on the other. Consequently, strategic partnerships increasingly move beyond classical alliance models and evolve into complex cooperation frameworks that incorporate not only security considerations but also economic, cultural, and normative dimensions.

Within this theoretical and structural framework, the position of emerging regional actors such as Türkiye and Azerbaijan acquires particular analytical significance. In an environment characterized by intensified competition among global power centers and the growing functional relevance of regional initiatives, these two states do not act merely as passive objects of the international system but rather as actors possessing a certain degree of agenda-setting and norm-shaping potential. From this perspective, Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations should be evaluated not simply as a chronological development of bilateral diplomatic ties, but as a concrete regional manifestation of broader structural transformations within the international system.

For this reason, the subsequent chapter’s analysis of the historical, cultural, and strategic dimensions of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations aims not only to reveal the factors underpinning the institutional depth and sustainability of bilateral cooperation, but also to analytically demonstrate how global and regional systemic changes have influenced the formation and evolution of these relations. In doing so, the study ensures conceptual coherence and analytical continuity between the theoretical–normative framework established in the first chapter and the empirical and historical analysis undertaken in the following chapters.

These structural changes in the international system directly influence the strategic behavior of regional and middle powers, which increasingly seek multidimensional partnerships to safeguard their political, economic, and security interests. In this context, Türkiye and Azerbaijan respond to global power shifts not as passive actors, but as states capable of shaping regional cooperation models. Therefore, Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations should be understood as a concrete regional adaptation to broader systemic transformations in the contemporary international order.

Historical, Cultural, and Strategic Dimensions of Türkiye–Azerbaijan Relations

As previously discussed, the emerging world order, marked by shifting global power balances and the restructuring of economic and political systems, underscores the necessity of strategic cooperation in interstate relations. Within this framework, strategic collaboration with Azerbaijan, identified by Davutoglu (2010, p. 127) as “Türkiye’s most important strategic ally in the Caucasus in general and in the South Caucasus in particular,” can be interpreted not merely as an extension of traditional alliance patterns but also as a rational response to the evolving international environment.

Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations exemplify a pragmatic cooperation model that is informed not only by political and economic considerations but also by a deeply rooted historical and cultural foundation. Huseynova (2007, p. 19) emphasizes that this partnership is grounded in “an ancient and rich historical-cultural heritage,” reflecting shared history, culture, language, and religion, and built upon inseparable ethnic, historical, national-spiritual, and socio-political ties. The historical trajectories of both nations have long run in parallel, with Azerbaijan and Türkiye, sharing a common cultural heritage, linguistic affinities, and belief systems, experiencing analogous historical turning points.

The peoples of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, representing two significant branches of the Turkic world, are united by enduring bonds of affection that transcend both time and space, frequently responding in parallel to political, social, and cultural transformations. In this sense, their historical trajectory can be understood not merely as a matter of geographical proximity but as a manifestation of shared spirit and destiny. The migrations of Turkic tribes from Central Asia to Anatolia facilitated the integration of these peoples into a common cultural basin grounded in the same ethnic roots. During the expansion of the Great Seljuk Empire, the territories of Azerbaijan engaged in extensive political, military, and cultural interactions with Anatolia. Over a historical continuum extending to the present, Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations have developed into a robust framework encompassing political, economic, social, and cultural dimensions, as highlighted by Babashova (2017, p. 4).

The historical, ethno-linguistic, and cultural affinities between these peoples constitute a foundational pillar of mutual trust and solidarity. Accordingly, Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations are strategic and multidimensional,

deeply rooted in shared history, culture, language, and religion. Huseynova (2007, p. 19) emphasizes that Azerbaijanis and Anatolian Turks have maintained close relations over centuries, consistently providing mutual support and cooperation. Moreover, the bilateral relationship manifests a unique regional unity, formalized in the guiding principle of “one nation – two states.”

Although Ottoman-Safavid relations in the 16th century were shaped by apparent political and military rivalry, the ongoing interaction between Anatolia and Azerbaijan in the background of this period paved the way for the emergence of a shared sense of civilization. The unifying power of Turkish-Islamic culture enabled the formation of strong bonds between the peoples in terms of language, literature, art, and spiritual values. Therefore, the 16th century can be regarded not only as an era of competition between two political powers but also as a period in which the historical foundations of the cultural unity of the Turkish world crystallized (Sumer, 1992, p.3). In the 19th and 20th centuries, both societies struggled to preserve their national identities under the pressure of imperial powers. During this process, the idea of a “common Turkish identity” gained strength, particularly through literature, the press, and intellectual movements.

A historical review of the early twentieth century reveals that the Ottoman Empire played a pioneering role in securing international recognition for the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, which briefly gained independence following the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917. Such recognition is not only significant as a diplomatic achievement but also represents an early expression of political unity and solidarity within the Turkic world. Article 4 of the peace and friendship treaty signed between the Ottoman State and Azerbaijan on 4 June 1918 stipulated that military assistance would be provided to Azerbaijan upon request. Consistent with this provision, the Azerbaijani administration under Mehmet Emin Resulzade sought support from the Ottoman Empire to liberate occupied Baku and to impede the advance of Bolshevik forces toward the capitals, including Ganja (Ozsoy, 2023, p. 592).

This intervention is particularly notable when considered in the context of contemporary regional power dynamics and the historically fraternal relations between the two nations. Following the Ottoman recognition of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic, the Caucasian Islamic Army, commanded by Nuri Pasha, successfully entered Baku, resulting in the liberation of the city on 15 September 1918 (Ashirli, 2007, p. 44). This episode underscores the practical manifestation of political solidarity and the enduring strategic and cultural bonds that characterized Ottoman–Azerbaijani relations.

This historical mission undertaken by the Caucasian Islamic Army demonstrates that relations between the two countries took on a concrete nature not only on the diplomatic level, but also in military and strategic dimensions. This intervention played a decisive role in the process of liberating Baku from the occupation of Armenian-Bolshevik elements and constituted a historical turning point in terms of protecting the Turkish presence in the region. However, this development can also be seen as a reflection of the Ottoman Empire’s policy of expanding its sphere of influence in the South Caucasus within the international balance of power at the time. Therefore, the year 1918 represents a critical historical threshold in terms of both Azerbaijan’s struggle for independence and the formation of the geopolitical foundations of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations. However, with Azerbaijan coming under Soviet rule in 1920, relations between the two countries were interrupted, paving the way for Türkiye-Azerbaijan interaction to be reshaped in a different geopolitical context in the subsequent period.

In 1920, the Soviet occupation of Azerbaijan inevitably disrupted formal Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. During this period, consistent with the experience of all Soviet republics, Azerbaijan’s external interactions were mediated through Moscow, and the country remained under Soviet governance for an extended period (Ozsoy, 2023, p. 592). The Soviet Union’s efforts to construct the ideal of the “Soviet man” had a profound impact on Azerbaijan’s traditional and cultural ties, aiming to detach the population from national and cultural values through measures such as the destruction of material assets and the reform of language and alphabet systems (Onen, 2021, p. 924).

Despite these constraints, Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations were maintained through various indirect channels throughout the Soviet period. Migration, literary production, artistic endeavors, and diaspora activities provided mechanisms for sustaining historical and cultural interaction between the two nations. In particular, Azerbaijani communities residing in Türkiye, alongside the limited literary works published within Azerbaijan, played a crucial role in preserving the common language and cultural heritage. Cultural exchanges through shared folk tales, music, and traditional arts further fostered social-level understanding and closeness, even when official diplomatic channels were inactive. Consequently, although formal relations were interrupted during the Soviet era, enduring historical and cultural bonds persisted, facilitating the rapid restoration of Türkiye–Azerbaijan cooperation in the post-independence period.

During this period, Azerbaijan became part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, while Türkiye entered the National Struggle and focused on its own fight for national independence. Although direct diplomatic contacts between the two countries were severed, historical, cultural, and social ties did not completely disappear at the level of the people. Foreign policy, conducted under the strict control of Soviet ideology, limited Azerbaijan’s relations with Türkiye; however, Türkiye’s pragmatic relations with the Soviet Union, particularly in the 1920s and 1930s, indirectly prevented the complete severance of historical ties with Azerbaijan. Furthermore, the diplomatic and economic relations established by Türkiye with the Soviet Union from the 1930s onwards created a platform for indirect interaction, even without direct contact with Azerbaijan, contributing to the preservation of solidarity and cultural continuity within the Turkic world. This situation demonstrates that, despite political obstacles between the two countries, bonds based on shared history and culture have shown long-term continuity. During the Cold War, relations between the two countries remained limited for many years due to geopolitical polarization. Nevertheless, mutual cultural affinity and a shared sense of identity remained alive in Azerbaijani and Turkish societies. Although official diplomatic relations were suspended when Azerbaijan came under Soviet rule, the visits of Turkish Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel in 1967 and Turkish President Cevdet Sunay in 1969 to Baku played a major role in determining the nature of these relations. Indirect communication, particularly through literature and art, ensured that the shared cultural heritage between the two societies remained alive. Azerbaijani literature and newspapers published in Türkiye, along with Turkish cultural products that were only available to a limited extent in Azerbaijan, are concrete examples of this indirect interaction. In 1970, with the Thaw period, the establishment of cultural relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan resulted in an agreement between the Library of the Soviet Azerbaijan Republic and the Institute of Turkish Studies at Istanbul University in Türkiye, revealing that the two countries share a common history, language, and traditions (Onen, 2021, p. 924).

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 marked a decisive turning point, allowing Azerbaijan to regain its independence and inaugurating a new phase in Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations. In the immediate aftermath, both countries swiftly established diplomatic ties, opened embassies, and Türkiye actively supported Azerbaijan’s integration into the broader international system. This geopolitical shift facilitated not only Azerbaijan’s sovereignty but also the emergence of independence among other Turkic-speaking republics in Central Asia. From Türkiye’s perspective, these developments generated a new framework for cooperation rooted in historical, cultural, and linguistic affinities, thereby accelerating Ankara’s initiatives to deepen political, economic, and cultural engagement in the region. The dissolution of the Russian geopolitical sphere provided Türkiye with the opportunity to maximize its strategic leverage in Central Asia and the Caucasus and to expand its regional influence (Semedov, 2008, p. 40). Simultaneously, this transformation allowed Türkiye to conduct its foreign policy more effectively, opening new strategic avenues, particularly in the formulation and implementation of its energy policy toward the Caspian region (Atamali, 2022, p. 47).

Despite the strategic opportunities emerging in the post-Cold War period, it is evident that Türkiye did not enter this new regional order “sufficiently prepared, both psychologically and diplomatically” (Davutoglu, 2010, p. 128). Throughout the Cold War, Türkiye had aligned its foreign policy priorities with

the Western alliance, primarily focusing on security concerns related to the Soviet threat. Consequently, the multidimensional geopolitical environment that unfolded following the Soviet Union's dissolution presented Ankara with a complex mix of opportunities and uncertainties. The lack of specialized academic institutions or research centers in Türkiye dedicated to the Caucasus and Central Asia during the early 1990s further underscores the institutional dimension of this unpreparedness (Semedov, 2008, p. 41).

For this reason, despite Russia's weakening position in the region in the 1990s, Türkiye couldn't become a de facto leading economic and political power in the region. Although Ankara made significant efforts to develop its relations with the newly independent Turkic republics, it failed to establish sustainable regional leadership in terms of both economic capacity and diplomatic experience. This unpreparedness deepened the incompatibility between the Cold War conditions and the opportunities offered by the newly emerging geopolitical conjuncture, thus making an "adjustment period" inevitable for Türkiye (Davutoglu, 2010, p. 128).

During this adaptation process, Türkiye sought to strengthen its political and cultural relations with the newly independent Turkic republics while also striving to establish its presence in the region on institutional foundations. During this period, Türkiye introduced the concept of the "Turkic World" into the international political literature, aiming for political solidarity and economic integration through cultural partnerships. In this period, when it began to be emphasized that the 21st century would be the "Century of Türkiye," the discourse of "Turkic World from the Adriatic to China" gained an important place in foreign policy understanding. In line with this, the Turkish Cooperation and Development Agency (TİKA) was established in January 1992, the Summit of Turkic-Speaking Countries was held in October 1992, and the Congresses of Friendship, Brotherhood, and Cooperation of Turkic States and Communities began to be held in 1993 (Kuchuk, 2023, p. 839).

Through its activities, TİKA facilitated the publication of a range of journals in Turkish, English, Kazakh, Kyrgyz, Turkmen, and Uzbek by engaging scholars, historians, and philologists from the former Soviet republics, while also supporting the implementation of educational, scientific, social, and other projects across the Turkic republics (Semedov, 2008, p. 41). Despite these efforts, the anticipated outcomes were constrained by the economic crises of the period, internal political instability, and competitive regional power dynamics. In particular, Russia's continued historical influence in the region, reinforced through its energy policies, constituted a significant limitation on Türkiye's aspirations for regional leadership.

However, the steps taken in the 1990s paved the way for Türkiye's long-term relations with Central Asia and the Caucasus to be based on a strategic foundation. The first result of the negotiations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was the signing of the agreement on the construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline in 1993. (Atamali, 2022, p. 48). Programs developed in the fields of education, media, and cultural diplomacy, such as accepting students from regional countries to Turkish universities, the launch of TRT-Eurasia, and the establishment of institutions such as the Yunus Emre Institute, have highlighted Türkiye's soft power. In this context, although Türkiye was unable to establish economic or political leadership in the short term, it has established a multidimensional network of relations with the region through cultural diplomacy and human interaction in the long term.

Furthermore, despite the unfavorable political and economic conditions of the time, Türkiye, as one of the first countries to recognize independent Azerbaijan, has been a decisive actor in the process of reestablishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. In this context, Türkiye's recognition of independent Azerbaijan and the rapid reestablishment of diplomatic relations laid the groundwork for the historical ties between the two countries to take on a strategic dimension and for the concept of one nation, two states to take shape. When discussing the nature of relations between the two countries, we would also like to draw attention to one issue: it has become a commendable tradition for Turkish heads of state and government to begin their first official visits abroad with Azerbaijan. During this period, political, economic, and military cooperation between the two countries developed rapidly; strategic partnerships

were established, particularly in the fields of energy, transportation, and defense, giving the one nation, two states concept a concrete diplomatic and institutional framework. The Declaration on Strategic Cooperation signed between the two countries in 1997, the Declaration on Deepened Strategic Cooperation signed in 2001, and the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance signed in 2010 are known as the documents of strategic partnership between the two countries (Valiyev, 2020, p. 22).

Following its independence after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Azerbaijan prioritized national security in the early 1990s, as the country faced profound political, economic, and social challenges resulting from the war with Armenia (Ozsoy, 2023, p. 588). Establishing political stability and consolidating an independent identity within the international system were simultaneously critical objectives. In this context, Türkiye undertook targeted diplomatic and technical initiatives to support the development of Azerbaijan's military infrastructure, culminating in the signing of the "Agreement on Cooperation in the Field of Military Education" on November 3, 1992. Under this agreement, Azerbaijani officers and non-commissioned officers were trained at Turkish military schools, while Turkish military instructors and advisors played a leading role in establishing new educational institutions within Azerbaijan. During this period, Türkiye's contributions primarily focused on education, institutional capacity building, and the establishment of foundational principles for the national defense system. The military-technical relations initiated through these efforts were subsequently strengthened under a strategic partnership framework, expanding cooperation to encompass a broad spectrum of activities, ranging from joint military exercises to collaborative initiatives within the defense industry (Ozsoy, 2023, p. 588).

The second significant phase of military cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan was formalized through the "Military, Technical, and Scientific Cooperation Agreement" signed on June 10, 1996, which elevated bilateral collaboration to a strategic level. This agreement encompassed joint military exercises, the sharing of technical and scientific expertise, arms procurement, defense industry production, and research initiatives (Atamali, 2022, p. 52). Furthermore, Türkiye actively supported Azerbaijan in developing military training infrastructure in accordance with NATO standards under the framework of NATO's Partnership for Peace (PfP) program. With the involvement of the Turkish Armed Forces (TSK), key Azerbaijani military institutions-including the Azerbaijan Military Academy, the Azerbaijan Military Air Force Academy, and the Azerbaijan Military Naval Academy-were restructured and modernized to meet NATO standards (Musayev, 2012, p. 175).

Since the 2000s, Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations have taken on a strategic dimension not only in the military sphere but also in the fields of energy, economy, and diplomacy. Joint exercises, knowledge and technology transfer, and defense industry cooperation during this period have contributed significantly to the modernization of the Azerbaijani army. After 2010, relations were elevated to the level of a strategic partnership based on mutual trust and a shared perception of threats. Under the signed protocols, coordination was increased in the areas of border security, intelligence sharing, counterterrorism, and defense planning. Türkiye provided Azerbaijan with modern warfare technologies, armored vehicles, electronic warfare systems, and, in particular, unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs).

The most prominent reflection of this process was the Second Karabakh War, which took place between September 27 and November 10, 2020. During this war, Türkiye provided comprehensive support to Azerbaijan in the areas of military training, consultancy, intelligence, and defense technologies; it also resolutely defended Azerbaijan's territorial integrity on diplomatic platforms. Following Azerbaijan's victory in the war, relations between the two countries were elevated to the level of official alliance with the Shusha Declaration dated June 15, 2021. The Declaration established a permanent strategic alliance providing for mutual defense mechanisms by institutionalizing military cooperation, defense industry partnerships, intelligence sharing, and joint exercises. Furthermore, the fact that the Declaration has a legal nature reflecting NATO's concept of "collective defense" further reinforces the importance of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations in terms of the international security architecture. The Shusha Declaration has thus

become one of the fundamental legal bases not only for the two countries but also for the integration process of the entire Turkic world.

Cultural and educational cooperation has contributed to strengthening historical ties between the two peoples and has enabled the continuation of social interaction in parallel with diplomatic initiatives. This process demonstrates that relations between Türkiye and Azerbaijan have acquired a strategic dimension not only at the regional level but also at the global level. From Türkiye's perspective, Azerbaijan's strategic importance is based on two key factors: The region in question is an important geopolitical corridor connecting Türkiye with Central Asian countries, and it has a decisive impact on Türkiye's energy supply security and regional stability through energy pipelines. Azerbaijan and Türkiye are deepening their strategic cooperation in order to adapt to this new order based on historical, cultural, and political ties. Today, Azerbaijan-Türkiye cooperation is characterized by the institutionalization of a strategic partnership covering defense, energy, economy, and humanitarian areas. As a result, the Türkiye-Azerbaijan military cooperation, whose foundations were laid in the 1990s, deepened during the Karabakh wars and achieved a permanent strategic partnership structure with the Shusha Declaration. This process demonstrates that military, technological, and diplomatic solidarity between the two countries has also played a decisive role in terms of regional security balances (Atamali, 2022, p. 52).

The strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Türkiye has gained increasing significance not only in the political-military and energy spheres but also in economic and transportation sectors, which have expanded in recent years (Valiyev, 2020, p. 22). In the energy domain, key projects such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) have simultaneously reinforced Türkiye's energy supply security and enabled Azerbaijan to access international energy markets. The construction of the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum natural gas pipeline in 2007 provided Türkiye with the opportunity to export Caspian hydrocarbons (Atamali, 2022, p. 49). Subsequently, in 2012, Azerbaijan and Türkiye signed an agreement for the implementation of the TANAP project, which received support from the European Union as part of its strategy to diversify natural gas supply sources. TANAP became operational in 2018, marking a major milestone in the strategic and economic integration of the two countries (Atamali, 2022, p. 49).

The linguistic proximity between the peoples of Azerbaijan and Türkiye, who belong to a common language family developed on the basis of Oguz Turkish, facilitates communication and cultural interaction and creates a natural bridge of understanding between the two countries. Similarities in the alphabet and education policies used in the Turkic world also make significant contributions to strengthening the common identity. Close cooperation in the cultural and educational fields can be seen as part of a broader framework that supports the strategic depth of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations. The two countries aim to achieve a strategic position at the regional and global levels by developing comprehensive cooperation in the fields of energy, transportation, defense, and economy. Today, the Turkish Council established in the region, the many regional trilateral relations involving Türkiye and Azerbaijan, and energy and transportation projects demonstrate the harmony of their regional policies. (Valiyev, 2020, p. 21). In terms of economic cooperation, free trade agreements and joint investment projects contribute to supporting regional stability and development. This integrated approach reveals the multidimensional and strategic nature of Türkiye-Azerbaijan relations, which are reinforced by historical, cultural, and diplomatic ties.

Thanks to their historical origins, cultural unity, and linguistic proximity, Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations are not only a political alliance but also an unshakable model of brotherhood. Their shared past has become a strategic element guiding the foreign policy vision of both countries. In the post-independence period, cultural relations between the two countries have been elevated to an institutional level. Preserving and developing cultural ties will ensure the sustainability of these relations in the future. Therefore, Azerbaijan-Türkiye relations are an example of how historical ties can be transformed into a strategic advantage in the modern international relations system.

The strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Türkiye is institutionalized not only at the bilateral level but also through multilateral diplomatic platforms and regional organizations. In particular, the coordinated stance displayed in international organizations and the joint activities carried out within the framework of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) demonstrate that this strategic cooperation is also being effectively pursued in the field of multilateral diplomacy. With the transformation of the Turkish Council into the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) in 2021, it has become possible to take cooperation in the Turkic world to a more institutional and strategic level. This transformation demonstrates that the Türkiye-Azerbaijan partnership has been elevated to a higher level, both symbolically and practically. The soft power cooperation between Azerbaijan and Türkiye is not limited to these two countries, but has an impact across a wide geography under the umbrella of the Organization of Turkic States. Shaped around cultural unity, linguistic unity, and a shared historical consciousness, these structures strengthen the soft power capacity of Türkiye and Azerbaijan across a broad area stretching from Central Asia to the Balkans. In this regard, organizations such as the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and the International Turkic Academy (ITA) provide opportunities for the strengthening of a common cultural identity in political and academic spheres. This process has laid the foundation for a new “soft power” strategy in which culture is used as a foreign policy tool. Following the Karabakh War, Azerbaijan has increased its influence within the Organization of Turkic States; it has begun to lead the integration process with the Central Asian Turkic Republics, particularly in the context of the Nakhchivan corridor, infrastructure connections, and energy cooperation. Türkiye, meanwhile, supports this process with its political vision and regional power capacity. Projects carried out within the framework of the OTS include multifaceted activities such as joint alphabet studies, harmonization of education curricula, cultural festivals, digital integration initiatives, and trade facilitation. These projects increase interaction not only between Türkiye and Azerbaijan but also with other Turkic states such as Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan.

Conclusion

This study has examined Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within the broader context of structural transformations in the international system, emphasizing the implications of the transition from a bipolar to a unipolar order and, more recently, toward a multipolar and multilayered global configuration. As demonstrated throughout the analysis, shifts in the distribution of power and the evolving nature of security, alliance formation, and regional interaction have expanded the strategic relevance of regional actors in contemporary international politics. Within this changing systemic environment, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have emerged as key actors whose partnership reflects both the constraints and opportunities generated by the evolving international order. This transformation underscores the interdependence between global systemic structures and regional strategic behavior, highlighting the importance of understanding regional partnerships in the context of broader geopolitical dynamics.

The findings indicate that Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations are not solely the product of shared historical, cultural, and identity-based ties but are also shaped by pragmatic geopolitical, economic, and security considerations. The strategic partnership between the two states has been consolidated through cooperation in political, economic, military, and energy-related domains, supported by diplomatic and legal frameworks that institutionalize bilateral interaction. Major energy and transportation projects, such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan and TANAP pipelines, initiatives to develop the Zangezur Corridor, and coordinated responses to regional security challenges illustrate how structural changes at the global level translate into tangible forms of regional cooperation. These concrete manifestations reinforce the role of Türkiye and Azerbaijan as stabilizing actors in the South Caucasus, demonstrating how bilateral strategic partnerships can influence wider regional order.

Furthermore, the analysis highlights that the strategic partnership between Türkiye and Azerbaijan extends beyond the bilateral level and increasingly intersects with regional integration processes. The Organization

of Turkic States, in particular, constitutes an important institutional framework through which this cooperation may be embedded in a broader regional context. By situating Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations within such multilateral structures, the study underscores the growing significance of regional institutions in sustaining and deepening strategic partnerships under conditions of multipolarity. The institutionalization of cooperation contributes to enhancing political cohesion, economic interconnectivity, and collective security among member states, thereby providing a model for regional collaboration in similar geopolitical settings.

Overall, this research contributes to the literature by offering a systematic assessment of Türkiye–Azerbaijan relations as a case study illustrating how regional strategic partnerships are shaped by structural transformations in the international system. The Türkiye–Azerbaijan partnership exemplifies a multidimensional and institutionally supported form of cooperation that aligns with the dynamics of the contemporary multipolar order. Moreover, the study provides insights into the mechanisms through which regional actors can leverage historical, cultural, and geopolitical linkages to navigate global systemic shifts, thereby reinforcing regional stability and strategic alignment. In sum, the Türkiye–Azerbaijan axis represents not only a symbolic manifestation of shared identity but also a functional strategic framework that shapes regional power balances and contributes to the integration and security of the broader Eurasian space.

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