


# Post-2020 Military-Security Cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan: Consequences for the Geopolitical Position and National Security of Iran

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## **Abstract**

Following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, military and security cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan has increased significantly. Focusing on these expanding ties, this article examines their implications for the geopolitical position and national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. The central research question asks: What impact has Turkey–Azerbaijan military–security cooperation after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War had on Iran's geopolitical weight and national security? According to the authors' hypothesis, these collaborations—by reducing Iran's political and geopolitical influence, expanding Turkey's military and intelligence activities along Iran's northwestern borders, and promoting pan-Turkist ideas—pose multifaceted threats to Iran's national security.

Employing a qualitative methodology and document analysis, the study draws on academic sources, official documents, and field reports to examine various dimensions of these relations within an integrated theoretical framework combining physical and ontological security. The findings indicate that the deepening of Ankara–Baku military and intelligence ties—such as drone technology transfers, joint military exercises, and strengthened security structures through collaborative initiatives—has constrained Iran's influence in the South Caucasus and weakened its geopolitical standing. Moreover, the spread of ethnonationalist discourses in Azerbaijan and surrounding regions has generated escalating and politically manipulated identity-based challenges for Iran. The conclusion underscores the need to formulate a comprehensive national strategy to restore regional balance in the South Caucasus and safeguard Iran's national security—one that synergistically incorporates military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural components.

**Keywords:** Iran's national security, Republic of Azerbaijan, Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, Turkey; Military and Security Cooperation.

## **Introduction**

The South Caucasus, owing to its significant geopolitical position, has long been a focal point of competition among regional and extra-regional powers. Within this context, military and security cooperation among the states of the region plays a decisive role in shaping the balance of power and ensuring stability. Developments following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War in 2020 reflect a remarkable intensification of military and security cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan. These collaborations—rooted in post-Soviet dynamics—reached an unprecedented level subsequent to Azerbaijan's military victory in the war with Turkish support. This outcome resulted from the deepening of political, military, and intelligence ties between the two states, which in turn reinforced and expanded their bilateral relations. Drawing upon shared political affinities and overlapping geopolitical interests encapsulated in the slogan “One Nation, Two States,” Turkey has taken significant steps toward strengthening its military–security alliance with Azerbaijan. Turkish support has been manifested not only in the military and political domains but also in the social and media spheres (Pirinçi & Güler, 2021, p. 223).

Beyond technical and military cooperation, this alliance carries important political signals for regional and international actors and has the potential to reshape the security architecture of the South Caucasus. Furthermore, the expansion of pan-Turkic and neo-Ottomanist discourses forms another dimension of this partnership that extends beyond the military realm and exerts notable political and identity-related influences across the region. These discourses have the potential to heighten identity- and politics-based tensions in the Caucasus and its surrounding areas, potentially producing significant consequences for the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran. In this regard, the signing of the “Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Support” in 2010, followed by the 2021 “Shushi Declaration,” represents significant milestones in deepening bilateral cooperation across military and security domains. The primary aim of these agreements is to institutionalize and clarify the political, legal, military, security, and economic mechanisms intended to consolidate the alliance-oriented relationship between Turkey and Azerbaijan—relations defined on the basis of sovereignty, independence, and territorial integrity (Çelik & Aslanlı, 2024, p. 57).

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been wary of the potential consequences of such cooperation. These geopolitical threats, along

with the spread of pan-Turkism and neo-Ottomanism within the framework of these agreements, create conditions conducive to tension and instability in the region. Accordingly, this article seeks to answer the following question: How do Turkey–Azerbaijan military and security collaborations impact Iran's national security? The central hypothesis of this research is that military–security cooperation between Azerbaijan and Turkey endangers Iran's physical security by reducing its influence in the South Caucasus and generating geopolitical and geostrategic constraints; moreover, by affecting national cohesion and promoting the ideology of *laïcité*, it poses a threat to the ontological security of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

### **1. Integrating Physical Security and Ontological Security**

The present study seeks to provide a framework for understanding and systematically examining national security threats within the context of military and political interactions among international actors. To this end, an integrated approach that simultaneously encompasses the concepts of physical security and ontological security has been adopted as the basis of analysis. Security is a multilayered, complex, and dynamic concept that assumes diverse meanings and dimensions across different theoretical schools. The combination and integration of these two approaches enable a deeper, broader, and more precise understanding of the mechanisms shaping national security and offer valuable insights into explaining the complex dynamics arising from the military and political relations of international actors.

**Physical Security:** Physical security is rooted in the realist paradigm of international relations, which views the international system as one characterized by competition, self-interest, and uncertainty. Within this system, states are regarded as rational and strategic actors whose actions are primarily oriented toward safeguarding vital interests and ensuring national security (Waltz, 1979, p. 88). Realism—one of the most influential and enduring theoretical traditions in this field—places its analytical focus on the state, power, and national security (Kumar, 2025, p. 1).

Physical security principally refers to the preservation of territorial integrity, political independence, and vital national interests against tangible and perceptible external threats (Bidova et al., 2021, p. 192). Such threats include a wide range of risks, including military attacks, terrorist operations, and environmental crises that may directly endanger the stability and survival of states. Consequently, security policies and measures typically emphasize

enhancing defensive capabilities, intelligence gathering, border control, and the improvement of the capacity to respond to threats.

From the realist perspective, the nature of international relations is inherently grounded in competition for power and dominance, and security constitutes an indispensable priority in global politics. Realists maintain that interactions among states are invariably interwoven with elements of hostility, mistrust, and self-interested motives—conditions that necessitate prudent and strategic management of conflicts at the international level (Waltz, 1979, p. 186). In this view, security is understood as the mitigation of risks and violence rather than the realization of a perfectly just order or absolute, enduring peace; thus, statecraft fundamentally involves the management and reduction of conflicts, not their complete elimination.

**Ontological Security:** Ontological Security. Anthony Giddens refers to ontological security as a sense of order and continuity in regard to individuals' experiences. He argues that this sense is reliant on people's ability to give meaning to their lives. Meaning is found in experiencing positive and stable emotions and in avoiding chaos and anxiety (Giddens, 1991, p. 243). This form of security extends beyond physical and tangible threats and is intrinsically tied to the preservation of identity and the psychological stability of individuals or groups (Steel, 2005, p. 526). Within the field of international relations, the concept has been further developed by scholars such as Jennifer Mitzen, who argues that states, much like individuals, require a stable identity and a predictable environment to function effectively and ensure their survival. States construct their identities through historical narratives, cultural identities, and the institutionalization of routines and established practices. Any disruption or threat to these elements generates ontological insecurity, which can provoke defensive—or even aggressive—responses (Mitzen, 2006, pp. 342–344).

This theoretical perspective emphasizes that states do not act solely on the basis of material interests or rational calculations; rather, preserving identity, stability, and existential security plays a fundamental role in many security-related decisions and foreign policy behaviors (Mitzen, 2006, p. 346). Moreover, this approach has significant implications for understanding conflict-resolution processes: states that perceive peace initiatives as threatening to their ontological security may refrain from accepting or participating in peaceful solutions (Rumelili, 2015, p. 2).

The integration of physical and ontological security approaches

makes it possible to construct an analytical framework that, while addressing concrete, material, and tangible threats, also incorporates the psychological, ideational, and identity-related dimensions of security. Physical security threats can simultaneously manifest as ontological threats, undermining the identity roots and national narratives of states. The core concept of ontological security emphasizes the relational structure of the “self” within a context of anxiety. This perspective posits that social actors seek a sense of stability and continuity over time in order to sustain their sense of agency. However, anxiety is a key factor that complicates the attainment and preservation of this internal stability (Kinnvall & Mitzen, 2020, p. 244).

Such integration demonstrates that the feeling of security extends beyond mere physical protection and encompasses psychological well-being, identity stability, and social continuity. Addressing these dimensions simultaneously provides a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of the complex dynamics of national security and the effects of military and political relations upon it.

A review and analysis of the theoretical literature on national security reveals the multidimensional nature of this concept and shows that no single approach can fully account for all its aspects. Therefore, employing integrative and multidimensional perspectives is both essential and unavoidable.

## **2. Literature Review**

Konrad Zashtowt (2012), in his article “Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan: Heading Towards a Regional Crisis?”, attributes the tensions among the three countries to Iran's Shi'a fundamentalism and its anti-Western and anti-Israeli policies. He argues that these policies, combined with Turkey's growing alignment with the Republic of Azerbaijan—particularly on the basis of shared geopolitical and cultural interests—have intensified disagreements and posed threats to Iran's national security. However, the article's emphasis on Iranian policies, while overlooking other regional dynamics, renders his analysis somewhat one-sided and incomplete.

Nelli Minasyan (2021), in her article “Pan-Turkism Manifestations of Turkey-Azerbaijan Military-Political Cooperation,” examines the expansion of bilateral relations within the framework of Pan-Turkist ideology. She demonstrates that after Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War and the signing of the Shushi Declaration, military and political cooperation between Ankara and Baku has increasingly become part of a

broadier project aimed at integrating the Turkic world. Projects such as the Zangezur Corridor are evaluated within this context. The article primarily focuses on the ideological dimension of Pan-Turkism, while the economic and security aspects of cooperation between the two countries receive relatively limited attention.

Adilah Hasna Khairunisa (2022), in an article titled “Identity and Foreign Policy: Turkey’s Support of Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict,” argues that Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan share a collective identity rooted in Turkic and Islamic heritage, which has driven Turkey to support Azerbaijan during the conflict. The article notes that Turkey provided Azerbaijan with logistical and military support, and it further highlights the role of the Turkish Parliament in approving legislation that facilitated military assistance, including the deployment of troops to the conflict zone. Ultimately, the study concludes that shared religious and ethnic identities served as the primary motivation for Turkey’s support of Azerbaijan in the conflict area. However, the article’s exclusive focus on religious and ethnic identity as the driving forces behind Turkey’s support—while giving limited attention to political and economic factors—results in a reductionist explanation of a complex and multifaceted issue.

Halil Günay (2024), in an article titled “Comparative Analysis of the First and Second Nagorno-Karabakh Wars: An Assessment of Turkey’s Role and Impact,” examines Turkey’s position and conduct in the two military confrontations between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia. The author begins by reviewing the historical roots and background of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict and then analyzes the course and consequences of both wars..

The findings indicate that Turkey’s policies and involvement differed fundamentally across the two periods under study. In the first war, Turkey sought to help end the hostilities through cooperation with international organizations and Western powers. In contrast, during the second war, Turkey played a decisive role in reshaping the balance of power and influencing the outcome of the conflict by providing extensive political, diplomatic, and military support to Azerbaijan.

Conversely, Russia—while acting primarily as Armenia’s supporter during the first war—assumed the role of mediator and overseer of the ceasefire agreement in the second. The results of this study show that regional geopolitical transformations, along with shifts in the pattern of relations among Turkey, Russia, and other regional actors, exerted a direct and significant influence on the

formation and outcome of the two Nagorno-Karabakh wars.

Sıdika İrem Altunsuyu (2025), in her article “Zengezur Corridor in Turkey–Azerbaijan Security Cooperation,” analyzes the strategic role of this route in strengthening the military, economic, and geopolitical ties between the two countries. She shows that, following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the Zangezur Corridor has emerged as a potential direct link connecting the Republic of Azerbaijan, Nakhchivan, and Turkey, thereby acquiring a central position in the broader project of Turkic world integration.

According to the author, this corridor not only enhances the strategic capabilities of Baku and Ankara but has also provoked reactions and concerns from Tehran and Moscow. She emphasizes that military cooperation—such as joint weapons production and the organization of joint military exercises—has reshaped the balance of power in the South Caucasus, turning the Zangezur Corridor into more than an economic initiative. It has become a tool for deepening security cooperation and expanding the regional influence of Turkey and Azerbaijan.

### **3. Post–Second Karabakh War Developments and the Foundations of Turkey–Azerbaijan Convergence**

The Second Karabakh War in 2020 is considered a turning point in the geopolitical developments of the South Caucasus, as, for the first time since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the balance of power in this region demonstrably shifted. The Republic of Azerbaijan, which over the past two decades has focused on gradual convergence with the West, particularly Turkey and Israel (Najafi Sayyar, Khozein, & Rasouli, 2022, p. 135), was able, with extensive support from Turkey, to reclaim control over significant parts of the disputed territories, including Shushi, Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Zangilan, and Gubadli (Quliyeva, 2025, p. 231), and thus to elevate its position in regional equations. Turkey's role in this military victory was highly prominent. Ankara's intelligence, logistical, and technical support—especially in the use of Bayraktar drones and advanced reconnaissance systems—significantly boosted the combat capabilities of the Republic of Azerbaijan (Gurbanov, 2025, p. 3003). This support not only led to Baku's military success but also paved the way for the consolidation of strategic and security ties between the two countries. In fact, Azerbaijan's victory, reliant on Turkish cooperation, became the basis for redefining their bilateral relationship into a “Strategic Alliance,” culminating in the signing of the Shushi Declaration in June 2021 (Afrasiyab, 2025, p.

54). It is noteworthy that the main allies of the Republic of Azerbaijan in this war, besides Turkey, also included Israel and Pakistan, an alliance sometimes referred to as the “Four Brothers” coalition. Following the developments of the war and the signing of the 10 November 2020 ceasefire agreement, significant changes emerged within the regional security architecture. The deployment of Russian peacekeeping forces in the Lachin Corridor, the redefinition of operational boundaries between Baku and Yerevan, and the proposal to establish the “Zangezur Corridor” as a transit route connecting the Republic of Azerbaijan with Nakhchivan all signaled the formation of a new geopolitical and security order in which Turkey played a decisive role. From this perspective, the Second Karabakh War can be viewed as the beginning of a new phase of institutional and ideological convergence between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan—one with profound implications for the geopolitical order of the South Caucasus.

From a geoeconomic standpoint, the significance of the Zangezur Corridor lies in its potential to reshape Eurasian transit dynamics. This route not only facilitates commercial exchanges between Turkey and Azerbaijan but also creates a direct connection to the markets and resources of Central Asia. In doing so, the Zangezur Corridor, in alignment with broader initiatives such as the “Middle Corridor” and China’s Belt and Road Initiative, has the capacity to enhance the geoeconomic position of both Turkey and Azerbaijan within regional strategic equations.

In this context, the expanding influence of Pan-Turkist ideas within joint Turkic institutional frameworks has also become increasingly evident. One of the most prominent manifestations of this trend is the establishment of the “Common Alphabet Commission of the Turkic World” within the Organization of Turkic States. Initiated through coordination between the leaders of Azerbaijan and Turkey, the commission held a meeting in Baku from 9–11 September 2024, during which members approved a unified 34-letter alphabet for Turkic languages—an initiative undertaken in accordance with the Nakhchivan Agreement and the Turkic World 2040 Vision document.

The primary objective of creating this unified alphabet is to facilitate communication among Turkic-speaking populations and to strengthen linguistic and cultural cohesion among member states. The commission emphasized that the linguistic characteristics and phonetic diversity of Turkic languages were carefully considered in creating the alphabet. The new script—based on Latin characters—

was formulated to ensure ease of learning and practical use for all speakers. The “Turkic Academy,” headquartered in Astana, officially announced this decision (Uğur, 2024).

As a result, the South Caucasus has transformed from a traditional buffer zone into a sphere of expanding cooperation and intensifying competition among regional powers. Leveraging Azerbaijan's victory, Turkey elevated its status from a mere political supporter to an active geopolitical actor, while Azerbaijan, benefiting from Turkish support—alongside a range of other contributing factors—was able to reconstruct its identity and international standing. This convergence, grounded in culturally and identity-based constructed interests, effectively laid the foundation for a new Turkey–Azerbaijan security alliance in the South Caucasus.

The Shushi Declaration, signed on 15 June 2021 between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan (Özdemir & Kantar, 2023, p. 733), outlines key areas of cooperation between the two countries, particularly in the military-political and foreign affairs domains. The declaration emphasizes that combining the capacities and opportunities of both nations across political, economic, cultural, educational, social, youth, and sports sectors can contribute to safeguarding and advancing shared interests. It further states that the two countries will take necessary measures regarding regional and international strategic issues of mutual concern.

Participation in efforts to expand regional and international cooperation, as emphasized in the Shushi Declaration with the goal of promoting a sustainable Turkic World, reflects the integration of Turkey's and Azerbaijan's capacities to advance the broader objectives of the Turkic World. In other words, the two countries function as founders of the Turkic World—or as the core of a union analogous to the European Union—just as France and Germany were founding members of the EU (Minasyan, 2021, p. 47). The Council of Cooperation of Turkic-Speaking States, which emerged from the consolidation of Turkic initiatives, was established on 3 October 2009 in Nakhchivan through the Ankara–Baku initiative (Organization of Turkic States [OTS], 2025).

The declaration explicitly emphasizes the coordination of macro-level policies between the two countries in military, political, and foreign affairs domains. The Shushi Declaration functions not merely as a military agreement but also as a political, security, and identity-oriented document, elevating the concept of “one nation—two states” from a rhetorical framework to a practical structure of cooperation. The declaration consolidates the commitment of both

countries to military coordination, joint training, collaboration in defense industries, and harmonized political stances (Gurbanov, 2025, p. 3003).

The Shushi Declaration, aimed at strengthening convergence and sustainable cooperation within the Turkic World, emphasizes increasing mutual interactions and synergy among Turkic-speaking countries (Pirinççi & Güler, 2021, p. 739). This model, rooted in the effective cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan during the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, could serve as a strategic framework for other Turkic states. The declaration highlights the development of the Zangezur Corridor and the Nakhchivan–Kars railway as essential steps toward enhancing the geographical and economic connectivity of the Turkic World. The text of the Shushi Declaration further specifies that the opening of this corridor and the completion of the Nakhchivan–Kars railway could elevate the transport and communication links between the two countries to an unprecedented level (Şuşa Beyannamesi, 2021, p. 12).

#### **4. Dimensions of Military and Security Cooperation between Turkey and Azerbaijan**

##### **4-1. Military Cooperation: Exercises, Armaments, and Defense Technology Transfer**

Military cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan has evolved beyond a purely tactical level following the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, developing into a sustainable, structured, and strategic pattern. Estimates indicate that Azerbaijan spent over USD 123 million on military equipment from Turkey in the first half of 2020 alone, including combat drones, missile systems, ammunition, and other advanced weaponry (CivilNet, 2020). Turkey's Bayraktar TB2 drones played a decisive role in Azerbaijan's battlefield successes during the conflict (Sher, 2025, p. 1454).

Azerbaijan's victory in the 2020 war was facilitated not only by the support of Russia and the Islamic Republic of Iran but also, as previously noted, by the effective involvement of three additional actors—Turkey, Israel, and Pakistan—with Turkey playing a particularly prominent role, as evidenced by Erdoğan's presence at the victory parade on 10 December 2020 (Al Jazeera, 2020). Following the victory in the 2020 war and the subsequent series of events and developments, military cooperation between the two countries was consolidated and has continued through extensive joint exercises. Exercises such as “Three Brothers–2021” with Pakistan (Medyamidas, 2021), “TurAz Eagle–2022” in the air domain (Türkiye Gazetesi,

2022), and “Caucasus Eagle–2024” with the participation of Georgia (Cantürk, 2024) exemplify this trend. In addition, the annual “Mustafa Kemal Atatürk” maneuvers in Baku and Nakhchivan are conducted to enhance operational coordination and armored capabilities (Rehimov, 2023). These exercises not only increase combat readiness but also strengthen joint deterrence and operational interoperability between the two countries, paving the way for broader trilateral cooperation with Georgia in the South Caucasus.

One of the main pillars of this cooperation is the development of the defense industry and the transfer of technology. Following the successful deployment of Turkish drones, major contracts were signed between Turkish companies such as Baykar and ASELSAN and the military structures of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The establishment of a Baykar branch in Baku (in 2023), the initiation of joint drone production (Baykar, 2023), and active participation in the ADDEX 2024 defense exhibition (Torlak, 2024) all reflect this shared commitment. Furthermore, prior to the onset of the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War, the February 2020 financial–military agreement, under which Turkey provided 200 million Turkish lira to Azerbaijan for the procurement of defense equipment (Kırım Haber Ajansı, 2020), marked a milestone in military-industrial collaboration between the two countries.

**Table (1): Military Agreements and Memoranda between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan (2025)**

<b>Title of the Agreement</b>	<b>Description and Objectives</b>	<b>In-text Citation</b>
<b>Memorandum of Understanding on Strengthening Mutual Military Security</b>	Strengthening bilateral security and military cooperation, coordinating training, and exchanging defense technology.	(Turk & Ergocun, 2025)
<b>Memoranda of Cooperation in the Defense Industries</b>	Expanding technological cooperation, transferring technical knowledge, joint production of defense equipment, and developing industrial capacity.	(Azernews, 2025)
<b>Logistics Support and Sales Agreement</b>	Support and sales of Bayraktar and Akıncı drones.	(Ednews, 2025)

Source: (Author)

Overall, this trend indicates a transition in the relations between the two countries from temporary military cooperation to long-term

strategic convergence; a convergence that has not only enhanced Baku's military capabilities but also increased Turkey's geopolitical influence in the South Caucasus, resulting in a shift in the regional balance of power vis-à-vis Iran and Russia (Celik & Aslanlı, 2024, p. 61).

#### **4-2. Security and Intelligence Cooperation**

The relations between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan in the security and intelligence sphere entered a new phase of institutionalization and gained a more strategic nature between 2018 and 2023. The signing of the “Shushi Declaration” in 2021 transformed this military coordination into mutual security and defense commitments (Gurbanov, 2025, p. 3002).

Within this framework, the Turkish National Intelligence Organization (MİT) and the State Security Service of the Republic of Azerbaijan (DTX) initiated expanded cooperation in data collection, monitoring the activities of armed non-state groups, and controlling the shared borders with Iran and Armenia.

Prior to the start of the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan possessed a lower level of technical intelligence capacity compared to Armenia. However, with extensive support from Turkey and its National Intelligence Organization, MİT, Azerbaijan's electronic warfare and signals intelligence (SIGINT) capabilities were significantly upgraded. In addition to providing advanced equipment, MİT played a key role in offering strategic and operational consultation. By deploying precise listening and localization systems near the front lines, MİT enabled the identification of enemy communication and radar networks.

During the conflict, this mutual cooperation reached its highest level, with live satellite imagery from the Göktürk-1 and Göktürk-2 satellites being provided to Azerbaijani forces for the precise targeting of Armenian defense systems and armored equipment. Simultaneously, electronic warfare operations caused widespread disruption to the Armenian army's communications. Continuous interception of wireless and mobile networks yielded critical intelligence that played a decisive role in executing accurate and preemptive attacks (Yıldırım, 2025).

Turkey, through the transfer of advanced information technologies and the provision of specialized training, has played a significant role in enhancing the security capacities of the Republic of Azerbaijan. The outcome of this cooperation has been an increased level of Baku's control over territories reclaimed after the

war, as well as more effective monitoring of movements on its borders with Iran. In this context, the two countries have established joint units for cyberspace monitoring, counterintelligence training, and the protection of critical infrastructure against cyber threats.

In addition to the geopolitical and security implications, the deepening of Ankara–Baku military and security relations has had significant effects on Turkey's domestic politics as well. Azerbaijan's success in the 2020 war, in which Turkey played a decisive role, was represented in Turkish media and domestic discourse as one of the symbols of “Erdoğan's foreign-policy strength.” Furthermore, on the eve of Turkey's 2023 presidential election, state-affiliated and pro-government media openly supported Recep Tayyip Erdoğan; this support stemmed from the long-standing friendship between Erdoğan and Ilham Aliyev, as well as the political, personal, and economic alignment of the two governments. Following the 2020 Nagorno-Karabakh War—where Turkey's role was decisive in Azerbaijan's victory—this support was reinforced even further (Eurasianet, 2023).

As a result, the security cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan has led to the formation of a kind of “parallel security system” in the South Caucasus. This system, while strengthening intelligence ties between the two countries, has undermined Iran's traditional position in regional security dynamics and paved the way for the emergence of a security-oriented alliance along the Ankara–Baku axis.

## **5. Geopolitical, Security, and Identity Implications of Turkey–Azerbaijan Cooperation for Iran**

### **5-1. Geopolitical Implications**

The expansion of military and security cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan after the Second Karabakh War has brought about extensive and multidimensional geopolitical changes in the South Caucasus. Turkey's support for Azerbaijan is viewed as an effort to expand its sphere of influence, both by elevating Azerbaijan's position in the conflict and by reducing Russia's influence in the region (Bijan, 2020, p. 478). This strategic alliance, which stems from Azerbaijan's military victory and Turkey's unconditional support, has not only increased Baku's power in the region but has also challenged Iran's geopolitical position in its northwestern periphery. Specifically, the creation of the so-called Zangezur Corridor—which directly connects Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan and, from there, to Turkey—would weaken Iran's role

as a transit bridge and as the primary route connecting the Caucasus to Central Asia and Europe. If Turkey enters Azerbaijan via Nakhchivan, Iran will then face a new actor capable of attracting cooperation from Turkic-speaking countries, including Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan, within the framework of cooperation among Caspian littoral states (Zolghadr, Asadi, & Jafari Pabandi, 2022, p. 232).

From a geostrategic perspective, this development could place Iran in a position often described as a “soft geopolitical encirclement,” since energy, transportation, and trade transit routes that previously passed through Iranian territory would come under the control of the Turkey–Azerbaijan alliance, thereby reducing Tehran's strategic maneuverability in the region. In other words, Iran would be effectively excluded from direct influence over broader Caucasus dynamics and key international communication routes, and its strategic position in the region would suffer a significant decline.

Beyond its transit and economic effects, another geopolitical consequence of this cooperation is the reconfiguration of the regional balance of power. Turkey's active and increasing presence in Azerbaijan—through military training centers, logistical bases, and the deployment and operations of security and military advisors—has confronted Iran with a gradual erosion of its traditional influence in the Caucasus. Within this framework, Tehran's relations with Baku and Yerevan, formerly managed through a delicate balance between two partially adversarial actors, have become more complex. As a result, Iran has been compelled to reconsider its policies in order to maintain stability and safeguard its national interests.

Simultaneously, this cooperation has solidified a new Turkey-centered power axis in Iran's northwestern neighborhood. By leveraging geopolitical projects, Turkey has not only diminished Moscow's influence in Baku but has also positioned Tehran in a manner that limits its ability to respond effectively to regional developments. The outcome of this process is the emergence of a new security and geopolitical architecture in the South Caucasus, centered on Turkey and Azerbaijan, which compels Iran to adopt proactive and strategic responses within the framework of its national security and strategic depth doctrine.

In summary, the geopolitical consequences of Turkey–Azerbaijan cooperation affect Iran far beyond the immediate regional context by curtailing Tehran's role in transit and energy

routes, weakening Iran's political and strategic influence in the South Caucasus, and facilitating the emergence of a new Turkey-centered geopolitical axis that has redefined the regional balance of power. This analysis indicates that, in order to preserve its strategic position and national security, Iran requires active, multidimensional, and strategically coherent policymaking in the Caucasus region.

### **5-2. Identity and Ontological Implications**

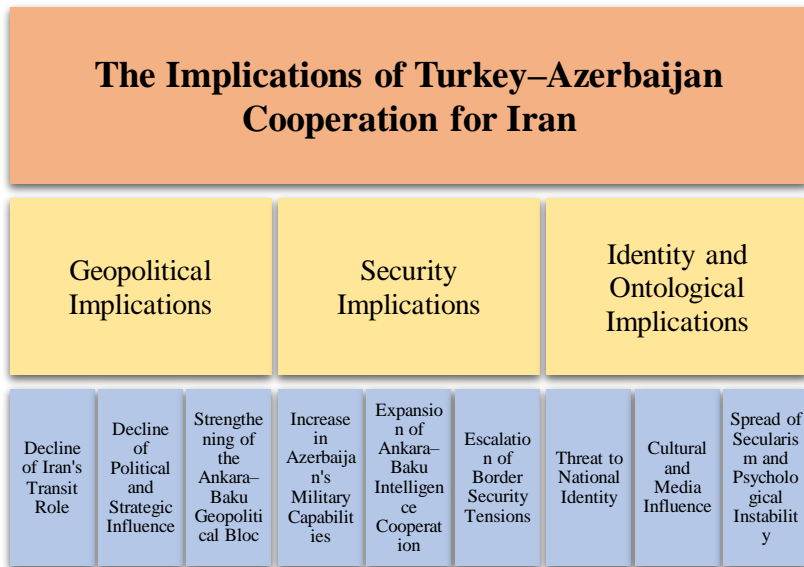
Ontological threats, particularly in Iran, are influenced by various factors, including national identity, cultural change, secularism, psychological instability, and social inequality. These threats not only impact individual and collective identity but also carry significant political and security implications.

- **The Crisis of National Identity and the Infiltration of Pan-Turkist Ideas in Iran:** The crisis of national identity in Iran, as a central issue, has been exacerbated by complex domestic interactions and external pressures, particularly the spread of Pan-Turkist ideology. Pan-Turkism, which emphasizes the unifying nature of shared language and ethnicity among Turkic-speaking populations, is increasingly promoted in the Azerbaijani-populated regions of Iran and can undermine citizens' sense of attachment to Iranian national identity. Historical developments, particularly following the collapse of the Soviet Union, reflect the strengthening of this ideology and efforts to create identity convergence with the Turkic-speaking regions of Iran. Social and cultural movements that manipulate constructed identities, by exploiting economic and social grievances, can exacerbate the crisis of national identity. Moreover, cyberspace and the media facilitate this process, encouraging younger generations to adopt Pan-Turkist ideas. This trend, in addition to posing identity challenges, carries security implications and can lead to social and political instability.
- **Changes in Cultural Values Due to Foreign Influence:** The cultural influence of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, particularly in the fields of art, media, and music, has had significant impacts on Iran's cultural and social values. The broadcasting of TV series, music, and cultural content from these countries can influence behavioral patterns and social values, especially among Iranian youth, and may undermine traditional and national values. The Republic of Azerbaijan, by leveraging linguistic and historical commonalities, strives to promote a

shared cultural identity that exerts greater influence in the border provinces of Iran. Media and digital platforms have facilitated easy access to foreign cultural and artistic content, accelerating changes in behavior, attitudes, and even family and social values. These shifts can potentially trigger identity crises, social confusion, and political tensions.

- **Laicism and Societal Psychological Instability:** Laicism, as a fundamental principle in the policies of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, has in recent years become an influential factor in shaping the region's cultural and political dynamics, posing significant challenges for the Islamic Republic of Iran. This ideology, which emphasizes the separation of religion from politics and the strengthening of a secular national identity, stands in direct contrast to Iran's political discourse, which is rooted in religious thought. Through the expansion of cultural and media influence, laicism has facilitated the emergence of identity and cultural tensions within society. The gradual infiltration of secular discourse in Azerbaijani-speaking regions, coupled with the promotion of modern and non-religious social models, can weaken national belonging and create identity gaps. This phenomenon is considered a serious threat to Iran's social cohesion and national security. Amidst this, the psychological impact of such trends is also undeniable. The expansion of laic values, combined with external pressures stemming from military and security cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan, has intensified psychological instability and mental insecurity among various segments of Iranian society, particularly in border regions. This sense of uncertainty and social anxiety, while eroding public trust in the governing structure, can pave the way for emotional, political, and social reactions in the form of ethnocentric and separatist tendencies. From this perspective, laicism is considered not only an ideological threat but also a psychological catalyst for the weakening of national identity and cultural cohesion.

In summary, the link between the promotion of laicism and psychological instability indicates that cultural and identity threats do not remain merely theoretical but manifest in tangible psychological and social consequences. This situation, by eroding public trust, weakening national solidarity, and increasing social vulnerability, can affect the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran in a multidimensional manner.



Source: (Author)

**Figure (1): Multi-Dimensional Implications of Turkey–Azerbaijan Cooperation for Iran: Geopolitical, Security, and Identity Perspectives**

### Conclusion

The findings of this article indicate that the military–security cooperation between Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan during and after the Second Nagorno-Karabakh War has not only transformed the geopolitical balance of the South Caucasus, but also created a set of multidimensional threats to the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran—including physical–military threats, intelligence challenges, and identity–cultural pressures. The integrated analysis of physical security and ontological security presented in this study demonstrates that an effective response to these threats must be pursued in a coordinated, comprehensive, and simultaneous manner across military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural dimensions. In the military–security realm, the deployment and strengthening of the Ankara–Baku axis's military and intelligence capacities, the transfer of advanced technologies (including drones and reconnaissance systems), and the institutionalization of bilateral exercises and agreements have reduced Tehran's influence in regional dynamics and highlighted the urgent need to reassess border defense, enhance deterrence

capabilities, and reinforce monitoring and early-warning systems. Simultaneously, in diplomacy and geopolitics, Iran must adopt an active, multidimensional, and flexible policy toward its neighbors and extra-regional actors. This includes a combination of proactive regional diplomacy, multilateral engagement (such as constructive relations with Russia, expanded dialogue with Armenia, managing competition with Turkey, and managing relations with the Republic of Azerbaijan), and efforts to preserve and expand Iran's role in regional transit and economic routes to prevent geopolitical isolation and the erosion of economic influence. Moreover, identity and cultural dimensions have created an ontological security threat by promoting Pan-Turkic and secularist discourses in neighboring states, particularly targeting identity dynamics in Iran's border regions. Addressing this requires policies such as strengthening development-oriented and justice-based initiatives in border areas, targeted investment in education and support for local culture, promoting national solidarity discourses grounded in diversity and coexistence, and enhancing communicative-media capacities to counter external cultural influence. Additionally, confronting emerging cyber and intelligence threats necessitates increased coordination among security institutions, development of cyber-defense capacities, and reinforcement of counter-espionage mechanisms and cyber-space management. At the macro-planning level, it is recommended that Iran formulate an intersectoral strategic framework for "integrated national security" that links short-term objectives (strengthening borders and deterrence) with medium- and long-term goals (socioeconomic development of border regions, regional diplomacy, and reinforcement of national identity narratives), based on policy transparency, civil-society participation, and the strengthening of social capital to mitigate destabilizing psychological and identity-related consequences. In conclusion, although the threats arising from the military-security convergence of Turkey and the Republic of Azerbaijan are serious and complex, adopting a comprehensive, preventive approach that combines military, diplomatic, economic, and cultural instruments can prevent escalation, and help Iran rebuild its strategic position and national stability in the South Caucasus. This synthesis, along with the proposed recommendations, derives directly from the analyses presented throughout the article.

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