

**IRAN
BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS
Marjanyan A. H.**

Summary

The article continues a series of studies on the influence of nuclear weapons on the processes taking place in our region. In the sense article touches upon some aspects of Iran's nuclear program that are little or not covered in Armenian analytical literature. The article also examines some current events unfolding around Iran and affecting Armenia.

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ՍԿԻԼԼԱՅԻ ԵՎ ՔԱՐԻԲԴԻՍԻ ՄԻՋԵՎ
Մարջանյան Ա. Հ.**

Սեղմագիր

Հոդվածը մեր տարածաշրջանում ընթացող գործընթացների վրա միջուկային զենքի ազդեցության նախկին ուսումնասիրությունների տրամաբանական շարունակությունն է, որտեղ շոշափվում են Իրանի միջուկային ծրագրի հետ կապված՝ մեզանում քիչ կամ երբևէ չլուսարանված հարցեր: Մասնավորապես, բերվում են Իրանին միջուկային հարվածներ հասցնելու մի շարք ռազմաքաղաքական սցենարների մանրամասներ: Դիտարկվում են Իրանի շուրջ տեղի ունեցող որոշ ընթացիկ զարգացումներ, որոնք առնչվում են նաև Հայաստանին:

**ИРАН
МЕЖДУ СЦИЛЛОЙ И ХАРИБДОЙ
Марджанян А. А.**

Аннотация

Статья является продолжением серии предыдущих исследований о влиянии ядерного оружия на процессы, происходящие в нашем регионе в том смысле, что в ней затрагиваются аспекты ядерной программы Ирана, которые мало или вовсе не освещены у нас. Рассмотрены некоторые текущие события, разворачивающиеся вокруг Ирана и затрагивающие Армению.

IRAN BETWEEN SCYLLA AND CHARYBDIS²

INTRODUCTION

“Iran, Turan had all arrived /Tatul invincible, unbending...”

“The Capture of Tmkaberd”, H. Tumanyan, 1905

This article is part of our series of studies on the impact of nuclear weapons on regional processes [1-3], but, understandably, it differs significantly from them in its logic and structure. Indeed, previous articles were devoted to the concepts of “our region” and “*tactical nuclear weapons*” (TNW), as well as on US and Soviet/RF nuclear arsenals [1]. The main focus of these studies is the fate of the Soviet nuclear weapons “heritage”. In particular, the “exchange strategies” related to this “heritage”, developed and implemented by post-Soviet republics during their “divorce” from the “Center”, its decisive role in the issues of sovereignty and international recognition of the borders of newly independent republics [2]; the strategic (or constructive) ambiguity prewired in “Budapest Memoranda”, as well as thorny issues of providing “security guarantees” in our troubled times [3].

Meanwhile, this article is dedicated to Iran, which compared to previous articles implies at least two structural differences in our observations. For the post-Soviet countries, including Russia, the starting point of our studies was the collapse of the USSR in 1991 and beginning of complex negotiations and bargains over the soviet “nuclear heritage”. Iran, being outside of this process, followed its own unique path of development. But despite this fact Iran also has such a starting point of its own, resembling 1991 for former USSR. Of course, it was not 1991, but rather 1979, the year of the Islamic Revolution in Iran and the beginning of the conflict with Israel, as well as the results of and lessons from the Iran-Iraqi War (1985–87). Just as the collapse of the USSR exposed the newly independent republics to the realities of geopolitical Grand Strategy, so did the Islamic Revolution plunge Iran into the maelstrom of regional geopolitics.

Iran's nuclear program, especially its uranium enrichment component, is at the center of analytical literature, including the Armenian one. However, these numerous publications are contradictory, having even diametrically opposed nature. For example, from the publication of February 26, 2023, “*US CIA Director: Iran is not going to create its own nuclear weapons*” to “*Pentagon: Iran is capable of creating nuclear weapons in a few months*” of March 26³. Or some publications of 2024: “*Iran is closer than ever to creation of the nuclear weapon*” (April 21), “*Has Iran tested the nuclear weapon?*” (October 7), “*The October seismic event in Iran was an earthquake*” (October 8), or “*Iran is not going to develop nuclear weapons after the Israeli attack*” (October 28)⁴.

¹ UNDP National expert (power), EU National expert (transport), EAEC Expert Club fellow, Dr. of Tec. Sci., Senior Researcher, Leading analyst.

² The original Armenian article was submitted to the Editorial Board on 20.12.2024.

³ “*CIA Director: Iran is not going to create nuclear weapons*” (in Rus.). RIA Novosti (26.02.2023), <https://ria.ru/20230226/iran-1854356880.html>; “*Pentagon: Iran can produce nuclear weapons in several months*”. TASS (24.03.2023) (in Rus.), <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/17362573> (date of downloads: 08.08.2023).

⁴ “*Iran is closer than ever to creation of the nuclear weapon*” (in Arm.). Hetq (21.04.2024), <https://www.hetq.am/hy/article/165930>; “*Has Iran tested the nuclear weapon? Iranian source*”. Iravunk.com, (07.10.2024), (in Arm.).

Given the volume limitations of this article, it would be superfluous to deal specifically with such publications. Moreover, the myriad of such contentless publications only serves to overshadow other regional developments related to nuclear weapons, especially in Israel, Turkey, Pakistan, and Ukraine. Instead, we believe it is appropriate to focus on those aspects of Iran's nuclear program, which have either not been considered at all or have been, but rarely and fragmentarily in our country.

1. Iran and nuclear weapons

“It's the alleged right to a first strike that could destroy an Iranian people, because an atom bomb may be being developed within his arc of power” ...

Günter Grass, “Was gesagt werden muss”. *Süddeutsche Zeitung*, 2012⁵.

It is appropriate to begin observations with a fundamental question: *Why is Iran concerned about the presence of nuclear weapons in the region and the need to balance them?* The answer is so simple that it escaped the attention of almost all publications on the topic, certainly intentionally. Therefore, it is not superfluous to summarize these concerns of Iran.

First, Israel (since the 1960s) and Pakistan (since May 1998) are *de facto* nuclear powers of our region, and they have consistently rejected any attempt to establish international control over their nuclear programs for decades⁶. Officially, Israel neither confirms nor denies its nuclear weapons capabilities in accordance with the “*nuclear ambiguity*” formula of the 3rd Israeli Prime Minister L. Eshkol (L. Shkolnik)⁷.

Israel and Pakistan have not signed the 1968 Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT)⁸ and have not ratified the 1996 Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT)⁹. These countries have never signed the so-called “Additional Protocols” with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), which, let us remind, are a crucial component of the NPT's verification

<https://iravunk.com/?p=294561&l=am>: “Nuclear test ban organization says Iranian seismic event looks like earthquake”. TASS (08.10.2024), <https://tass.com/politics/1853263>: “Iran is not going to develop nuclear weapons after the Israeli attack” (in Arm.). Armenpress (28.10.2024), <https://armenpress.am/hy/article/1203409> (date of downloads 01.11.2024).

⁵ The unrhymed poem “What Must Be Said” by Günter Grass, winner of the 1999 Nobel Prize in Literature, was first (and last) published in 2012 in a number of prestigious periodicals, including the German “Süddeutsche Zeitung”. Today it is not accessible here., <https://www.sueddeutsche.de/kultur/gedicht-zum-konflikt-zwischen-israel-und-iran-was-gesagt-werden-muss-1.1325809>. For English translation see “The Guardian”: <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2012/apr/05/gunter-grass-what-must-be-said>, The Russian translation can be found in: <https://www.svoboda.org/a/24539876.html>. I am happy to note that since 2021, an Armenian translation of this poem by Grass is also available (T. Hakobyan), which, however, is not used here: groghutsav.am/2021/09/16/q_1_n_l_u_p_t_n-q_n_uu-h_n_u_z_-u_t_n_p_-t_-uu_t_|/ (date of downloads: 08.11.2024). Here and below, all translations are ours - A.M.

⁶ Israel. NTI country profile., <https://www.nti.org/countries/israel/>, Pakistan. NTI country profile., <https://www.nti.org/countries/pakistan/> (download date: 08.08.2023).

⁷ As the legendary Israeli 5th Prime-Minister G. Meir put it: “*We do not have nuclear weapons, but we will not hesitate to use them if necessary*” (see [4], pp. 319-320).

⁸ Treaty on the non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons: <https://www.arlis.am/documentview.aspx?docID=81237> (download date: 08.08.2023).

⁹ Adopted at the 50th UN General Assembly on September 10, 1996.

mechanism [2, 3]. They have acquired their nuclear weapons in gross violation of fundamental international legal mechanisms of strategic security.

Israel tested its nuclear weapon in South Africa as early as in September 1979¹⁰. Today, Israel is the only country in our region that possesses almost all the elements of the “nuclear triad”¹¹. Pakistan carried out its first public nuclear test on May 28, 1998¹².

On the other hand, Iran signed the NPT Treaty on July 1, 1968, depositing the ratification documents in Washington, Moscow, and London in February-March 1970. Iran signed (but has not ratified) the CTBT on September 24, 1996¹³. As for the IAEA Additional Protocol, Iran signed it on December 18, 2003¹⁴.

Naturally, all this cannot but worry Iran. The “Eshkol formula” regarding Israel's nuclear weapons is perceived by Iran as a mockery and humiliation. And the fact that Israel's first nuclear weapons test took place only five months after the Islamic Revolution (April 1, 1979)¹⁵ initially colored the emerging Iran–Israel conflict, emphasizing the crucial factor of nuclear weapons in it.

Second, Turkey and Saudi Arabia, Iran's long-standing regional rivals, are threshold countries in terms of nuclear weapons. The secret cooperation between these countries and other nuclear states (Pakistan, China, North Korea) in the field of nuclear weapons and their delivery technologies has been registered [9]. In particular, it refers to the involvement of a number of Turkish companies in the Pakistani A. Q. Khan's international nuclear technology smuggling network, which operated in 2000–2004 [10].

In addition, Saudi Arabia has been the absolute leader in our region since the 1980s in terms of the main carriers of nuclear weapons, i.e., long-range ballistic missiles. It has been known since the 1990s [11] that as early as in 1984-85, China had supplied Saudi Arabia with more than a dozen liquid-fueled CSS-2 ballistic missiles (Chinese marking: DF-3A)¹⁶. These 63.8-ton missiles are capable of delivering a 2.1-ton warhead to a distance of about 3000 kilometers¹⁷. Saudi Arabia

¹⁰ See “Vela incident” [5]. On September 22, 1979 US “Vela 5B” satellite detected light and gamma rays flash near the S. African coast. Although the competent agencies and the US President J. Carter administration were convinced that this was an Israeli nuclear weapons test conducted in S. Africa, special measures were used to keep this information secret. Partial declassification was made only in 2016. Revealing the nuclear weapons program carried out in S. Africa greatly contributed to A. M. Kozlov's activity in 1977-1982. Our 2015 report on Turkey's nuclear capabilities [6] due to circumstances prepared on the day of his death, was dedicated to A. Kozlov's memory.

¹¹ On May 2000, Israel conducted its first secret launch of nuclear-capable cruise missiles (CCMs) in the Indian Ocean from two German-made Dolphin-class submarines, see “Popeye Turbo”, FAS, Updated Tuesday, June 20, 2000, <https://nuke.fas.org/guide/israel/missile/popeye-t.htm> (download date: 08.08.2015). It was noted that the Popeye Turbo missile is capable of delivering a 200 kg warhead to a distance of 1500 km. It is believed that these warheads can have a nuclear charge containing 6 kg of plutonium. On January 19, 2022, it became known that testing of Dolphin-II class submarines provided for Israel had begun in Germany [7]. It is reported that these submarines are equipped with vertical launch systems (VLS), which provide Israel with the possibility of underwater vertical launching of cruise and ballistic rockets.

¹² Several days after India carried out similar tests [8].

¹³ One day before Israel. Although Israel signed CTBT but has not ratified it.

¹⁴ Conclusion of Additional Protocols with IAEA. Status List. As of 11 October 2024, <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/20/01/sg-ap-status.pdf> (download date: 01.11.2024).

¹⁵ On January 16, 1979, the Shah of Iran Reza Pahlavi left Iran, and in February emigrant Ayatollah R. Khomeini returned to Iran.

¹⁶ Development of the ballistic missiles of Dong Feng (“Eastern Wind”) family started in China as early as since mid-1960s with the use of the Soviet rocket technologies.

¹⁷ DF-3A. *Encyclopedia Astronautica*, <http://www.astronautix.com/d/df-3a.html> (download date: 18.04.2012).

displayed its DF-3A missiles for the first time 28 years after they were delivered, during a military parade on April 29, 2014 [12].

In January 2014, it was revealed [13] that between 2007 and 2013 China, with the assistance of the United States, provided Saudi Arabia with solid-fuel CSS-5 (DF-21) ballistic missiles. They are lighter (about 15 tons) and have a shorter range of about 1700–2000 km but are more accurate than the DF-3A missiles, more flexible for operational use. Finally, in early 2022, it became known that Saudi Arabia had started an extensive work on the development, testing, and production of its own ballistic missiles [12]. It should be noted that until 2011¹⁸, Saudi Arabia surpassed all countries in our region in terms of ballistic missiles, including Israel, India, and Pakistan. A circumstance that consistently escapes the attention of our analysts. According to a number of unofficial sources, the “China–Saudi Arabia” strategic partnership includes China's “*provision of nuclear capabilities*” to S. Arabia in the event of a significant and sharp violation of the strategic balance in the region [11]¹⁹.

We will not specifically address Turkey's impressive missile development program here: relevant publications are available on the website of the “ARVAK” analytical center²⁰.

Iran is understandably concerned about all these facts, especially considering the importance of the Iran-Saudi Arabia strategic competition in the geopolitical developments of our region [14]²¹.

Third, the adoption of the “Middle East Nuclear Weapon Free Zone” program, initiated by Egypt and Iran back in 1974 – five years before Islamic Revolution in Iran, has been consistently (24 times) failed in the UN due to the Israeli and US opposition²². More than a clear signal to Iran about exposedly biased US position on this issue.

¹⁸ When the solid-fuel three-stage Jericho-3 ballistic missile with a range of 6.5-7.0 thousand km was put on combat duty in Israel. See *Missile Threat*, “*Jericho 3*”, Updated April 23, 2024, <https://missilethreat.csis.org/missile/jericho-3/> (download date: 11.11.2024).

¹⁹ Note that just these circumstances were the basis for the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia at the beginning of the year, in which China's role was crucial, see “*Wang Yi: The Facilitation of the Reconciliation Between Saudi Arabia and Iran Sets a New Example of Political Settlement of Hotspot Issues*”. PRC MFA, (01.09.2024), https://www.mfa.gov.cn/rus/wjdt/wshd/202401/t20240110_11221089.html (download date: 23.08.2024). However, today, when an almost fatal blow has been inflicted to the “axis of resistance” that Iran has been building for years, and about 7 months after the deaths of Iranian President I. Raisi and Foreign Minister H. Abdollahian in a plane crash (19.05.2024), H. Abdollahian's statement made on August 19, 2023, that “Riyadh and Tehran intend to independently ensure security in the Persian Gulf and the region” sounds under a completely different light. “*Saudi Arabia and Iran agree to independently ensure security in the region*” (in Rus.), TASS (19.08.2023), <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/18544163> (download date: 13.02.2024).

²⁰ *Simavoryan, A.* “Turkey-Pakistan military-technical cooperation” (in Arm.). ARVAK, 04.08.2024, <https://arvak.am/ռնրոփիւ-պսկիստան-համագործակցոյն/> (download date: 13.12.2024).(in Arm.).

²¹ Let us note two facts, little known among us. First, by order and financial support from Saudi Arabia, in 2016, the Ukrainian Design Bureau (OKB) “Yuzhnoye” and the Pavlograd Chemical Plant began developing the “Hrim-2” solid-fuel tactical ballistic missile [15]. On November 21, 2024, the Russian Aerospace Forces struck the “YuzMash” plant, where OKB was located, with hypersonic multiple individually-targeted (MIRV) inert (non-combat) warheads. The strike was carried out by two-stage solid-fuel medium range “Oreshnik” ballistic missile, launched from the “Kapustin Yar” missile base (4th state central training ground of the Russian Federation) in the Astrakhan region of the Russian Federation. This is the first time in the history of conflicts that “euro-strategic” ballistic missile with MIRV warheads, especially designed to carry nuclear charges, have been used in combat conditions. Fortunately, without nuclear charges.

In January 2020, it became known that “Tetra Tech” company (in partnership with AECOM) had been selected to provide engineering services and support to Saudi Arabia's missile program [16]. Interestingly, “Tetra Tech” had been providing consulting services to Armenia in the energy and transport sectors for years, as part of USAID-supported projects.

²² *Who is preventing the Middle East from becoming nuclear free?* (in Rus.). Kommersant “B” (18.11.2022), <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/5678888> (download date: 08.08.2023). Currently this reference is not active, only a reference to the comment to this article is available: “They in “B” explained, who prevent to make the Middle East

2. Iran between Scilla and Charybdis

“Why have I kept silent, held back so long, on something openly practiced in war games, at the end of which those of us who survive will at best be footnotes?”

Günter Grass, “Was gesagt werden muss», 2012.

Three circumstances mentioned above alone are sufficient to understand Iran's position on nuclear weapons. But there is another, perhaps even more important fact. *For more than half a century, nuclear weapons have been considered with all seriousness and depth in strategic and tactical scenarios dedicated to the territorial partition of and/or regime change in Iran.*

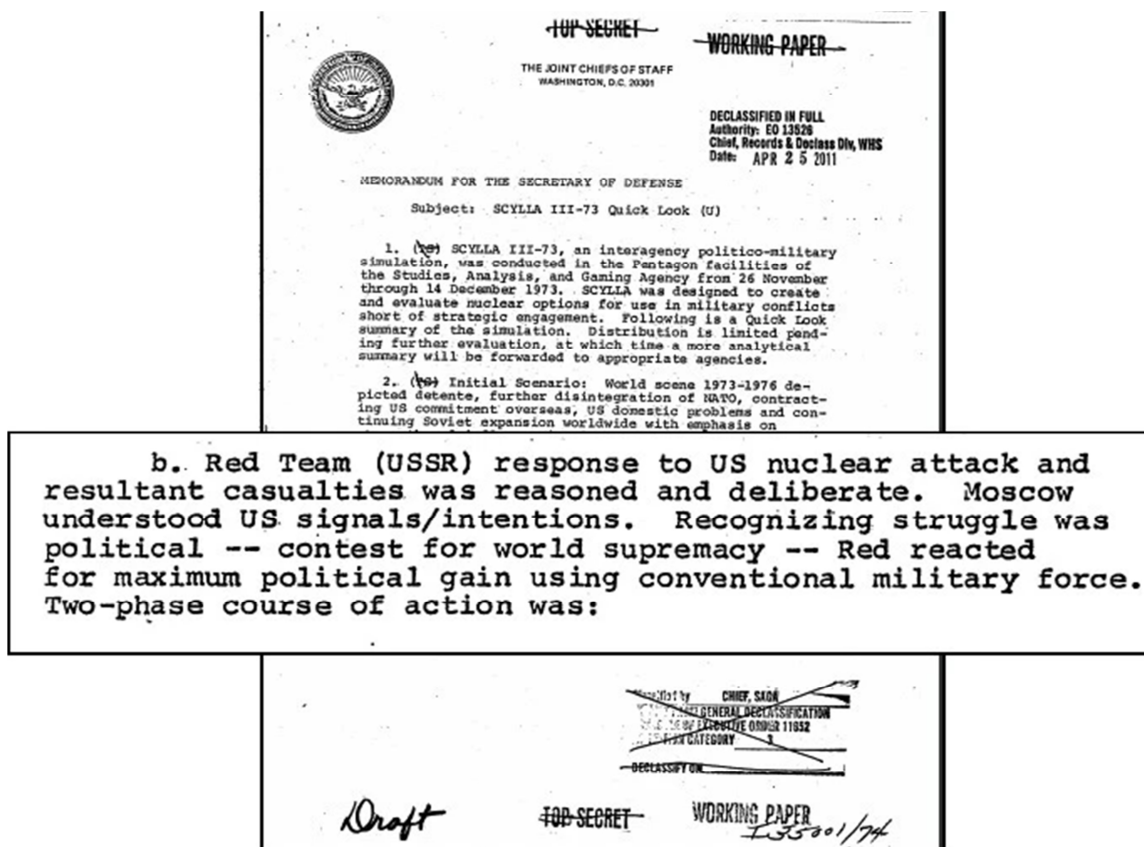


Figure 1. Excerpt from declassified material related to SCYLLA III-73, dated January 2, 1974. **Source:** [17].

2.1. SCYLLA (SCYLLA III, 1973)

In order to understand the essence of the issue, it is necessary to refer to the plans to attack Iran's national territory with nuclear weapons, more precisely, with tactical nuclear weapons (TNW). And not developed recently, in the current unprecedented tension of the Iran–Israel conflict, as many might think, but developed, played out and assessed by specialists back in the early 1970s, when, let us emphasize it specifically, Israel and Iran were strategic partners, if not allies [4].

We mean the US “SCYLLA III-73” high-level military-political exercise (war-gaming). It was a “top secret” interagency military-political exercise of the US Armed Forces, conducted by the

nuclear free”, 19.11.2022, (in Rus.), https://mt.smi.today/blog/43205751815/V--obyasnilo-kto-meshayet-sdelat-Blizhniy-Vostok-bezvadernym?utm_referrer=mirtesen.ru (download date: 20.12.2024).

Pentagon's “Studies, Analysis and Games Agency” from November 24 to December 14, 1973. This was 6 years before the Islamic Revolution in Iran and 7 years before the Iran–Iraq War.

The materials related to “*SCYLLA III-73*” were (not fully) declassified only on April 25, 2011, (see **Fig. 1**), and were published later, on December 15, 2015 [17]. The main goal of the exercise was to develop and evaluate options for using TNW in a local military conflict that would not escalate into a global nuclear war²³.

Before turning to the “*SCYLLA III-73*” exercise as it is, let us make a brief historical overview. On September 22, 1980, one year after the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the bloody Iran–Iraq War began and lasted until August 20, 1988. Iraq's invasion of Kuwait on August 2, 1990, became the prelude to the First (August 1990–February 1991) and Second (March 2003–December 2011) Gulf Wars, leading to the hanging of Saddam Hussein, the current *de facto* partition of Iraq and the formation of the current geopolitical fragility of the southern part of our region.

With this real-life chronology in mind, let us now turn to the *SCYLLA III-73* exercise. Its introduction to the alleged developments in the near future is as follows: “*In June 1976, Iraqis attempt to seize disputed territory from Kuwait by force. Iran pledges support to Kuwait and invades Iraq. As fall of Baghdad becomes imminent, USSR intervenes. Soviet military elements join Iraqis as two Soviet divisions cross USSR-Iranian border south of Caucasus. US intervention considered ‘vital’ to save Teheran*”. Let us overcome the temptation to compare this “introduction” with those developments that actually took place in 1976–1986 and state the following.

In the first phase of the *SCYLLA III-73* exercise, it turns out that the use of US conventional weapons is not enough for an effective intervention. The US President suggests considering the option of using TNW in Iran. In the first step, the White House authorizes the use of 85 TNWs in Iran, which, turns out to be insufficient. In the second phase of the exercise, already 118 TNWs are authorized for use in Iran. Of these, 74 units are free-fall thermonuclear air bombs of the B-61 family, 30 units are artillery shells, 12 units are warheads for medium-range ballistic “*Pershing II*” missiles, and 4 units are nuclear mines [1]. The results of these 118 TNWs strikes are evaluated as satisfactory.

In the endgame of the *SCYLLA III-73* exercise, it turns out that Moscow, impressed by the decisive US response, is takes retaliatory steps in a restrained, limited and “*reasonable manner*”. Moscow correctly understands the US message: “*the struggle is actually political and being waged for global dominance*”. *The USSR continues the struggle using conventional weapons, striving to obtain maximum political gain on other platforms* (see **Fig. 1**).

Let us make 3 observations that are important to us:

1. Back in the 1970s, during the period of Iran-Israel strategic cooperation, the limited use of TNW in Iran was considered by the US/NATO to be an “*effective measure and acceptable solution*”, because it did not lead to a “USSR–West” (or, as we put it today, “West–Russia”) global nuclear conflict²⁴.

²³ Almost nothing is known about other military-political exercises using the US tactical nuclear weapons, except for some of their names: BETA I, BETA II (1967), Olympiad I-79, Proud Prophet 83, DELTA-84-M etc., see [18, p.183, footnote 140] and [19, 20]. Even less is known about similar exercises of USSR/RF, France, China, UK and Israel.

²⁴ Mr. R. Pauly, a direct participant in the *SCYLLA III-73* games, wrote in 2018: “*Observation of 26 military-political wargames, conducted starting from 1958 show that mostly when deterrence of USSR fails, the US military-political elite players, for practical calculations and/or reputational reasons, were inclined to cross the threshold of applying nuclear weapons and refer to the help of TNW. Morale or the ban to deter setting a precedent operated here very seldom*”, see Reid B.C. Pauly blog, <https://www.reidpauly.com/wargames-and-crisis-simulations> (download date:

2. The *SCYLLA III-73* nuclear exercise related to Iran is intentionally vague, and bare an abnormal, if not “perverted” logic. Indeed, “*saving Iran from the invasion of the USSR*” by delivering 118 nuclear strikes on Iran, you have to agree, is an extraordinary course of action. In general, the impression is, that the real goal of the *SCYLLA III-73* exercise is not “to save” Iran, but to disarm, or divide, or impose regime change in Iran's. And all these – 6 years before the Islamic Revolution. We will come across with this “perverted” logic again later, see below.

3. The list of targets for nuclear strikes of *SCYLLA III-73* exercise remains top secret till now. It is not known from where the 12 “*Pershing*” medium-range ballistic missiles are launched, from where 30 nuclear artillery shells are fired. Neither we know from which air bases approximately 40 aircraft carrying 74 B-61 thermonuclear bombs will take off, and how 4 nuclear mines will be delivered to Iran. And, finally, where are these 118 targets for the TNW strikes are located on the Iranian territory? These are rhetorical questions of course – as we said, the data related to *SCYLLA III-73* TNW target list is kept undisclosed till today. Although it is not difficult to guess that in the realities of 1970s Iran could have been hit with these strikes from the territory of the Federal Republic of Germany, Turkey, Pakistan and Israel. Today, perhaps Azerbaijan could be added to the list of these countries.



Figure 2. Breakaway republics of “Ahurastan” (left) and “Luristan» (right – light green). “Luristan” includes Iran's Kermanshah (1), Ilam (2), Lorestan (3) and Khuzistan (4) provinces. GAAT, 2012–2013.

Source: [23, 24].

Besides, let us remind that according to *SCYLLA III-73*, “*two Soviet divisions from the South Caucasus crossed the USSR–Iran border*”. It can be assumed that at least some, or even – most, of the targets were likely located in the territories of Armenia (and Azerbaijan) adjacent to Iran. Well, the Gehyan steppe²⁵, stretched along the left bank of the Araks River, could have turned into hell already back in the 70s of the last century. Just as it became hell for us in 2020, during the 44-Day War that led to our military defeat. Just as it became the starting point of the tragic air flight of the president of the Islamic Republic of Iran E. Raisi and foreign minister H. Abdollahian on May 19, 2024.

08.08.2023). Note, that 73 years after atomic bombing of Japan by the USA, speaking about “*bat to deter setting a precedent*” seems a little late.

²⁵ Infrastructure and War. From Kursk NPP to Khudaferin HPP. “ARVAK” analytical center, 10.08.2024, <https://arvak.am/լոկոմոտիվ-առկա-ի-տնտեսական-հիմունքներ/> (download date: 07.11.2024).

2.2. CHARYBDIS (GAAT, 2012–2013)

In order not to create the impression that we are talking about things long gone, and that the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, or the collapse of the USSR in 1991 changed the essence of geopolitical balance of power in our region, we should also refer to the GAAT (Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Turkey) exercise of the US Army High Command. We have already had the opportunity to address it in the past, see [21, Appendix 3, pp. 41-47] and [6]. Now, it would be useful to remind the section of the GAAT exercise manual of 2012–2013 academic year that summarizes the developments expected by the GAAT to occur in 2018 in South Caucasus (GAAT Introduction [22]).

“[In 2018 in Armenia] President S. Sarkisian (a native of Nagorno-Karabakh) and head of the Republican Party of Armenia is re-elected for a third five-year term as the President of Armenia. Azerbaijan President I. Aliyev completes his third term and leaves office. Prime Minister Artur Rasizadze succeeds him and embarks on a moderate course of democratic reform.

*Based on suppression of the SAPP²⁶ by the Azerbaijani government in July 2018, the SAPA²⁷ makes its first attack on Azerbaijani Security Forces. Responding to a Government of Azerbaijan request, Turkey bases an F-16 Squadron at Baku to protect oil survey vessels in the Caspian Sea. In response to SAPA activity and a request from the Government of AZ, US Army SOF commence limited FID Operations with the Azerbaijani military (headquarters in Baku). US launches operation of its expedition corps together with Azerbaijan's (and Georgia's) armed forces. EU provides additional economic assistance to Georgia and Azerbaijan. At the same time, the Autonomous Republic of Luristan is formed in Iran's southwest [22, p. 1.16-1.18]” (See **Fig. 2**).*

We repeat that these were perceptions of the developments that would take place in the South Caucasus in 2018–2019 by the GAAT 2012–2013 academic year. Let's once again restrain the temptation to compare them with the actual developments of real 2018, or with the course of the 2016 Four-Day War, or with 44-Day War of 2020. Instead, let us single out the following circumstances important for us here.

First, the 2012 GAAT exercise, while generally adequately assessing president S. Sargsyan's intention to maintain power during the “3rd term”²⁸, in the case of Azerbaijan, for the unknown reason, assumes I. Aliyev's voluntary departure from power and the start of a reform phase.

Next, GAAT is not a nuclear exercise as such, and the available documentation related to it does not imply the use of TNW. Although, given the US strategic culture, there is no doubt that exercises involving the use of TNW related to the South Caucasus and Iran have been, are being, and will be considered in the future. But even to the extent that GAAT is known to us today, some “nuclear” elements are clearly visible in it.

Thus, according to [22, p. 1.19-1.21] *“On November 2019, FKM²⁹ attack the Armenian nuclear power plant (ANPP) at Metsamor. Radiation leaks are detected in neighboring countries.*

²⁶ According to GAAT, “SAPP (South Azeri Peoples Party). Originated in 2015 among the extended Azeri families that straddle the Azerbaijan–Iran Border. The Party's failure to provide tangible results gave birth to its military arm (SAPA) in 2016”.

²⁷ According to GAAT, “South Azeri People's Army (SAPA)” are the South Azerbaijan's Azeri radicals, identifying themselves with the Azeris of their Northern Azerbaijan. At the initial stage they were armed and trained by Iran, “now” they are supported by “Ahurastan”.

²⁸ The only “little thing” left out in GAAT, is the amendment to the state structure and Constitution of the Republic of Armenia undertaken for this purpose (constitutional referendum of December 6, 2015).

Armenia accuses Azerbaijan of covertly supporting the FKM attack. Russia keeps far from developments, being busy with domestic problems (secessionist movement in Tatarstan)³⁰. RF agrees to the operation of the US/NATO coalition forces in the Transcaucasia, putting forward the following conditions: 1. to recognize the presence of its armed forces in S. Ossetia and Abkhazia; 2. to ensure the transit of Azerbaijani gas and oil in agreed amounts by Russian pipelines”.



Figure 3. The insignia of the 151st Squadron of the Turkish Air Force on the theme of the Artsakh War, against the background of F-16s stationed at the Lankaran airport [27]. *By permission of H. Khachikyan.*

If the GAAT alleged terrorist attack by Azerbaijani forces on the Metsamor ANPP in 2012 could seem a slight exaggeration, this episode of GAAT no longer seems so after the threats against the ANPP made by high-ranking officials in Baku on the eve of the 44-Day War in 2020³¹. Well, after February 2022, when the Ukrainian Zaporozhye NPP, the largest in Europe, was repeatedly shelled,

²⁹ According to GAAT, “Free Karabakh Movement” (FKM) – an *Insurgent Group composed of Azeri refugees driven from Nagorno-Karabakh by the Armenians in 1993. Their goal is to force Armenian withdrawal from NK and the right of return. Armenia has accused the Government of AZ of providing covert assistance to them*” [22, p. 1.11]. An attentive analyst cannot help but notice the genetic similarity between the “Free Karabakh Movement” and the “Free Syrian Movement” (latter becoming “Free Syrian Army” on July 29, 2011). Especially in the context of the transfer of several thousand Islamist militants from Syria to the Fizuli and Geyan steppes with Turkish support in 2020, see “Turkey deploying Syrian fighters to help ally Azerbaijan, two fighters say”. Reuters, September 28, 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-armenia-azerbaijan-turkey-syria-idUSKBN26J25A/?fbclid> (download date: 01.10.2022). Today, when Aleppo and Damascus fell, and the Assad regime collapsed in Syria, here in Syunik, the “reemergence” of these Islamist militants once again comes to the geopolitical agenda.

³⁰ Being busy conducting a “special military operation in Ukraine”, as we would say today:

³¹ “Aliyev also a nuclear terrorist”: “Aravot”, July 23, 2020, (in Arm.), <https://www.aravot.am/2020/07/23/1125289/> (download date: 28.08.2023).

and Ukrainian forces invaded the Kursk region in the general direction to the Kursk NPP³², such behavior seems to be becoming ordinary.

In addition, as was mentioned above, the GAAT s scenario states that “*in response to Azerbaijan’s request, Turkey is sending a squadron of F-16 fighter-bombers to Azerbaijan*”. GAAT does not specify the types of these aircraft or their initial deployment base in Turkey. However, it should be noted that the F-16 type C and D versions are dual-purpose aircrafts [1], capable of carrying out nuclear missions. Furthermore, some of the B-61 family of thermonuclear bombs deployed in Turkey are intended for the Turkish Air Force's F-16C/D dual-purpose aircraft. Thus, although GAAT is not a nuclear weapons exercise, it contains elements related to nuclear security and nuclear weapons delivery systems.

We can only remind that during the real war, Turkey sent a batch of F-16 fighter-bombers to Azerbaijan, which played a significant role during the combat operations in 2020 (see **Fig. 3**):

Next, the restart of the war in NKR in 2018–2019 was considered as an “*Iranian provocation*”. Even more, at the 4th phase of GAAT exercise it is envisages the creation of exclusion zones in NKR and adjacent territories, as well as along the Azerbaijani-Iranian border, which “*should be handed over to the UN or NATO peacekeeping forces and/or Azerbaijan's defense forces to ensure security*” ([25], Objective 16, Effect 16-1). Considering that the presence of the Turkish armed forces in the operation area is envisaged, it is not difficult to imagine the nature of this “*peacekeeping force*” and the consequence of all this.

Another important circumstance is that the implementation of the military operation, planned by GAAT in 2018, leads to the dismemberment of Iran the following year, in 2019. Even the submission to external pressure regarding its nuclear programs does not save Iran [26]. In any case, according to the GAAT exercise, Iran's dismemberment befalls like the merciless fate in ancient Greek tragedies.

Finally, it is also important that with the formation of “Ahurastan”, separated from Iran, the number of littoral states of the Caspian Sea increases from 5 (Russia, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Azerbaijan) to 6, which qualitatively changes the logic of the “midline” “delimitation and demarcation” of the Caspian Sea³³. This will prevent Iran's claims to the “Alov–Sharg” and other oil and gas fields in the South Caspian, as they will now be located in the “Ahurastan” section of the Caspian Sea coast under Azerbaijani-Turkish control (in 2012-13, we had the opportunity to state that demarcation of the Caspian Sea along the median line would necessarily lead to “delimitation and demarcation” between the RA and the AzR) [21]).

Let us conclude this section of the article with a map compiled in 2017 by perhaps the most famous specialist in this field, Hans M. Kristensen (see **Fig. 4**). Here depicted are US/NATO alleged volley targets in Russia, China and Iran, to be hit by approximately 1000 TNWs. As we can see, about four dozen of them are aimed at Iran, 6 of which are in our immediate neighborhood³⁴.

³² “Infrastructure and War: From Kursk NPP to Khudaferin HPP”. “ARVAK” analytical center, (10.08.2024), (in Arm.), <https://arvak.am/լրուպւղի-ւտլ-ից-խունաֆերին-իտլ/> (download date: 15.08.2024).

³³ It is about the so called, “*Steiner points*”. For a triangle, there is only one such point, for a quadrangle, there are two, for a pentagon (the current state of the Caspian Sea) there are three, and for a hexagon (the state of the Caspian Sea with the formation of “Ahurastan”) they no longer exist. For more details about the Caspian Sea median division and the *Steiner points*, see [21, Appendix 3].

³⁴ For the targets of US/NATO nuclear strikes in the USSR and Armenian SSR, see [1].

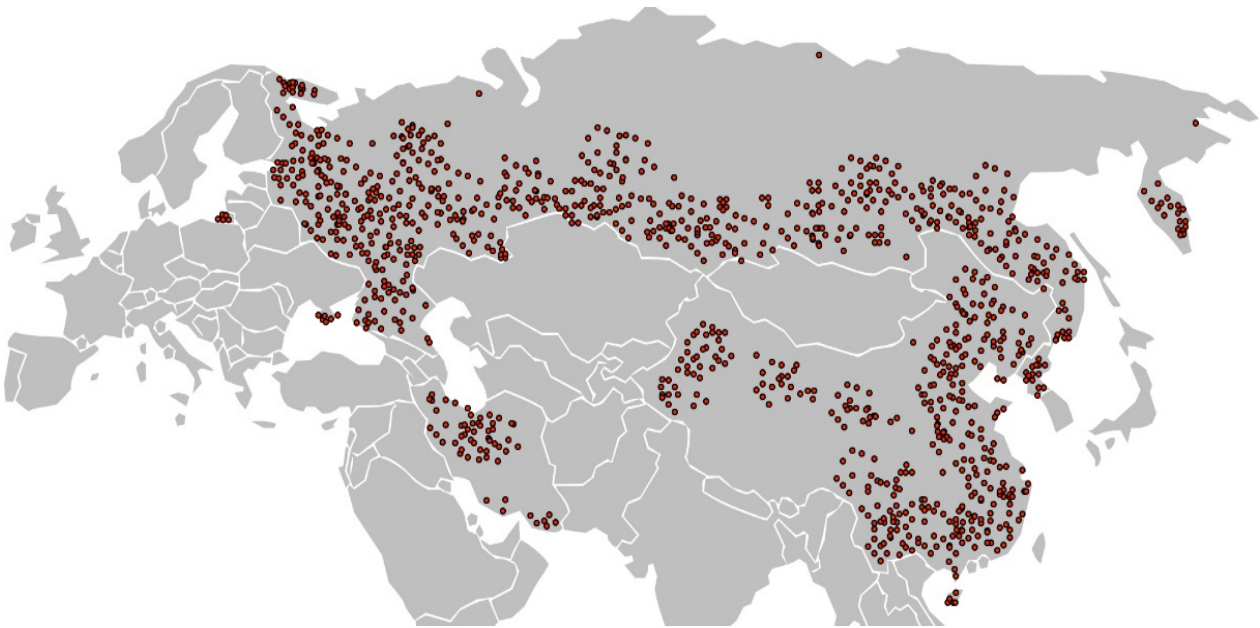


Figure 4. Targets of the alleged strike by 1000 TNW units in Russia, China and Iran. Source: [H. M. Kristensen, 2017](#).

3. Iran, Armenia, Region

“The Middle East is quieter today than it has been two decades”.
Jake Sullivan, the U.S. President's National Security Advisor,
29.09.2023³⁵.

Due to circumstances, or more precisely, as a result of the ruthless logic of history, I am finishing my article on the days when the cradles of civilization, Aleppo (01.12.2024)³⁶ and Damascus (08.12.2024)³⁷, fell as a result of the attacks of Islamist militants that had begun on November 27, 2024. On December 8, 2024, Syrian President B. Assad left the country and departed for Moscow from the Hmeimim airbase³⁸. Today, Israel and Turkey are essentially thorning to parts Syria³⁹.

³⁵ *National Security Adviser on Threats to Democracy*. The Atlantic Festival, September 28-29, 2023, <https://www.c-span.org/video/?530829-1/national-security-adviser-threats-democracy> (download date: 05.10.2024, see from 00:27:30). See also [28].

³⁶ *“Who and how captured Aleppo? 10 main questions about the new war in Syria”*. BBC, Russian Service, December 3, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/ce8n1g9zwy1y> (download date: 14.12.2024). (in Rus.).

³⁷ *“Bashar Assad removed, rebels captured Damascus”*. BBC, Russian Service, December 8, 2024, <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/c9388exdk4qo> (download date: 14.12.2024).

³⁸ *“Assad, his family arrive in Moscow”*. TASS (8.12.2024), <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/22612655> (download date: 14.12.2024). It is noteworthy that on the eve of the fall of Syria, on November 26, 2024, Turkish Defense Minister Y. Güler, during his speech at the Planning and Budget Committee of the Grand National Assembly, stated that the United States no longer objects to the deployment of Russian S-400 anti-aircraft systems in Turkey, and that Turkey may return to the 5th generation F-35 fighter program. Moreover, today Turkey intends to receive 40 such fighters, instead of the previously negotiated 6, see *“Defense Minister Yaşar Güler stated that the U.S. may finally be willing to deliver the F-35 jets to Turkey”*, The Aviationist, November 26, 2024, <https://theaviationist.com/2024/11/26/turkey-resubmits-offer-to-purchase-f-35-jets/> (download date: 15.12.2024).

³⁹ *“Turkish division of Syria”*. Novaya Gazeta Europe (11.12.2024), <https://novayagazeta.eu/articles/2024/12/11/turetskii-razdel-sirii>. *“Benjamin Netanyahu says Golan Heights will remain part of Israel for eternity”*. RIA Novosti (09.12.2024) (in Rus.), <https://ria.ru/20241209/netanyakhu-1988277248.html>. *“Turkish General Staff Receives Order to Shoot Down Israeli Air Force Planes in Syria”*. Voennoye Obozreniye (14.12.2024) (in Rus.),

This chain of this violent and tragic events can be traced back to October 7, 2023, when Hamas militants attacked Israel and took hundreds of hostages. This was followed by Israeli counterattacks, initially against Hamas, including a full-scale invasion to the Gaza Strip by the Israeli military on October 27, 2023 (this operation, called the “The Swords of Iron War”, continues to this day). Then, against the military structures and infrastructure of “Hezbollah”, positioned in Lebanon. After the September bombings, regular units of the Israeli Armed Forces invaded Lebanon on October 1, 2024 (“Operation Northern Arrow”). Two factors from these multi-layered and complex processes – the technological and chronological, should be highlighted.

The Israeli strike on Hezbollah included precision air-missile strikes, as well as the remote and/or online detonation of various electronic “gadgets” (pagers, portable radios, cell phones, office equipment, etc.). As a result of these high-tech combined strikes, Hezbollah's senior and supreme command was almost completely beheaded, and operational communication links were paralyzed⁴⁰. Such a large-scale use of “gadgets” opened a new chapter in the ongoing hybrid wars, bringing such “quasi-combat” operations closer to mere acts of terror⁴¹.

The next factor concerns the chronology of the aforementioned operations. Let us remind that the previous large-scale invasion to the Gaza Strip by Israeli troops (“Cast Lead” Operation)⁴² started on December 27, 2008. That is, during the phase of the American presidential elections, which in the USA is called “*Presidential Transition*” and is regulated by a separate law⁴³. During this period (05.11.2008–20.01.2009), the presidential power in the United States was passing to the president-elect B. Obama and vice-president J. Biden of the Democratic Party, who won the elections, signaling a new huge swing in global politics and geopolitics – from the US Republican Party to the Democratic Party. It is not difficult to see that the events in our region described above, also took place on the eve of the 2024 US presidential elections, and their peak, the dismemberment of Syria, occurred already during the “presidential transition” from 05.11.2024 to 20.01.2025.

But the chain of this tragic events can, and should, be traced back to 1:00 PM, September 19, 2023, when after a 282-day blockade (12.12.2022–19.09.2023), Azerbaijani regular troops attacked Stepanakert and Nagorno-Karabakh, which resulted in biblical exodus of Armenian population from Artsakh. This choice of starting point seems more appropriate for us, because it places the dynamics of the Artsakh conflict in the context of the US presidential election cycles.

<https://topwar.ru/255704-smi-genshtab-turcii-poluchil-prikaz-sbivat-samolety-vvs-izrailja-v-sirii.html> (download date: 14.12.2024).

⁴⁰ “Axios reveals Israel's purpose in Lebanon electronic device explosion”. RBC (18.09.2024) (in Rus.), <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/18/09/2024/66eaed749a79473a6a4048f7>, “Hezbollah” Device Explosions: Questions Still Needing Answers”. BBC (21.09.2024) (in Rus.), <https://www.bbc.com/russian/articles/c4g49ll4oego> (download date: 17.12.2024).

⁴¹ Assassination of the commander of the Russian Armed Forces' radiation, chemical and bacteriological defense in Moscow on December 17, 2017, by means of a remote online explosion of a parked self-propelled scooter, can be attributed to this series, see “The head of the chemical defense forces, general Kirillov, died in the explosion in Moscow”. RBC (17.12.2024), (in Rus.), <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/17/12/2024/676108279a7947b9cb09c769> (download date: 17.12.2024).

⁴² *Israel/Gaza, Operation “Cast Lead” - 22 Days of Death and Destruction*. AMNESTY INTERNATIONAL (02.07.2009), <https://www.amnesty.org/en/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/mde150212009eng.pdf> (download date: 01.05.2022).

⁴³ *The Presidential Transition Act, 1963*. See <https://presidentialtransition.org/transition-resources/transition-timeline/> (download date: 11.12.2024).

In any case, all these happened according to our geopolitical interpretation of “Farley’s Law”⁴⁴, according to which wars and geopolitical escalations in the (Greater) Middle East tend to flare up in the years of US presidential election. Especially when the end of one-party domination, or an 8-year double term of one of the two American parties is expected. The astonishingly inadequacy of J. Sullivan’s assessments of September 29, 2023, cited in the introduction to this section of our article, made just 10 days after the biblical exodus of the Armenian population from Artsakh, and just 48 hours before the next bloody outbreak in the Middle East (“Operation Northern Arrow”), are yet another proof that neither we nor the world have well mastered the peculiarities of dynamics of war and peace in connection with the US presidential electoral cycles⁴⁵.

Let me remind once again that the April 2016 Four-Day War and the Artsakh 2020 44-Day War began on the eve of the US presidential elections, when another swing of the great US “Democratic Party–Republican Party” pendulum was expected. All we and Artsakh had to do was to survive until January 20, 2025.

Alas, we did not succeed.

3.1. MACRO-REGIONS (Competition)

“Reality of our days is regionalism, not globalization”
Shannon O’Neil, 2022 [29]

After nuclear weapons, the second major driving force shaping the real geopolitics of our region and the world, is the formation of separate and competing *macro-regions*. In our early studies, we named them as “Worlds of the World” [30, 31]. In the reports of US National Intelligence Council (NIC)⁴⁶ [32], the IMF [33], and the Davos Economic Forum [34] this phenomenon is referred to as “*Fragmented World*”. Russian-speaking analysts prefer to talk about the “*end of the Western globalization*” and the establishment of a “*multipolar world order*”. In an academic sense, the origins of this phenomenon can be found in the works of the “second wave” of the French “*Annales*” historical school (J. Duby, F. Braudel, J. le Goff) [35], as well as in the studies by D. Lorenz [36], S. Huntington [37], and I. Wallerstein [38].

For Iran and us, this phenomenon manifests itself as fierce competition between two economic and political integration processes unfolding before our eyes. One of them has a latitude orientation, stretching along the “West–East” axis, the other is longitudinal, stretching along the “North–South” axis. (See **Fig. 5**).

⁴⁴ Named after J. A. Farley (1888–1976), longtime friend, then political foe of the president F.D. Roosevelt, legendary US Postmaster General. See “A shocking loss of adequacy in perception of reality”. Caucasian geopolitical club, December 31, 2016, (in Rus.), <https://kavkazgeoclub.ru/content/porazitelnaya-poterya-adekvatnosti-v-vospriyatii-realnosti> (download date: 16.12.2024). For the geopolitical interpretation of “Farley’s Law” see also [14].

⁴⁵ Sullivan’s assessment was so out of date and embarrassing that the editors of *Foreign Affairs* magazine took the unprecedented step in retroactively editing J. Sullivan’s article, see “*Jake Sullivan boasted exactly a year ago about how quiet the Middle East was — as it now sits on cusp of all-out war*”. New York Post, Sep. 29, 2024, <https://nypost.com/2024/09/29/us-news/one-year-ago-jake-sullivan-boasted-about-middle-east-being-the-quietest-in-two-decades/> (download date: 16.12.2024).

⁴⁶ For “Global Trends” reports of the US National Intelligence Council (NIC) and mechanisms of their preparation see *Marjanyan, A. H.* “Our future through the eyes of NIC”, Noravank, “21st CENTURY”, N2 (24), 2009, also: <https://cyberleninka.ru/article/n/nashe-budushchee-glazami-nic/viewer> (download date: 14.12.2024).

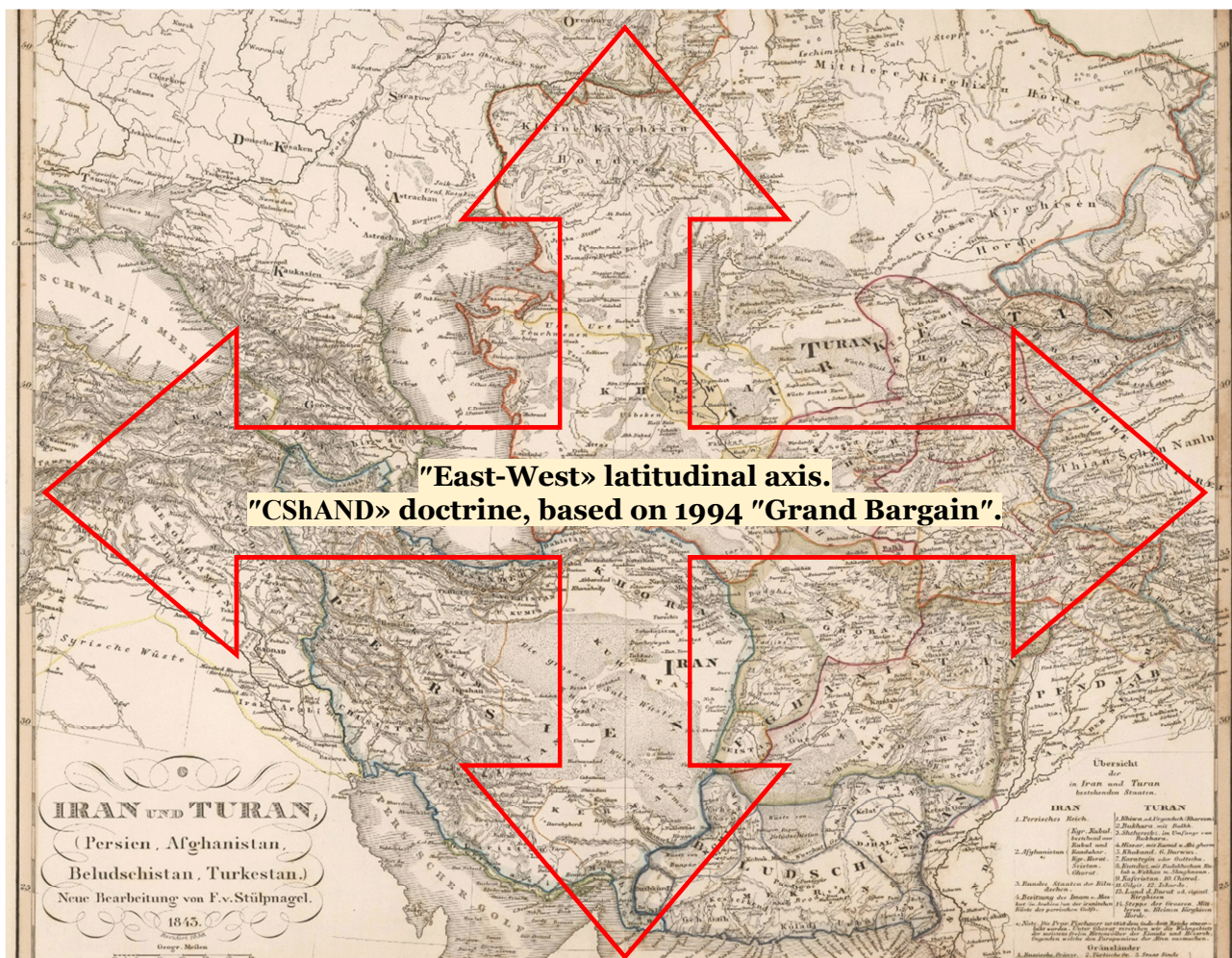


Figure 5. The communication “Cross” of our region, depicted on “Iran and Turan” German map of 1843.
Source [Marjanyan, 2024]⁴⁷

Over the past 30 years, development of the “West–East” axis has taken place within the framework of the so-called “Clinton–Shevardnadze–Aliyev (Senior)–Netanyahu–Demirel” doctrine (“CShAND” doctrine), based on the agreements reached during the “Great Bargain” of 1994 [2, 3]. For us, it was expressed in the almost complete blockade of Armenia, isolation from the development of the regional energy and transportation infrastructure and suppressed development of the socio-economic system. Ultimately, all this predetermined the military defeat of the Armenian side in the Karabakh conflict. All this time, the “North–South” communication axis in the region has remained suppressed and underdeveloped.

Constraints on the development along the 'North–South' axis are also evident in the case of Iran. However, due to its physical dimensions, huge natural resources and some geographical peculiarities of the territory, as well as thanks to the diversity and complex nature its economy, this “strangling” influence is more moderate. However, Iran is paying a tangible and painful price for regional isolation along the West–East axis. This situation is even more pronounced in the case of Russia, especially after 2014.

⁴⁷ Marjanyan A. H., Armenia, Iran and Region (in Rus.). International Conference “CAUCASUS AND THE IRANIAN WORLD”, Institute of Oriental Studies, RAU. 12.12.2024.

Currently, two other processes are superimposed on this general picture. We mean the Organization of Turkic-Speaking States (OTS) and the Chinese “Community of a Common Destiny” (人類命運共同體) global project, known to us as the “*One Belt and One Road*” project. Understandably, our primary concern is OTS. Let us just remind the “*Shushi Declaration*” of June 15, 2021, on the alliance between Azerbaijan and Turkey and the “*Karabakh Declaration*” of the OTS informal summit, signed in Shushi on July 6, 2024. Let us note several facts which we believe are important to us:

First, the OTS center of gravity is within the post-Soviet space, where it inevitably competes with the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and other Russia-led integration processes. However, unlike the CIS, the OTS has broader geopolitical borders, stretching to Eastern Europe (Hungary), Mediterranean (Northern Cyprus) and NATO’s area of operations (Turkey). Thus, the OTS has a wider scope for maneuver and more flexible and strong geopolitical leverages. We saw this recently, when “Turan” almost simultaneously hit a heavy blow to Iran and Russia in Syria⁴⁸. And as a prelude to this, it hit Russia in Abkhazia⁴⁹ (November 2024), using here Russia's clumsy conduct of investment policy and the issue of sharing the output of the Inguri hydropower plant.

Second, development of the unified Turkic alphabet by the OTS countries, compilation of unified terminological dictionaries in various fields, preparation of unified school textbooks on the history of the Turkic world, and, especially, creation of the “Middle Corridor” from Central Asia to Turkey and Europe, bypassing Russia – this “infrastructural backbone” of the OTS, one of the components of which is the so-called “*Zangezur Corridor*” – come to prove that here we are dealing with a well-thought-out and consistently implemented program for the formation of a real macro-region.

It will inevitably enter into competition, if not conflict, with the efforts of Iran, India (more precisely – Bharat), and Russia's on formation of their own macro-regions. Especially if we consider that the major integration projects of the contemporary Russian Federation lack an ideological basis and have weak infrastructural connections⁵⁰, while the OTS has both.

Third, the geographical distribution of Turkic-speaking member-countries of the OTS has the same latitudinal nature, stretching along the “West–East” axis, which is naturally in line with the goals of the above-mentioned “CShAND” doctrine. First of all, in relation to the transportation of hydrocarbons, uranium and other natural resources from the Central Asia and the Caspian Basin to Europe through Azerbaijan and Turkey, as well as the expansion of NATO's area of responsibility to the Caspian Basin.

Fourth, the “One Belt and Road” project is infrastructural component of the global vision of the “Community of Common Destiny”, proclaimed by Xi Jinping, the General Secretary of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC), at the 18th Congress of the CPC in November

⁴⁸ “*Turkey is behind the overthrow of Assad, says Trump*”. Armenpress (16.12.2024) (in Rus.), <https://armenpress.am/ru/article/1207614> (download date: 17.12.2024).

⁴⁹ “*Abkhazia: Turkish trace in the attempted coup?*” Yerevan Today (18.11.2024) (in Rus.), <https://ru.yerevan.today/120920>, see also: “*What interests does Turkey pursue in Abkhazia?*” Voennoye Obozreniye (Military Review), (24.12.2015) (in Rus.), <https://topwar.ru/73783-kakie-interesy-presleduet-turciya-v-abhazii.html> (download date: 17.12.2024).

⁵⁰ Probably with the exception of the recently created “nuclear sharing” infrastructure and agreements of the Russia-Belarus Union State. Which, to some extent is an effort to counterbalance nuclear “burden sharing” of US/NATO and matching the “strategic ambiguity” regarding the use of nuclear weapons by NATO [1, 2].

2012, also has a latitudinal orientation: from East to West. Inevitably it will (already did) enter into a complex interaction, even a conflict, with the Western “CShAND” doctrine.

Using the terms of dialectical logic, we can say that the Western “CShAND” doctrine based on the “Great Bargain of 1994” (thesis), having met the Eastern program of the “Community of Common Destiny” (antithesis) since 2012, is being resolved before our eyes, in the new “Great Bargain of 2024–25” (synthesis). This new “Great Bargain”, usually called the “*New Yalta*” or “*New Potsdam*”⁵¹ will shape the geopolitical essence of processes in our region and the entire world.

3.2. CONNECTIVITY (Cooperation and Communication projects)

*“And admittedly, I am silent no more,
because of the hypocrisy of the West I'm tired;
I also hope it might free many from silence”*
Günter Grass, “Was gesagt werden muss”, 2012.

In practical terms for Armenia, Iran and our region all these means the following. The rapid development of integration processes along the “West–East” axis has led to stagnation and degradation of the “North–South” axis, resulting in the imbalance of geopolitical vectors in our region⁵². Until recently (November 9, 2020, and February 23, 2022) it occurred due to following reasons:

- 1) Russia's slow and inconsistent position in the development of the “North–South” axis;
- 2) Armenia's chaotic, sometimes contradictory actions in building a truly strategic partnership with Iran;
- 3) historical underestimation of the geopolitical importance of the of the “northern” direction in Iran, in particular the vague geopolitical and communication understanding of importance of the Araks Riverbed zone;
- 4) systematic underestimation of the importance of the rise of the Indian geopolitics and the role of the Indian subcontinent for the geopolitical balance in our region.

Today, more than ever it is necessary to realize the coincidence of common strategic interests of Russia, Armenia, Iran and India in the development of the “North–South” axis, the urgent need to clearly formulation of this common interests and their institutionalization. Considering the recent events in Tbilisi, it is necessary to include Georgia into these list of countries as an important component of the “North–South” communication axis.

From this perspective, the Armenian “Crossroads of Peace” project has geopolitical, and therefore – practical, meaning only if it is aimed primarily at the development of the “North–South” axis of this cross. Which implies a review of the current policy of Armenia's alienation from the BRICS and the rapid implementation of a number of programs. Such as the construction of a new high-voltage power line between Armenia and Iran, full implementation of the “Electricity for Gas” agreement, construction of the Meghri and Uzhtubin hydroelectric power plants on the Araks River. And, most

⁵¹ For more details see: “A new game begins, the game of the Great Yalta”. “168 Jam” (12.11.2024) (in Arm.), <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7uMKb-RzXuM> (download date: 16.12.2024).

⁵² From an academic perspective, noteworthy is the fact of the historical distribution of biological species and human communities along the “North–South” axis, pointed out by J. Diamond, compared with intensity of these process by the “West–East» axis [39], and paralleling of this phenomenon geopolitical and geo-economical processes.

importantly, the rapid and consistent implementation of the “Mumbai (India)–Chabahar (Iran)–Armenia–Georgia–St. Petersburg (Russia)” multimodal communication project (MCAGRP).

This last project is of crucial importance and serve as a cornerstone to the development of the “North–South” axis. Just as the “Middle Corridor” is an infrastructural foundation of the emerging “Turkic” macro-region, the MCAGRP should become the infrastructural backbone of *our macro-region*. It is encouraging that some progress has been here recently⁵³. However, this is not enough.

The significance of this project for landlocked Armenia is so great, that in the frame of MCAGRP the issue of free and unhindered accesses of Armenia to the High Seas should be raised. More specifically, the possibility of Armenian national berths in Chabahar (Iran) and Poti (Georgia) should be considered [40]. Like Czech Republic national berths in the port of Hamburg (Germany), or, as the port of Giurgiulesti (Moldova) at the Black Sea estuary of the Prut River

Finally, we think that it is of the utmost importance to endow the “India–Iran–Armenia–Georgia–Russia” communication corridor with its own unique, theoretical and ideological basis, softening the purely geographical overtones of its name and giving it the appropriate historical and civilizational depth. We are convinced that the most natural choice here is the term “*Aryan World*” (Airyanəm Vaējah) from Avesta. Especially considering the fact, that the peoples of these countries belong to the Indo-European language family, just like Turkic-speaking countries of the “Great Turan” belong to the linguistic family of their own.

Establishment of a long-lasting geopolitical stability for Armenia, Iran, and our entire region will depends on whether the “Turanian” or the “Western” East–West axis will be sufficiently balanced by the “Aryan World” of the North–South axis, ensuring the creation of the true “*Crossroads of Peace*” for all of us.

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