

**MILITARY AND POLITICAL RIVALRY IN THE CAUCASUS-CASPIAN  
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<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3223-427X>**Summary**

This article explores the growing role of the Caucasus-Caspian region in global geopolitical and geoeconomic processes during the Middle Ages. It provides a detailed examination of the military and political events that took place during this period and reveals the struggle of the main rival forces to establish control over the main trade routes extending from Europe and China, India and Central Asia. In this regard, the extremely important military-strategic and economic significance of one of the main branches of the Great Silk Road is shown - the famous Caspian Route, which ran along the western coast of the Caspian Sea, which became famous back in ancient times. The aim of the study is to analyze the military-political processes occurring in the region during the Middle Ages and to reveal the military events taking place from the 3rd century until the end of the 14th century in the region, which was subjected to spontaneous geo-ethnopolitical pressure from successive diverse military-political forces.

In the course of studying this problem, the main responsibilities were to highlight the great migrations of peoples, as well as the invasions of the Arabs, Rus, Seljuks, Mongols, Golden Horde and Timurids, which coincided with the directions of the main world trade routes, including the Caspian, and constituted one of their main strategic goals. In this article, historical-chronological and comparative research methods were used to reveal the problem posed. In the final part of the article, it is noted that the Middle Ages marked the intensification of military and political rivalry in the Caucasus-Caspian region for control over the Caspian route. Beginning in the 10th century, the first signs of a renewed desire of non-Caspian states to penetrate and strengthen their position in this region by one means or another were observed. With the emergence of the powerful Ottoman Empire and strong Azerbaijani states – Ak-Koyunlu - from the mid-15th century, and then from the beginning of the 16th century – The Safavid state, the Caucasus-Caspian region became one of the key elements in the relations between Asia and Europe, which during this period acquired the character of a military-political confrontation.

**Key words:** geopolitical and geoeconomic space, continental Eurasian territories, trade routes, transport and sea routes

**ВОЕННО-ПОЛИТИЧЕСКОЕ СОПЕРНИЧЕСТВО НА КАВКАЗСКО-КАСПИЙСКОМ РЕГИОНЕ В XVI-XVII ВВ. И АЗЕРБАЙДЖАН****Нурулла Алиев**Капитан первого ранга в запасе, доктор исторических наук,  
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**Аннотация:** В статье раскрывается содержание неуклонно возрастающей роли Кавказско-Каспийского региона в общемировых геополитических и геоэкономических процессах эпохи Средневековья. Проводится детальный анализ военно-политических событий данного периода, а также освещается борьба ведущих соперничающих сил за установление контроля над магистральными торговыми путями, пролежавшими между Европой и Китаем, Индией и Центральной Азией. В этой связи показано исключительное военно-стратегическое и экономическое значение одной из ключевых ветвей Великого шёлкового пути — Прикаспийского пути, сформировавшегося ещё в древний период и проходившего вдоль западного побережья Каспийского моря.

**Целью исследования** является анализ военно-политических процессов, происходивших в Кавказско-Каспийском регионе в эпоху Средневековья, а также раскрытие военных событий с III в. по конец XIV в. на территории, подвергавшейся стихийному геополитическому давлению со стороны сменявших друг друга разнородных военно-политических сил.

В ходе исследования основное внимание уделено процессам Великого переселения народов, а также нашествиям арабов, русов, сельджуков, монголов, золотоордынцев и тимуридов. Их экспансия во многом совпадала с направлениями главных мировых торговых путей, включая Прикаспийский маршрут, контроль над которым являлся одной из важнейших стратегических целей указанных сил. Для раскрытия поставленной проблемы в статье применялись историко-хронологический и сравнительный методы исследования.

В заключительной части отмечается, что эпоха Средневековья характеризуется усилением военно-политического соперничества в Кавказско-Каспийском регионе за контроль над Прикаспийским путём. Начиная с X в. наблюдаются первые признаки возобновления стремления неприкаспийских государств тем или иным способом проникнуть и закрепиться в данном регионе. С появлением с середины XV в. мощной Османской империи, а также сильных азербайджанских государств — Ак-Коюнлу и, с начала XVI в., Сефевидской державы, Кавказско-Каспийский регион превращается в один из ключевых узлов взаимодействия между Азией и Европой, приобретающего в этот период характер военно-политического противостояния.

**Ключевые слова:** геополитическое и геоэкономическое пространство, внутриконтинентальные евразийские территории, торговые пути, транспортные и морские маршруты.

## Introduction

The 16th and 17th centuries marked an intensification of military and political rivalry in the Caucasus-Caspian region for control of the Caspian route. The first signs of a renewed desire by non-Caspian states to penetrate and strengthen their positions in this region by one means or another were observed. Thus, with the emergence of the powerful Ottoman Empire and the strong Azerbaijani states of Ak Koyunlu in the mid-15th century, and then from the early 16th century, – The Safavid state, the Caucasus-Caspian region became one of the key elements in the relations between Asia and Europe, which during this period acquired the character of a military-political confrontation.



## Azerbaijan. 15th century

At the same time, in the 16th and 17th centuries, the Caucasus-Caspian direction became a priority in the Russian state's foreign policy to counter the military-political activity of the Ottoman Empire, through the establishment and development of trade, economic, and military-political relations with the Safavid Empire, for which the Ottoman Empire's dominance in the region posed a threat.



## The Safavid state of the 15th-16th centuries.

Considering the real Turkish influence in Europe in the 15th-16th centuries. and the ever-increasing international importance of transport communications in the Caucasus-Caspian region pushed a number of Western European states to create an anti-Ottoman military-political coalition with the states of Ak Koyunlu, and then the Safavids, who sought, in turn, to restore traditional trade relations with the countries of the West and reach the Black and Mediterranean Seas. During this period, the West pursued far-reaching geopolitical goals - to create favorable conditions for the upcoming colonial expansion in Asia, by pitting two powerful Eastern monarchies against each other and thereby weakening them - the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid state.

### **1. Ottoman-Safavid military-political confrontation in the Caucasus-Caspian region**



#### **Ottomans and Safavids. The confrontation between two Turkic dynasties**

In the 16th century, one of the main factors that prompted the Ottoman Empire to begin military campaigns in the East was the establishment of control over the main trade and caravan routes running through the territory of the Safavid state, access to the western coast of the Caspian Sea, for which, previously All that was needed was to conquer Shirvan and gain a foothold in Baku.

Meanwhile, the emergence in 1501 of the Safavid state, which was larger in territory than the Ak Koyunlu state and militarily and politically stronger, created a serious obstacle to the expansion of the Ottoman Empire to the East. In turn, both the founder of the Safavid state, Shah Ismail I, and subsequent Safavid rulers, sought, in alliance with European states, to inflict defeat on the Ottoman Empire, to ensure access to the Mediterranean and Black Seas, thereby establishing international trade relations in the vast state subject to them.





### The Middle East on the European map of the 16th century.

The existence of two powerful competing military-political forces in the Middle East—the Sunni Ottoman Empire and the Shiite Safavid Empire—made their clash inevitable, resulting in a series of long and bloody wars during the 16th and 17th centuries. On the other hand, these wars diverted significant forces of the Ottoman Empire and weakened its influence in the European direction.

Thus, the further aggravation of the already profound political and economic disputes between these leading Muslim countries, which also had a religious character, created favorable geopolitical conditions for the beginning of colonial conquests of Western European states in the East.



### The conquest of Kura by Shah Ismail Safavi at the head of the Qizilbash in 1500. Miniature from a manuscript in the British Museum

The transformation of the Safavid state into a powerful military and political force behind the Ottoman Empire could not fail to attract the attention of Western European diplomacy. As before, the greatest activity in this matter was shown by Venice and the Papacy, which called on the leading Western European states to immediately take advantage of this favorable condition [1, pp. 46-48]. In turn, Shah Ismail I strove, above all, to expand trade relations with European countries and obtain firearms and small arms from the West for the Qizilbash army.

However, in the end, the anti-Ottoman coalition never took place, and Shah Ismail I himself suffered a heavy defeat in the first Ottoman-Safavid war of 1514-1515.



**The Caucasus-Caspian region on a 16th-century European map.  
The Caspian Sea is referred to as the "Sea of Baku."**

The subsequent conquest of Syria and Egypt in 1515-1517, as well as vast territories in North Africa and Arabia, transformed the Ottoman Empire into a powerful empire encompassing vast land areas and waterways at the crossroads of Asia, Africa and Europe. Almost all caravan routes connecting Europe with the countries of the East came under its control.



**Battle between Shah Ismail and Shirvanshah Farrukh Yasar**

Meanwhile, the Portuguese conquests in the Indian Ocean basin, especially their establishment of control over Aden at the beginning of the 16th century, led to the Portuguese effectively breaking up the famous trade route linking the Indian Ocean basin ocean through the Red Sea and Egypt with the Mediterranean coast. After the capture of the Portuguese fleet of Ormuza, located at the entrance to the Persian Gulf, the second main route was also crossed Caravan route connecting the Indian Ocean through Hormuz, the Persian Gulf with the Mediterranean coast. The restriction of trade relations between Sefevids state and the countries of the Indian Ocean basin dealt a heavy blow to the economic connections maintained along the trade route connecting Hormuz via Tabriz, Shemakha, Baku, the Caspian Sea and the Volga

with Russia and European countries. Thus, as a result of the Ottoman and Portuguese conquests, the Safavid state found itself in a de facto economic blockade [2, p. 138].

In the first half of the 16th century, due to the unfavorable political situation in Shirvan, a decline in caravan trade routes was observed, in connection with which the importance of Baku as the main port on the sea route in the international transit silk trade increased even more. Russian merchants, who appeared on the Caspian Sea as early as the 15th century, also took an active part in this trade. In the 1560s, due to the temporary cessation of wars between the Safavid state and the Ottoman Empire, this trade expanded and a Russian trading factory was established in Shemakha [1, pp. 53-55]. The main items exported by Russian merchants from Baku by sea were salt, oil, saffron and silk. From Russia, valuable furs, leather, sabers, armor, and metal products were imported to Shirvan via Baku. In the 16th century. Baku oil was exported by Russian merchants through Astrakhan not only to the Russian state, where it was used mainly in military affairs and as a solvent in painting, but also to the countries of Western Europe. In addition, oil from Baku was exported by Gilan merchants in their buses to the Mangyshlak harbor, and from there it was transported by caravan across the desert to Khiva, Bukhara and other Central Asian cities. The trade of Gilan merchants did not cease even after the occupation of the western coast from Baku to Derbent by the troops of the Ottoman Empire in 1578, while the sea trade route of Russian merchants from Astrakhan to the Safavid state moved to the eastern coast of the Caspian Sea [3, p. 26, 50, 84].

During this period, Indian merchants, who had their own caravanserais in Shemakha and Baku, also took an active part in the international silk trade [4, p. 32]. In the 16th century, velvet, purple, satin, brocade, and expensive English cloths came to Shirvan from Western European countries, especially France and England [5, pp. 226-227]. In the 1530s, as a result of successful military actions in the "European direction", the troops of Sultan Suleiman Kanuni (1520-1566) captured Belgrade (1521) and Buddha (1526), as a result of which a significant part of the famous Istanbul trade route ended up in the hands of the Ottoman Empire, connecting the countries of Western and Central Europe with the East. With the capture of Rhodes (1522), the Ottoman Empire further strengthened its position in the Mediterranean. At the same time, the Ottoman Empire sought to oust Portugal from the Indian Ocean and defeat the Safavid Empire, take control of the Persian Gulf and the Caspian Sea basin, and thereby become a powerful intermediary in European-Asian trade. In turn, internal European conflicts, in particular the long Italian wars (1494-1559) in which the German Empire, Spain and France were involved, in the conditions of which some Italian states looked to the Ottoman Empire as the protector of their independence, and also the powerful movement of the Reformation which once divided the united European Christian world, contributed to the failure of plans to create a united anti-Ottoman coalition with the participation of the Safavid state during the 16th century.

## **2. Strengthening the role of the Volga-Caspian waterway and the growth of military and political activity of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus-Caspian region**

In the conditions that had arisen by the end of the 16th century, when, as a result of the growing influence of the Ottoman Empire and the Great Geographical Discoveries, a shift in international trade routes occurred, a search began for alternative trade routes in European-Asian trade. This is precisely the route that the Volga-Caspian waterway took in the second half of the 16th century.

The weakening of trade and economic ties between Russia and the East, which occurred as a result of the Mongol campaigns, did not last long. Already in the 14th-15th centuries. A new trade route begins to develop: from Tver to Astrakhan and further to Central Asia, the Iranian



plateau and India. The Volga opens the way to the Caspian Sea and the eastern route becomes the predominant one for Russia.

The first detailed description of the Volga-Caspian route belongs to the English traveler and merchant Anthony Jenkinson, who in the 60s of the 16th century made a journey from Muscovy to Persia. Starting in the capital of the Russian Tsardom – Moscow, this route ran along the Moscow River – Oka, then along the Volga River to Nizhny Novgorod – Kazan – Astrakhan, then along the Caspian Sea – to Derbent – Shabran and, finally, by land along the route Shemakha – Ardabil – the capital of the Safavid state – Qazvin [5, p. 167-172, 198-207]. After the completion of the formation of the centralized Russian state from the middle of the 16th century, the process of its territorial expansion began both in the western, eastern and southern directions. The first detailed description of the Volga-Caspian route belongs to the English traveler and merchant Anthony Jenkinson, who in the 60s of the 16th century made a journey from Muscovy to Persia. Starting in the capital of the Russian Tsardom – Moscow, this route ran along the Moscow River – Oka, then along the Volga River to Nizhny Novgorod – Kazan – Astrakhan, then along the Caspian Sea – to Derbent – Shabran and, finally, by land along the route Shemakha – Ardabil – the capital of the Safavid state – Qazvin [5, p. 167-172, 198-207]. After the formation of the centralized Russian state, in the mid-16th century, the process of its territorial expansion began in both western, eastern, and southern directions. The first detailed description of the Volga-Caspian route belongs to the English traveler and merchant Anthony Jenkinson, who in the 60s of the 16th century made a journey from Muscovy to Persia. Starting in the capital of the Russian Tsardom – Moscow, this route ran along the Moscow River – Oka, then along the Volga River to Nizhny Novgorod – Kazan – Astrakhan, then along the Caspian Sea – to Derbent – Shabran and, finally, by land along the route Shemakha – Ardabil – the capital of the Safavid state – Qazvin [5, p. 167-172, 198-207]. After the completion of the formation of the centralized Russian state from the middle of the 16th century, the process of its territorial expansion began both in the western, eastern and southern directions.



**The Caucasus-Caspian region on a European map of the late 16th century**

Considering the fact that the mouths of the rivers flowing into the White, Baltic, Black, and Caspian seas were not under the control of the Russian state, and in order to obtain free export of products to foreign markets, they were kept in a closed area for three centuries – from the 16th to the 18th centuries. directed its main efforts towards a military-political solution to this



problem through numerous wars with the Livonian Order, Lithuania, Poland, Sweden, the Ottoman Empire, the Crimean, Kazan and Astrakhan Khanates. Only by solving this grand geopolitical problem could Russia acquire the status of a great power.

As for the northeastern Caspian region, after the collapse of the Golden Horde at the beginning of the 15th century into several possessions, the largest of which were the Nogai Horde and the Uzbek Khanate. The Nogai Horde covers the region between the Yaik (Ural) and Volga rivers, and the Uzbek Khanate - from the Aral Sea to the Yaik in the west, Tobola - on north and to Irtysha - in the east.

In the middle of the 16th century. Russia, having successively occupied the Kazan (1552) and then the Astrakhan (1556) khanates, entered and established itself on the northern coast of the Caspian Sea. This allowed it to significantly increase its role in international trade via the Volga-Caspian waterway. Noting the enormous significance of this event for Russia, the outstanding Russian historian of the early 19th century Nikolai Karamzin wrote: "Besides glory and brilliance, Russia, having joined its possessions to the Caspian Sea, discovered new sources of wealth and power for itself, its trade and political influence spread" [6, p. 139].

Russia's entry into the Caspian Sea not only threatened the Ottoman Empire's income from transit goods transported through Turkish territory in the Mediterranean region; It also posed an obstacle to the broad geopolitical plans of the Ottoman Empire to cover the borders of the Russian state from the Dnieper to the Urals. In general, as the researcher of the history of the Caucasian wars, General of the Russian army V. Potto, notes, starting with Ivan IV, "the idea of

domination in the Caucasus becomes hereditary in Russian history" [7, p. 14]. It was to the reign of Ivan IV, who was the first of the statesmen in Russian history to realize the military-political and economic significance of the Caucasus, that the origins of Russian expansion in the region date. As a result of the marriage of Ivan the Terrible with the daughter of the Kabardian prince Temryuk in 1561, Kabarda, the most developed in the region in terms of state and military-political relations, was accepted under the protection of Russia, which acquired a unique point of support for further expansion in the southern direction [8, p. 97]. In turn, the occupation of Kazan and Astrakhan by Russia opened up broad opportunities for establishing direct contacts with the Safavid state for joint actions against the Ottoman Empire, which began under Ivan IV (1533-1584) and Tahmasib I (1524-1576). The Safavid Shah Tahmasib I sought allies in the struggle against the Ottoman Empire, and Ivan IV sought to develop trade with the East along the Volga-Caspian route, which undoubtedly promised Moscow enormous profits.

However, both countries found themselves in a difficult military and political situation in the second half of the 16th century. The Safavid state, torn apart by feudal civil wars, waged long, almost continuous wars in the west and north with the Ottoman Empire and its supporter, the Crimean Khanate, and in the east with the Sunni state of the Sheibanis.



Crimean Tatar campaigns in Azerbaijan and the Ottoman-Safavid War

1578-1590s

The Russian state also had formidable adversaries – in the west and north – the Polish-Lithuanian Commonwealth and Sweden and in the south – the Ottoman Empire with the Crimean Khanate. Weakened by the unsuccessful Livonian War, the Russian state in the 1570s-1580s was not in a position to actively oppose the Ottoman Empire in the Caspian Sea region. A kind of revenge for the failure at Astrakhan in 1569 was the occupation of Baku and Derbent by the troops of the Ottoman Empire in 1583, which placed the Caspian section of the Volga-Caspian trade route under its control and reduced to nothing the significance of Astrakhan as the center of Russian eastern trade. This also led to the strategic encirclement of Moscow from the south and southeast and the severance of land ties between the Russian state and the Safavid power.

It was precisely during this period that regular diplomatic relations between these states were established. The embassy of Hadi Bek, sent to Moscow in 1586, first asked for military assistance against the Ottoman Empire, promising to hand over Derbent and Baku which had been captured by the Turks during that period as compensation for it.

However, due to a number of historical circumstances, this plan was not put into practice. The fact is that the Russian state was entering "Times of Troubles," and in the Safavid state, another civil war was taking place, connected with the accession to the throne of Shah Abbas I (1587-1629). Under this Shah, who ensured the restoration of the former military and political power of the Safavid state, the question of concluding a military agreement against the Ottoman Empire was no longer raised, although the Safavids received military assistance from the Russian state, and without any territorial compensation.

Being a strong-willed, rather far-sighted and purposeful politician and diplomat, Shah Abbas I, not without reason, feared his powerful northern neighbor with its rather active policy in the North Caucasus. By proposing to Moscow to fight the Ottoman Empire together, the Shah in fact only sought to influence Sultan Murad III (1574-1595) with the threat of a military alliance with the Russian state in order to obtain easier peace terms.

The second half of the 16th century is characterized by increased military and political activity of the Ottoman Empire in the Caspian region. Having occupied vast territories in Europe, North Africa, and Asia, the Ottoman Empire achieved control over traditional trading centers in the eastern Mediterranean, linking West and East. One of its main military-strategic goals in the Middle East during this period was access to the Caspian Sea. Campaigns in this direction were carried out mainly along two routes: through Azov to Astrakhan and through Shirvan to Baku and Derbent. The occupation of these important points on the Caspian Sea created favorable conditions for the Ottoman Empire to enter into direct contact with the Sunni Central Asian states and form a common bloc with them against its main competitor in this region, the Safavid state, as well as to establish its complete control over the entire Asian-European trade.

Already in the war of 1548-1555 the strategic task of the Sublime Porte was: firstly, to use the Northern Caucasus route from Azov to Kuban - Northern Caucasus for penetrating Shirvan from the north and attacking the Kyzylbash troops from the rear; secondly, the involvement of the Crimean Khan Devlet Giray in the war and, finally, thirdly, the search for allies among the Uzbek rulers of Central Asia. Moreover, the latter caused particular concern to Shah Tahmasib I, who had to fight them quite regularly in the east [9, p. 184-185]. It was during this period that Turkish ships first appeared on the Caspian Sea, closing the paths to the south for Russian buses [9, p.186]. However, the Ottoman Empire and its ally Crimea, which in the 40s and 50s of the 15th century attempted to consolidate their position in Astrakhan, failed to achieve their goals

due to the opposition of the Nogai Horde, which roamed along the Volga and wintered at its mouth. All these factors largely contributed to Moscow's capture of Astrakhan in 1556. It should also be noted that the task of capturing the Volga route from Kazan to Astrakhan was set by Moscow at the end of the 1550s as one common strategic goal [9, p. 194]. After the capture of Astrakhan by the Russians, the Ottoman Empire's connections with Central Asia were broken and the use of the North Caucasus route for military operations in subsequent wars in the Caucasus was significantly hindered.

The Ottoman Empire could not come to terms with the military-political situation in this region that had changed to its disadvantage. After the capture of the Astrakhan Khanate by Russia, Sultan Selim II (1566-1574) and his vizier Magomed Sokolli hatched a grandiose plan: with the aim of simultaneously stopping the Russian advance to the south and facilitating the Turkish advance to the east, to implement one of the most original projects of the era. Middle Ages – to build a canal between the Don and the Volga at a point where the two rivers were separated by only 30 miles. This would facilitate the advance of the Turkish fleet along a circuitous route through the Sea of Azov, the Don, the Volga and the Caspian Sea into the depths of the Safavid state, opening a new passage to the Caucasus and to the roads leading to Central Asia, and would also disrupt the connection of this state with Russia. The channel would lead to the revival of the isolation of the intercontinental path - the central Asian roads, what Seleucus Nicator aspired to 18 centuries before.

Taking advantage of the Turkish-Austrian peace treaty of 1562, Selim II ordered the Crimean Khan to assist in digging this canal and begin preparatory work [10, p. 7-23]. Although in 1568 on the Don 20 thousand workers under the protection of 5 thousand Janissaries began to dig a canal and dug it a third, however, due to the weak technical capabilities of that era, the harsh climate and also to a considerable degree the hidden counteraction of the ambitious and independent in his actions Crimean khan Devlet Giray, who himself planned and subsequently launched an offensive against Moscow in 1571 with his own forces, did not implement this project [11, p. 283-284]. The next campaign of the Ottoman-Crimean troops against Astrakhan which took place in 1569 also ended in failure. The expansionist efforts of the Russian state during this period were directed to the East, to the vast and fabulously rich Siberia.

The real Turkish threat to Europe in the 15th and 16th centuries pushed a number of Western European states – Venice, Portugal, England, the Papacy, the German emperors, and others – to create an anti-Turkish military-political coalition with the Azerbaijani states of Ak Koyunlu (under Uzun Hasan) in the second half of the 15th century and the Safavids (under Ismail I, Tahmasib I, and Abbas I) during the 16th and early 17th centuries who in turn sought to restore traditional trade ties with Western countries and access the Black and Mediterranean Seas. Moreover, the West pursued far-reaching geopolitical goals: creating favorable conditions for future colonial expansion in Asia by pitting two powerful Eastern monarchies—the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid Empire—against each other and thereby weakening them. This paved the way for the implementation of the "anaconda" geopolitical strategy, using naval force: establishing control and strangling the coastal territories of Afro-Asian countries, a strategy already implemented in the 18th and 19th centuries, when the capitalist West, thanks to the Industrial Revolution, was leapfrogging the hopelessly lagging feudal East.





**16th-century Ottoman (left) and 17th-century Safavid (right) miniatures depicting the battle**

The last decades of the 16th century were the Ottoman Empire's greatest successes in the South Caucasus. In the 1580s, The Ottoman Empire established its complete control over Shirvan, and Turkish warships, the Qataris, appeared on the Caspian Sea, which were built in Niyazabad, between Baku and Derbent. Moreover, if the route to Central Asia through the North Caucasus was closed to the Turks by the Terek fortress and Sunzha fort built by the Russians during this period, then with the capture of Shirvan and the fortresses on the western shore of the Caspian, opportunities opened up for relations with the Bukhara Khanate by sea, and with the ruler of Bukhara, Abdullah II, negotiations on a military alliance with the Sublime Porte [9, p. 275].

In turn, in order to neutralize the intentions of the Bukharan khan to build a city on the Yaik and thereby threaten Astrakhan, the Russians hastily erected their own fort at the mouth of the Yaik in 1595 [9, p. 283].

Thus, by the mid-90s of the 15th century. a whole system of Russian fortresses was created on the northwestern, northeastern and northwestern coasts of the Caspian Sea - at the mouth of the Yaik, the mouth of the Volga (Asstrakhan), the mouth of the Terek (Tersky town), the mouth of the Koysu-Sulak (Koysinsky fort) and, finally, the Sunzhensky fort at transport across Sundzha on the "Ottoman road", i.e. on the same route that Osman Pasha took from Derbent to Crimea in 1583. The construction of Russian fortresses in the North Caucasus not only hampered the implementation of the strategic tasks of the Turkish command and facilitated the military actions of the Safavid troops, but most importantly, laid the foundation for the process of real dominance of the Russian state in this region in the following, 17th century. Meanwhile, the conquest of the Kazan and Astrakhan khanates in the mid-17th century provided Russia with free access to the Caspian Sea, marking the beginning of an era of Russian penetration into the Caucasus and the entire Caspian region.

During this century, the importance of the Volga route and the Russian state's access to the Caspian Sea became quite clear. The development of the Volga-Caspian waterway, which passes through Eastern Europe, from the White Sea along the Northern Dvina, Volga and Caspian Sea through Azerbaijan and Iran to India, began. By the 17th century, India had become the most economically advantageous route in European-Asian transit trade. Trade exchange with the countries of the East via the Volga-Caspian waterway has acquired a systematic character. In general, the inclusion of the countries of the Caucasus and Central Asia in the system of the all-Russian market was prepared, which served, along with the political, also as a kind of economic

“shock absorber” in the implementation of the military expansionist plans of the Russian Empire in relation to these countries in the subsequent 18th-19th centuries.

In general, in the 16th-17th centuries, the main emphasis in the foreign policy activities of the Russian state in the Caucasian-Caspian direction was placed on counteracting the military-political activity of the Ottoman Empire, through the establishment and development of trade, economic and military-political relations with the Safavid state, for which the dominance of the Turks in the region was just as dangerous for the realization of its goals as it was for Russia [8, p. 101].



**The Caucasus-Caspian region on a 17th-century European map**

### **3. The Beginning of Anglo-Russian Geopolitical Rivalry in the Caucasus-Caspian Region**

By the beginning of the 17th century, thanks to rather radical reforms, especially in the area of state building and in the military sphere, Shah Abbas I managed to strengthen the Safavid state. Having started a war with the Ottoman Empire in 1603, Shah Abbas I managed to occupy all of Azerbaijan, Eastern Georgia, Kurdistan, Luristan, as well as Baghdad, Mosul and Diyarbakir within a few years. In order to secure his dominion in the Persian Gulf and open a route through it for the silk trade, Shah Abbas I took control of Ormuz in 1623 with the participation of the English fleet. The fact is that in the struggle for Ormuz, the interests of the Safavid state and England collided. The Safavid state during this period was of interest to the English both from the point of view of strengthening the approaches to India and from the point of view of the silk trade, which made possible an alliance between Shah Abbas I and the English East India Company in the fight against Portugal. Shah Abbas I also paid significant attention to the Caspian region. Thus, by his order, a large road was built along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea in Mazandaran, with a length of about 270 km [12, p. 71].

In general, the diplomatic activity of the Safavids at the turn of the 16th-17th centuries was aimed at concluding an anti-Ottoman alliance and receiving assistance from the West and North to fight the Sublime Porte. In a letter from Shah Abbas I to the English King James I Stewart (around 1607), the Shah's readiness to “attack the Turks with a powerful army” was noted [13, p. 68].

The access of the Russian state to the Caspian Sea in the middle of the 16th century also interested the English, who at the beginning of the second half of this century, having established trade with Moscow via the White Sea, tried to penetrate into the Safavid state along the Volga.

From the second half of the 16th century, England, for the first time making use of the right of transit through the territory of the Russian state, permitted by Ivan IV, established trade relations with the Safavid state. In the 60-80s of the 15th century, trade operations were carried out here by the "Moscow Company", founded by the English in 1555. Between 1558 and 1580 alone, this company sent 9 trade expeditions to the Safavid state [1, pp. 62-64]. The admission of English merchants to transit trade with the Safavids through the territory of the Russian state was dictated by the desire of Ivan IV to break through the economic blockade created against the Russian state by Poland and Sweden and to establish direct trade with Western Europe through the Northern routes. The English strove to control all trade along the Volga-Caspian route, and after that all eastern trade, and, above all, with the Safavid state, India and China. The Russian state could not refuse the benefits of its monopoly position in the Volga-Caspian trade and, having become convinced that England was not going to conclude an alliance treaty with Moscow, it was unable to renew the Moscow Company's rights to transit in 1586, already under the reign of Tsar Feodor Ivanovich (1584-1598). trade through its territory. At the same time, the Russian state demonstrated diplomatic activity in its relations with the Safavid state, especially during 1586-1612. It is enough to note only the fact that during this period both states exchanged 17 embassies and missions (12 Iranian, 5 Russian) [1, p. 65-66].

In turn, the English "Muscovy Company" intensified its trade and diplomatic activities in the Safavid state in the 60-70s of the 15th century. During this period, missions were sent here by E. Jenkinson (1562), A. Edwards (1566) and others, who, as a result of negotiations with Shah Tahmasib I and the Shirvan ruler Abdullah Khan, managed to achieve the right to monopolize the export of raw silk from Gilan and Shirvan. the Volga-Caspian route, as well as the right to duty-free trade within the Separatist state [2, p.171-176]. However, in general, the British are trying to simplify trade with the countries of the Near and Middle East through the Volga-Caspian Sea the journey and Arkhangelsk were not successful. This was connected, firstly, with the military successes of the Ottoman Empire, which established its control over the western coast of the Caspian Sea in the 1580s, and secondly, with Russia's jealous attitude towards English plans in this region. The British also failed to achieve another important goal: to establish land trade links with India through the territory of the Safavid state, thereby intercepting the Portuguese-Indian trade along the Hormuz-Indian Ocean waterway. The failures of the English in establishing trade with India via the Volga-Caspian route were also connected with the exceptionally long and dangerous sea, river and land routes, which made the goods transported via these routes uncompetitive compared to those that were delivered by shorter land and sea routes connecting the countries of the Middle East with Europe and other Asian countries through traditional transit routes.

However, nevertheless, in connection with the Safavid-Ottoman wars of the early 17th century, and later the harsh duty policy of the Ottoman Empire, the Volga-Caspian route throughout the century acquired great importance in the East-West transit trade. This trade route is becoming the most economically advantageous for both Western countries and the Russian state, with the latter increasingly playing the role of an intermediary in European-Asian trade. The main transport routes in this trade are: Isfahan-Kazvin-Rasht-Astar-Lenkoran-Baku-Derben-Asstrakhan and further along the Volga to the north and Tabriz-Mugan steppe-Shemakha-Shabran-Niyazabad-Asstrakhan and further to the north [14, p. 143].

In the trans-Caspian trade of the 17th century. The Azerbaijani cities of Tabriz, Ardebil and Shemakha play an important role in the game. In particular, from Ardebil there was a direct road to the southern coast of the Caspian Sea in Rasht, and from there by sea through Lenkoran or by land goods were delivered to Shemakha, Derbent and Astrakhan and further across the



Volga to the large trading centers of the Russian state. Through Rasht, along a paved road that ran along the southern coast of the Caspian Sea, caravans from Ardabil and other cities of Azerbaijan and neighboring countries went to the northeastern cities of the Safavid state - Astrabad, Mashhad, etc., and to Central Asia. The most important transit routes for European-Asian trade from Tabriz went along the following directions: Tebriz-Ardebil-Isfagan-Bender-Abbas (or Ormuz) – further to India; Tabriz-Nakhchivan-Iravan – cities of Turkey and beyond; Tabriz-Van Diyarbakir-Aleppo (in Syria), and from there by sea to the countries of Europe; Tabriz-Nakhchivan-Ganja-Shemakha, from where part of the goods were sent to the Russian state via the Volga-Caspian route [15, p. 71].

Shemakha played a key role in transit trade, serving as a stock exchange and warehouse for the European-Asian trade along the Volga-Caspian waterway. This route passed through Shabran-Derbent-Tarka-Astrakhan, then along the Volga to Moscow and back. Since the return route downstream the Volga was easier, they went by water all the way to Derbent (often to Niyazabad and Baku), and after unloading the goods in caravans at these points, the goods were delivered overland to Shemakha [15, p. 59]. The struggle of European capital in search of markets within the Safavid state, which began in the 16th century, became even more acute at the beginning of the 17th century. The competitive struggle between the English, Portuguese, Dutch, and Venetian capitals led to the fact that Venetian capital was gradually pushed into the background in the Eastern market. Later, already in the middle of the 17th century, France also joined the struggle of European countries for the Eastern markets. Trade agreements between Sefevidian states and the Dutch (1623), English (1629) and French (1674) East Indians The company to a significant extent contributed to the revival of the European-Pacific-Asian trade in raw silk, and by a significant amount beneficial for The attempt of the Golshtinsky Trading Company to direct the trade of raw silk from Shirvan and Gilan via the Volga-Caspian route to Moscow, and from there via the Baltic Sea to Germany, undertaken in the 1930s. The 17th century, due to limited financial possibilities and, above all, in connection with the political fragmentation of Germany, ended in failure [15, p. 71-72].



**Trade relations between England and the Safavid Empire (late 16th – early 17th centuries)**

As for Russian trade capital, although it was weaker than Western European trade and industrial capital, thanks to the territorial proximity of the Russian state to the Caucasus-Caspian region and neighboring countries of the Near and Middle East, East, as well as the firm protectionist policy of the Russian government in relation to trade via the Volga-Caspian route, its interests were protected from possible competition from foreigners. Legally, this was reflected in the Novotorg Charter of 1667, according to which the passage of foreigners from Arkhangelsk to Moscow and further was permitted only by a special charter of Tsar Alexei

Mikhailovich (1645-1676) [16, p. 31]. As for Russian-Safavid trade, after the Ottoman Empire was driven out of the South Caucasus in the second half of the 17th century, it expanded significantly.

At the same time, the naval raids of Cossack detachments, led by Stepan Razin on the western and southern coasts of the Caspian Sea in 1667-1669, clearly demonstrated the lack of naval power in the Safavid state in the form of a navy, which made it vulnerable in the subsequent military and political events in the Caspian Sea that unfolded in this region at the beginning of the 18th century.

Thus, already by the middle of the 15th century, the Caspian Sea basin, through which the main caravan and sea routes ran, connecting China, India and Central Asia with the basins of the Mediterranean and Black Seas, as well as the Persian Gulf with the Volga Khanates and the Moscow State, begins play a key role in international trade between Asia and Europe.

With the emergence of the powerful Ottoman Empire and the strong Azerbaijani states – Ak Koyunlu, and then, from the beginning of the 16th century – the Safavid state – in the mid-15th century, the military-strategic situation in the Caucasus-Caspian region changed radically. This region became one of the key elements in the relations between Asia and Europe, which during this period acquired the character of a military-political confrontation. In the second half of the 16th century, the Ottoman Empire sought to emerge and strengthen its position in the Caspian Sea basin. This would give it the opportunity to enter into direct contact with the Sunni Central Asian states and form a common bloc with them against its main competitor in this region – the Shiite Safavid state, as well as establish its complete control over all Asian-European trade. In turn, the real Turkish influence on Europe in the 15th-16th centuries pushed a number of Western European states – Venice, Portugal, Spain, England, the Papacy, the German states, etc. – to create an anti-Ottoman military-political coalition with the Ak Koyunlu states and then the Safavids, who, in turn, sought to restore traditional trade relations with Western countries and access to the Black and Mediterranean seas. In addition, the West pursued far-reaching geopolitical goals – to create favorable conditions for the upcoming colonial expansion in Asia, by pitting two powerful Eastern monarchies against each other and thereby weakening them – the Ottoman Empire and the Safavid state.

In general, the preconditions were created for the implementation by the leading European powers, with the help of naval force, of the geopolitical strategy of the “anaconda” – the establishment of control and strangulation of the coasts of the Afro-Asian countries, which was fully implemented already in the 18th-19th centuries, when The capitalist West, thanks to the industrial revolution, is moving far ahead of the hopelessly lagging feudal East.

Meanwhile, the conquest in the mid-16th century The Kazan and Astakhan Khanates provided the Russian state with free access to the Caspian Sea, thus marking the beginning of the era of Russian penetration into the Caucasus-Caspian region.

The Caucasus-Caspian region was of interest to the Russian state not only from the point of view of strengthening its southeastern borders, but also because a number of military-strategic and trade routes of great economic and political significance passed through this territory. First of all, the southern (overland) section of the main Volga-Caspian trade route, which connected Eastern Europe with the countries of the Near and Middle East, ran along the entire western coast of the Caspian Sea. Directly connected to this route was a second important military-trade route, connecting the Caspian coast of the Caucasus with the Black Sea-Azov Sea along the Temryuk-Pyatigorye-Elhotovo-Tarki-Derbent line, with the last section of this route coinciding with the Dagestan-Shirvan section (the "Ottoman Road") of the Volga-Caspian waterway.

In the Central Caucasus sector of the North Caucasus Route, three roads branched off from it, leading to the South Caucasus. One of these, along the Terek Gorge, led through North Ossetia to the Kingdom of Kartli; the second, through Ingushetia along the upper reaches of the Assa River to Kartli and Katekh; and the third, along the Argun River, through Chechnya and the Alazani Valley via Tusheti, led to the Kingdom of Kakheti [17, p. 316].

Considering the ever-increasing international significance of these communications, the Russian state, in the second half of the 17th century, made every effort to finally establish its control over the North Caucasian trade routes. A key role in this was played by the system of Russian military forts in the Eastern Caucasus, primarily the Terek settlement built at the mouth of the Terek, as well as the active involvement of the Terek-Greben Cossacks. Furthermore, Moscow succeeded in securing the Great Nogai Horde's recognition of its dependence as early as 1557, and the transfer of the Adyghe and Kabardians under the protection of the Russian state. Moreover, all of this occurred against the backdrop of intense military and political rivalry between the Safavid Empire and the Ottoman Empire for supremacy in the Caucasus. At the same time, the presence of fortresses and Russian detachments on the Terek, as well as Russia's alliance with the North Caucasian rulers, prevented the Sublime Porte and the Crimean Khanate from establishing control over the Northern Caucasus. On the other hand, preoccupied with the Livonian War in the northwest, the Russian state was unable to pursue a more active offensive policy in the Caucasus

During the 17th century, the Russian state, preoccupied with a protracted war with Poland, was unable to devote sufficient attention to the North Caucasus. This, in turn, led to the increased activity of the Ottoman Empire and the Crimean Khanate in this region, particularly in Kabarda, which oriented its policies toward the Russian state.

In turn, forced to maintain peaceful relations with European powers after its defeat in the war of 1683-1699 and the Treaty of Karlowitz, the Ottoman Empire sought to compensate for its losses in the West by strengthening its influence in the East.

With the beginning of the new, 18th century, the Ottoman Empire, in alliance with the Crimean Khanate, significantly intensified its military and political activities in the Caucasus. In the first decades of the 18th century, Turkish and Crimean troops repeatedly launched campaigns in both the Northern and Southern Caucasus. However, they were unable to establish a lasting foothold there due to the sharply increased military and political activity of the Russian Empire, established by Peter the Great.

During this same period, the process of revival and development of the main Volga-Caspian water trade route began, which passed through Eastern and Northern Europe, from the White Sea along the Northern Dvina, Volga and Caspian Sea through the territory of the Safavid state to India, and which already in the 17th century becomes one of the most profitable routes in the European-Asian transit trade.

Thus, the events in the Caucasus and the Caspian in the late Middle Ages cannot be considered in isolation from the global processes that fundamentally changed the geopolitical appearance of the world. Beginning in the 15th century, the development of sea trade routes that were in the hands of Western Europeans and the decline of the caravan trade as a whole, which in turn led to the disruption of the centuries-old traditional trade and economic ties of the countries of the Near and Middle East, both with the countries of Europe and with India and China served as one of the main reasons for the economic and associated political and cultural decline of all Muslim Asia at the turn of the 17th-18th centuries.

To this we must add the important geostrategic factor that the countries of the Muslim East, remaining at the level of the times of Sindbad the Sailor, never became the owners of "sea



power”, which, according to the concept of A. Mahan, includes three main components - a navy + a merchant fleet + naval bases, for, as Bernard Cara de Vaux noted in his time, “Muslims ... in general are not known as great lovers of maritime affairs” [18, p. 23]. By this time, possessing a powerful naval force, the small, in spatial terms, Thalassocratic Western Europe managed to win the geopolitical battle with the enormous Telluric-ratic East, which, due to a number of objective and subjective reasons, “plunged” into a long “lethargic sleep” from which he woke up to only thanks to the menacing rumblings of the twentieth century.

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