Under the current NATO eastward expansion, the global Western policies get to implicate the strategically vital areas enjoying advantageous geographical positions as well as substantial resources in energy, assets and manpower. Also emerging within a certain framework of the Eurasian space among those regions, beside the Near and Middle East, Balkans and North Caucasus were the near-Caspian areas, attracting not only the regional competitors like Iran, Russia and Turkey but also the western powers, US in particular, that has declared this zone to be the sphere of its vital interest. Projects for rehabilitating “The Great Silk Road”, constructing the transcontinental oil and gas pipelines from Asia through Caspian Sea area to South Caucasus, Turkey and Western Europe, plans to deploy the NATO military bases in South Caucasus being developed within the last few years can be classified as merely individual fragments supporting the framing of those areas within the focus of the world political interest.¹

In light of what has already been stated it seems expedient to peer into the periods of the Circum-Caspian zone featuring continuous regional geopolitical factors generating the international relations throughout the history to date. One such historical period for the Circum-Caspian zone with the adjacent Eurasian areas was the epoch of Peter I and Nadir Shah Afšar characterized by the peak antagonism for leadership between Russia, Turkey and Iran on the one hand, and England and France on the other hand, the states supporting the former countries against Russia.

This approach to the problem shows that the Caucasus-Near-Caspian region bridging Europe and Asia, East and West, North and South, integrating the economic, political, ethnic, confessional and cultural processes, having repetitively fallen amidst the crucial military and political occurrences, is again featured within the system of major events and their contemporary interaction.

In the 16th – early 17th cc. a decisive influence upon the International relations at the Near-Caspian areas was rendered by the policies of Iran and Turkey influenced first by Portugal and Holland, and later by England and France. This process had been initiated by the Iranian-Turkish wars reflected in the summary International agreements. A milestone among those was the Qasre-Shirin (Zohab) treaty of 1639 awarding to Iran the littoral Dagestan, Shirvan, Eastern Armenia, Eastern Georgia, some parts of Western Armenia, including Diarbekir, etc., Luristan and Mosul with their provinces, as well as the cities Najaf and Karbala. Turkey received the western areas of Transcaucasia and Baghdad.² The status quo established by that treaty held out till the Caspian Campaign by Peter I and the conquest of Iran by the Afghans in 1722.

A distinguishing feature of forming the international relations in the indicated region since the mid-17th century was the emergence of the third force on the Caucasian skyline – the rising Russia that conquered Astrakhan with an outlet to the Caspian Sea in 1556, annexed Kabarda in 1557 and seized Azov in 1700. However, the determinant role of the Near-Caspian areas in the Eurasian International Relations made itself manifest in the major military and political events which were inscribed into the epoch of Peter I and Nadir-Shah Afšar and which grabbed into their orbit not only Russia, but also its major geopolitical adversaries: England, France, Sweden, Poland, et al. This collision in international relations caused by the interference of the mentioned countries had been shaping around certain key events: the Caspian Campaign by Peter I, the regional delimitations between Russia and Turkey, the Russian-Iranian...
contacts and treaties, the Russian-Turkish and Persian-Turkish wars, the anti-Russia policies of the "Eastern Barrier" by the Western powers, etc.

The most significant of those events, the Caspian Campaign by Peter I having no analogy in its scale, the amount of the actuated forces and the military and political consequences, has become subject of special research in the relevant historiography. Although the campaign ended in 1722 by Russia annexing the Dagestan coast from Astrakhan to Derbent, the main purpose of the campaign – seizing the strategic initiative in the East and a turnaround of the eastward trade with Europe from the Levantine direction to the Caspian-Volga main line – was partially implemented in the following year.

The Peter I's campaigns and their achievements produced a widespread international reaction, re-echoed in Western and Eastern capitals. The resulting situation prompted the interference of other powers accelerated after the overthrow of the Iranian supremacy in the Caucasus in 1722. Parallel to the Peter I Campaign there was the conquest of Iran by the Afghans who overthrew the Safavid dynasty in October 1722. The surviving heir of the Safavids, Prince Tahmasp instructed Ambassador Ismail-Bek, who was in Petersburg, to find out the further intentions of the Russian monarch with regard to Iran and the Iranian possessions in the Caucasus.

The reaction of the contending parties to the current events was ambiguous depending upon the internal resources and international positions under their control. The Safavid Iran, paralyzed with its interior contradictions and the Afghan occupation was unable to counter the onslaught from without. The Ottoman Turkey possessing vast territories in Asia, Europe and Africa, though weakened by its inherent systemic crisis, remained an influential military and political power striving to regain the slipping European positions along the Caucasian-Caspian direction. The Russian state promoted to the rank of the leading world powers by Peter I's reforms, having crushed the first-rate military might of Sweden and partially occupied the Caspian coast, was poised for an incursion in the same direction.

The emerging situation caused an acute dissatisfaction of the Porte issuing an official warning that a further buildup of the Russian efforts in the Near-Caspian area will entail a declaration of war by Istanbul. That statement was followed by specific actions. Haji Daud, a Dagestani landlord having become an Ottoman subject in 1722 as the overking of Dagestan and Shirvan was instructed "so that he...appropriated the proximal Persian provinces by force and arms ...would by all means try to expel the Russian garrison from Derbent and all adjacent regions".

The hegemonic cravings of the Ottomans were vigorously supported by the British diplomacy. Prodded by the British Ambassador, the Porte was very aggressive. In a special letter to the Turkish Sultan the Ambassador assured him that Russia was prepared to effect the seizure of the entire Caucasus, but having no allies in Europe can be easily defeated. Influenced by the English diplomacy, the Porte started preparing for war. In April 1723, Ibrahim-pasha, the Great vizier, demanded to recognize the Turkey-occupied Western areas of Iran, Transcaucasia and part of Northern Caucasus with Derbent as Turkish territory. Russia was to get the Zasulak area up to the river Terek.

The Turkish plan to absorb the mentioned territories triggered a resolute counteraction on the part of Russia. Having amassed forces at the Russian-occupied Caspian territories, to achieve added security in case of a war with Turkey, Peter I declared his preparedness to protect the interests of Russia using all available means.

The negotiations held in June-August 1723 yielded no positive results. Insisting upon the right to control Armenia, Georgia, Shirvan and the Northern Caucasus, the Porte reverted to blatant military seizures. In June 1723 the Turkish troops occupied Tiflis causing jubilation by the English corps diplomatique. In his report to London the British Ambassador in Turkey underscored that the additional troops had been dispatched to Georgia by his initiative.

In response, the Russian troops captured Enzeli and Rasht, and then Baku. Thereupon, attempting to block Turkey from the Caspian shoreline, Russia started to insist that Tahmasp cede voluntarily the Near-Caspian areas while pledging the necessary assistance to Iran for countering the Afghan and Turkish invaders. Signed on this basis on September 12, 1723 was