

Geopolitics and Geo-Economics as Conditioning Factors of Modern Military Conflict

Геополітика та геоелекономіка як чинники сучасного воєнного конфлікту

Zafar Nuri Najafov

PhD in National Security and Military Sciences, e-mail: zafarnajafov@yahoo.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1392-9359>

National Defence University, Baku, Republic of Azerbaijan

Зафар Нурі Наджафов

Доктор філософії з національної безпеки та військових наук, e-mail: zafarnajafov@yahoo.com, ORCID ID: <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1392-9359>

Національний університет оборони, Баку, Азербайджан

Received: June 16, 2026 | Revised: June 29, 2026 | Accepted: June 30, 2026

UDC 355.01:327:339.9

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2026.16.3.35>

Purpose. To investigate the role of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests in the emergence and development of military conflicts in the modern era.

Method. Historical, systematic approach and structural analysis methods.

Findings. As a result of the research, the mutual influence of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests in the formation of modern military conflicts was systematized, and the influence of geoeconomic instruments (energy, transport corridors, economic sanctions and technological dependence) on military violence was substantiated. The integration of geoeconomic instruments with hard power in modern military conflicts was also identified.

Theoretical implications. The theoretical basis of the study is based on modern views explaining the interrelation of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests. The article analyzes the realization of geopolitical interests of states through economic instruments, the strategic importance of energy and transport corridors, the impact of economic dependence and sanctions mechanisms on the emergence and development of military conflicts within a conceptual framework. This approach substantiates the fact that geopolitical and geoeconomic interests are complementary and mutually influencing determinants in modern conflicts.

Practical implications. The practical results of the study show that a comprehensive assessment of geopolitical and geoeconomic factors is essential for preventing modern military conflicts and increasing the effectiveness of national security policy. The conceptual framework of the interaction of these interests can be used by state agencies in strategic planning, risk assessment, ensuring the security of energy and transport infrastructure, as well as in predicting the possible consequences of economic sanctions and other means of geoeconomic influence.

Value. The scientific value of the article lies in the systematic analysis of the influence of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests on the formation and development of modern military conflicts. The study of military conflicts in the study in their interaction not only with political and military factors, but also with geoeconomic factors such as energy security, transport corridors, economic sanctions, technological competition and global supply chains provides a comprehensive approach to modern security research. This approach contributes to a more complete explanation of the mechanism of interaction of geopolitical and geoeconomic determinants and to the enrichment of the scientific and methodological base for the analysis of modern conflicts.

Paper type. Theoretical.

Мета дослідження. Дослідити роль геополітичних і геоелекономічних інтересів у виникненні та розвитку воєнних конфліктів у сучасну епоху.

Метод дослідження. Використано історичний метод, системний підхід і структурний аналіз.

Результати дослідження. У результаті дослідження систематизовано взаємний вплив геополітичних і геоелекономічних інтересів на формування сучасних воєнних конфліктів, а також обґрунтовано вплив геоелекономічних інструментів (енергетики, транспортних коридорів, економічних санкцій і технологічної залежності) на розвиток воєнного насильства. Крім того, встановлено інтеграцію геоелекономічних інструментів із традиційною військовою силою (hard power) у сучасних воєнних конфліктах.

Теоретична цінність дослідження. Теоретичне підґрунтя дослідження базується на сучасних наукових підходах, що пояснюють взаємозв'язок геополітичних і геоелекономічних інтересів. У статті проаналізовано реалізацію геополітичних інтересів держав за допомогою економічних інструментів, стратегічне значення енергетичних і транспортних коридорів, а також вплив економічної залежності та санкційних механізмів на виникнення й розвиток воєнних конфліктів у межах єдиної концептуальної моделі. Запропонований підхід обґрунтовує, що геополітичні та геоелекономічні інтереси є взаємодоповнювальними й взаємозумовленими детермінантами сучасних конфліктів.

Практична цінність дослідження. Практичні результати дослідження свідчать, що комплексне оцінювання геополітичних і геоелекономічних чинників є необхідною передумовою запобігання сучасним воєнним конфліктам і підвищення ефективності державної політики у сфері національної безпеки. Запропонована концептуальна модель взаємодії цих інтересів може бути використана органами державної влади під час стратегічного планування, оцінювання ризиків, забезпечення безпеки енергетичної та транспортної інфраструктури, а також прогнозування можливих наслідків економічних санкцій та інших засобів геоелекономічного впливу.

Цінність дослідження. Наукова цінність статті полягає в системному аналізі впливу геополітичних і геоелекономічних інтересів на формування та розвиток сучасних воєнних конфліктів. Розгляд воєнних конфліктів у взаємозв'язку не лише з політичними й військовими чинниками, а й із такими геоелекономічними факторами, як енергетична безпека, транспортні коридори, економічні санкції, технологічна конкуренція та глобальні ланцюги постачання, забезпечує комплексний підхід до сучасних безпекових досліджень. Такий підхід сприяє глибшому розумінню механізмів взаємодії геополітичних і геоелекономічних детермінант та розширює науково-методологічну базу аналізу сучасних воєнних конфліктів.

Тип статті. Теоретична.

Key words: Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Interests; Devaluation of Classical Geopolitical Knowledge; Modern Military Conflicts; Balance of Political Forces; Hybrid War.

Ключові слова: геополітичні та геоелекономічні інтереси; девальвація класичних геополітичних знань; сучасні воєнні конфлікти; баланс політичних сил; гібридна війна.

Introduction

The character of military conflict has changed substantially during the twenty-first century under the combined influence of globalization, technological innovation, economic interdependence, and the digital transformation of international relations. Although armed force remains the ultimate instrument of interstate confrontation, contemporary conflicts increasingly extend beyond the traditional battlefield and involve economic coercion, technological competition, information influence, cyber operations, and strategic control over critical infrastructure. Consequently, military conflict can no longer be adequately explained solely through classical geopolitical theories focused on territory, military power, and the balance of power.

Historically, geopolitical competition was primarily associated with the acquisition and control of strategically important territories, maritime routes, and natural resources. Classical geopolitical theories developed by scholars such as Halford Mackinder, Alfred Thayer Mahan, and Nicholas Spykman regarded geographical location as the principal determinant of national power and security. However, the end of the Cold War, rapid globalization, and the expansion of international economic networks significantly transformed the strategic environment. The growing role of international trade, financial markets, technological innovation, and global supply chains has expanded the spectrum of instruments available to states pursuing strategic objectives. As a result, geopolitical rivalry increasingly incorporates geo-economic instruments capable of producing strategic effects without the large-scale application of military force.

Geo-economics has therefore emerged as a complementary analytical framework explaining how states employ economic leverage to achieve geopolitical objectives. Economic sanctions, export controls, restrictions on technology transfer, investment screening, manipulation of energy markets, and competition for access to critical minerals have become integral components of strategic rivalry. These instruments not only influence economic performance but also affect military readiness, industrial capacity, technological development, and national resilience.

Recent military conflicts clearly demonstrate the growing interdependence between geopolitical ambitions and geo-economic capabilities. The Russian-Ukrainian war, strategic competition between the United States and China, tensions surrounding semiconductor production, maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region, and competition over energy corridors illustrate that contemporary conflicts are increasingly shaped by economic dependencies alongside traditional military capabilities. Hybrid warfare further reinforces this trend by integrating conventional military operations with cyberattacks, disinformation campaigns, financial pressure, technological restrictions, and diplomatic coercion into a comprehensive strategy designed to undermine an opponent's political, economic, and military resilience.

Despite the growing recognition of geo-economic instruments in international relations, many studies continue to examine geopolitical and economic dimensions separately. Such fragmentation limits understanding of the mechanisms through which economic power influences military conflict and strategic decision-making. An integrated analytical perspective is therefore required to explain how geopolitical objectives are increasingly pursued through economic instruments and how geo-economic competition shapes the dynamics, intensity, and outcomes of contemporary military conflicts.

The purpose of this study is to examine geopolitics and geo-economics as interconnected determinants of modern military conflict by identifying the principal mechanisms through which geographical, economic, technological, and strategic factors interact in shaping contemporary interstate competition and military confrontation.

Literature Review

The theoretical foundations of geopolitics were established by classical scholars who emphasized

the strategic importance of geography in determining national power. Mackinder's Heartland theory argued that control of the Eurasian landmass provides decisive geopolitical advantages, whereas Mahan highlighted maritime power and naval superiority as essential components of global influence. Spykman's Rimland theory further demonstrated the strategic significance of coastal regions in maintaining international balance and preventing regional hegemony. These classical approaches established geography as a fundamental determinant of state behavior and military strategy.

Contemporary geopolitical scholarship has considerably expanded this perspective by recognizing that geographical advantages increasingly depend upon technological capabilities, control of information flows, cyber infrastructure, and access to critical resources. Scholars emphasize that globalization has not diminished geopolitical competition but rather transformed its mechanisms. Energy security, digital infrastructure, rare earth elements, semiconductor production, satellite communications, and transportation corridors have become strategic assets whose control directly affects national security and military effectiveness.

Parallel to these developments, geo-economics has evolved into an important analytical framework for understanding international competition. Luttwak introduced the concept of geo-economics as the continuation of strategic competition through economic instruments rather than direct military confrontation. Subsequent research has demonstrated that sanctions, trade restrictions, export controls, investment policies, industrial subsidies, technological standards, and financial instruments increasingly serve as tools of geopolitical influence. Economic statecraft enables governments to pursue strategic objectives while minimizing the political and military costs associated with conventional warfare.

A substantial body of literature has examined the growing interaction between geopolitics and geo-economics in contemporary security environments. Studies of economic sanctions indicate that their effectiveness depends upon international coordination, the target state's economic resilience, and the structure of global financial networks. Research on energy security demonstrates that dependence on external energy supplies creates strategic vulnerabilities that may influence foreign policy decisions. Similarly, analyses of global supply chains reveal that disruptions in semiconductor production, transportation networks, or access to critical minerals may significantly affect military-industrial capabilities and national defence preparedness.

Recent investigations of hybrid warfare further strengthen the argument for integrating geopolitical and geo-economic perspectives. Modern hybrid conflicts combine conventional military operations with cyberattacks, information operations, financial coercion, diplomatic pressure, and economic restrictions. Such multidimensional strategies seek to weaken an adversary's decision-making capacity, social cohesion, economic stability, and military effectiveness simultaneously. The Russian-Ukrainian war has become one of the most extensively studied examples illustrating how military operations are closely interconnected with sanctions, energy policy, technological restrictions, international financial measures, and strategic communication.

Although existing studies have made substantial contributions to understanding individual dimensions of geopolitical or geo-economic competition, relatively few provide a comprehensive analytical framework explaining their mutual interaction within contemporary military conflicts. This research addresses that gap by synthesizing geopolitical and geo-economic approaches into a unified conceptual perspective that better reflects the multidimensional nature of modern warfare.

Materials and Methods

This study employs a qualitative research design aimed at analysing the interaction between geopolitical and geo-economic factors in shaping contemporary military conflicts. Given the multidimensional character of the research problem, the study integrates conceptual analysis with comparative and qualitative methods commonly applied in strategic and security studies.

The research is based primarily on a comprehensive review of academic literature, strategic policy documents, reports of international organizations, government publications, and analytical studies addressing geopolitics, geo-economics, international security, economic statecraft, hybrid warfare, and military conflict. The literature selection focused on peer-reviewed publications and authoritative institutional sources that provide theoretical and empirical evidence regarding the evolution of geopolitical competition and geo-economic strategies.

Several complementary research methods were employed.

Systematic literature analysis was used to identify the principal theoretical approaches explaining the relationship between geopolitics, geo-economics, and military conflict. This method enabled the synthesis of diverse conceptual perspectives and the identification of common analytical categories.

Comparative analysis was applied to examine similarities and differences between classical geopolitical theories and contemporary geo-economic approaches. The comparison also considered the changing role of military, economic, technological, and informational instruments in interstate competition.

Qualitative content analysis was employed to analyse strategic documents, international policy papers, security strategies, and analytical reports. This method facilitated the identification of recurring themes related to economic coercion, sanctions, strategic resources, technological competition, energy security, and hybrid warfare.

Case-oriented analytical interpretation was used to illustrate how geopolitical and geo-economic factors interact in recent international conflicts, including the Russian-Ukrainian war and broader strategic competition among major powers. These cases were selected because they demonstrate the practical integration of military operations with economic, technological, financial, and informational instruments.

The analytical framework is based on the assumption that contemporary military conflict results from the interaction of several interconnected variables: geographical position, access to strategic resources, technological capabilities, economic resilience, industrial capacity, energy security, financial influence, and military power. Rather than examining these variables independently, the study analyses their mutual relationships and cumulative impact on strategic decision-making and conflict dynamics.

The methodological approach allows for a comprehensive interpretation of modern military conflict by integrating geopolitical and geo-economic perspectives while remaining grounded in established theories of international relations and contemporary security studies. This integrated framework provides a more complete explanation of the multidimensional character of present-day interstate competition than approaches relying exclusively on either military or economic determinants.

Results

The diversification of the conceptual apparatus of geopolitics in the modern era means the transition of geopolitics to a broader, multidimensional and complex approach. This process means the gradual expansion of classical “geocentric” thinking and its enrichment with new analytical directions. If earlier geopolitics focused mainly on territory, borders and natural resources (Cohen, S. B., 2009), now it is integrated with political science, economics, sociology, information security and technology. This makes it possible to explain events more complexly.

Geopolitical views are no longer limited to land, sea and air, space (satellite systems, space military potential), cyberspace (cybersecurity and information warfare) and digital economic space (data and technology dominance) have led to the diversification of geopolitical analyses.

One of the main reasons for diversification is that states, which are considered leading subjects, now influence geopolitical processes together with transnational corporations,

international organizations, non-governmental structures and even cyber groups (Flint, C., 2021). This also necessitates the expansion of views.

The current task of geopolitics is to understand the nature and character of military-political processes taking place at the beginning of the 21st century (Baburin, S. N., 1997, p.341). In the context of globalization, the disappearance of borders between the internal and external worlds and the constant increase in interdependence have created the basis for the expansion of the concept of security. Modern geopolitics covers not only military security, but also areas such as energy security, food security, information security and climate security. This creates new analytical directions (Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J., 1998).

Ideological and theoretical diversity is also not overlooked. Geopolitical approaches are also divided into different schools: the classical geopolitical school, critical geopolitics, neo-geopolitics and feminist and postcolonial geopolitical approaches. This also indicates the diversification of views within science.

In the modern world, the international security environment is changing rapidly. Regional conflicts, competition between great powers, and new security challenges (cyberattacks, hybrid warfare, information warfare) directly affect the policies and defense strategies of states. Understanding these changes is the basis for making the right decisions.

The development of military technologies is changing the nature of war. Unmanned aerial vehicles, artificial intelligence, high-precision weapons systems, and space technologies are renewing classical military approaches. Studying these transformations is important for the Armed Forces to adapt to new realities.

The balance of political power in global politics is changing. The restructuring of alliances between states, the strengthening of regional blocs, and the competition for global leadership shape international relations. Analyzing these processes plays a key role in strategic forecasting. All this increases the role of geopolitics as an intellectual method in the study of military-political transformations in the modern era and contributes to the effective planning of national security and defense policy. States are able to identify potential risks in advance and develop more flexible and sustainable strategies.

The realization of the geopolitical and geoeconomic interests of states is ensured by transforming them into goals. Geopolitical interests are desires and benefits, and the goal is the specific goals of their protection or preservation. For example, the interest of the state is to expand its economic influence; the security goal is to prevent war, crisis, terrorism, or the collapse of the system. On the one hand, the “goal” is a subjective reflection of interest, that is, an interest specifically understood by those in power – the political, economic, and military elite; on the other hand, it is a decision of a politician to achieve any result based on the available “means, methods and conditions”. This means that states formulate their interests in the form of specific political, economic and strategic goals and determine a policy to implement them.

Geopolitical and geoeconomic interests can be translated into the following goals:

1. Strengthening national security;
2. Increasing economic growth and competitiveness;
3. Ensuring control over strategic energy and transport corridors;
4. Expanding regional and international cooperation;
5. Increasing the state's international prestige and influence.

As a result, geopolitical and geoeconomic interests turn into specific goals that determine the main directions of the state's foreign and domestic policy, and these goals are implemented through diplomatic, economic, military and legal means.

A number of events in recent years have clearly demonstrated the impact of geopolitics and geoeconomics on modern military conflicts:

Russia's large-scale intervention in Ukraine has led to changes in energy markets, an increase in defense spending and a renewal of security policies;

The Israel-Hamas war has increased geopolitical risks related to security and energy routes in the Middle East;

Energy and transport projects in the South Caucasus region have further increased their geoeconomic and geopolitical importance;

Digital technologies, artificial intelligence and competition in cyberspace have become one of the important directions of the security policy of states.

In general, the possibilities of geopolitics at the beginning of the third millennium are considered wide and multifaceted. In modern approaches, geopolitics is no longer limited to geographical location and borders, but is considered a more complex system:

1. The ability to explain the global balance of power. Geopolitics is still an effective analytical framework for understanding the competition between great powers (for example, US-China relations) and the formation of regional power centers. It allows us to explain the strategic behavior of states in the context of space and resources.

2. The relevance of energy and resource geopolitics. In the third millennium, energy security, transport corridors and strategic resources (oil, gas, rare metals) occupy a key place in geopolitical analysis. In this area, geopolitics is an important tool for assessing the economic and military strategies of states.

3. Geopolitics of new domains. In addition to land and sea, space and the cyber domain have now also become areas of geopolitical competition. This expands the capabilities of geopolitics and increases its scope.

4. Analysis of hybrid warfare and the information environment. In modern times, geopolitics has begun to take into account not only military power, but also elements such as information influence, economic pressure and technological superiority. This increases its analytical value.

5. The persistence of uncertainty. However, globalization, the increase in non-state actors and rapid technological changes limit the predictive capabilities of geopolitics to some extent. That is, it should not be used as a sole explanatory model, but should be used in conjunction with other sciences.

As a result, geopolitics in the third millennium has become a more flexible, multidimensional and multidisciplinary approach, and its classical "geocentric" rigid model is no longer sufficient.

The adaptation of geopolitical knowledge to modern realities has a serious impact on the understanding of national interests, leading to radical changes in its content and structure. If previously national interests were mainly limited to territorial integrity and military security, now, as a result of the transformation, areas such as energy security, cybersecurity, information sovereignty, technological independence have also become part of national interests.

The renewal of geopolitical knowledge has forced states to take into account more factors. Today, political decisions are made taking into account global economic relations, the system of international sanctions, technological dependencies, logistical and trade corridors. This leads to more strategic planning of national interests.

Modern geopolitical approaches show that national interests are protected and expanded not only by military force, but also by culture, diplomacy, media and information policy. This also allows states to conduct more flexible policies.

Transnational companies, international organizations and technology giants directly affect national interests. Therefore, states have begun to more seriously protect economic sovereignty, data security, and strategic industrial control within the framework of national interests. The transformation of geopolitical knowledge has expanded the content of national interests, making them more diverse and dynamic.

At the beginning of the third millennium, the modern international system is characterized by the intensification of the struggle for spheres of influence of various public forces, blocs and associations,

ethnic and religious movements. This is expressed in the use of various means and methods of action by subjects of international relations to ensure their own interests, including geopolitical interests, as well as the search and formation of relevant socio-economic, geopolitical and ideological concepts. In such conditions, it is extremely important to understand the role and significance of geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the transformation of modern political processes.

In the scientific literature, the concept of geopolitical and geo-economic interests is interpreted broadly and multifacetedly, it is used when considering the political and economic positions of states, assessing their behavior in the system of international relations. The study of geopolitical and geo-economic interests is of great importance in taking into account the complex of economic, political, military-strategic, resource and other interests that play an important role in maintaining or changing the global and regional balance of power, international, national and regional security. At the same time, correctly defining the difference between these two terms allows us to understand the essence of geopolitical processes and make a more precise division of means of influence.

Definition of geopolitical interests

In an era when the protective capacity of national borders is weakened and national sovereignty is limited, the territorial-spatial factor retains its former importance. Despite the radical changes in the nature of global political thinking and international relations, control over strategic territories remains the main priority of international politics. R.Chellen, the founder of the concept of "geopolitics", described human history as a struggle for living space. In his opinion, the struggle between neighboring states for control of the border strip is considered an important law of international politics. In general, global politics consists of war for space, peace created by arms and force, or a military alliance established for the purpose of joint action against an aggressor. In a closed world, states can seize each other's territory only by force (Nartov, N. A., 1999, p. 48-49).

When determining geopolitical interests, one of the main tasks is to clarify their essence and structure. This helps to understand how states behave in the international system, which territories they are interested in, and on what grounds these interests are based. The essence of geopolitical interests is the strategic course pursued by states in order to exist, strengthen, and ensure their security in the international system. At the same time, it is the desire of a state or international actor (organization, alliance, etc.) to exert influence in certain geographical regions for the sake of strategic goals, to strengthen its position there, and to limit the influence of other powers. These interests are associated with the following reasons:

- security needs – protecting borders, preventing enemies from getting close;
- economic interests – access to energy, natural resources, trade routes;
- military superiority – creating military bases in strategic positions or acquiring allies;
- ideological/political influence – spreading its political model or exporting its doctrinal views;
- regional leadership claim – the desire to play a leading role in the socio-political life of a certain region, etc.

As for the structure of these interests, its main components can be estimated as follows:

Geographical component. Geographical location of the state or region of interest, access to the seas, mountains, rivers, passageways and other natural factors. For example: Turkey's control over the straits and its geopolitical importance.

Strategic component. Military bases, radar systems, military presence, defense planning and strategic depth. For example: Russia's maintenance of military bases in Armenia and Georgia.

Economic component. Access to energy resources (oil, gas, water), trade routes, ports, transport corridors. For example: Azerbaijan's TANAP and TAP projects are important for Europe in terms of energy security.

Political and ideological components. Establishment of spheres of influence (for example, the "near abroad" for Russia), support for allied regimes, diplomatic alliances and influence in international organizations.

Cultural and historical component. Interests in regions with historical ties, cultural and ethnic affinity. For example: Russia's interest in regions inhabited by Russian-speaking populations.

The changes that classical geopolitical interests have undergone in the modern era are "structural and content changes" in the "geopolitical behavior" and "objects of interest" of states in connection with changes in the system of international relations, technology and global problems. These changes give rise to a number of important differences compared to classical (dating back to the first half of the 20th century) geopolitical approaches. The radical transformations that geopolitical interests have undergone in the modern era are reflected in Table 1 below. Thus, initially, there was a transition from hard power to soft power. While in the classical era military power was perceived as an unlimited means of influence, today "economic influence", "diplomacy", "media", "technology" and "cultural influence" have a serious impact on the system of international relations. For example: China is building a geopolitical influence based not on military, but on economic and infrastructure with the "One Belt, One Road" initiative.

Table 1: Transformation of Geopolitical Interests from Classical to Contemporary Geopolitics

Aspect	Classical Geopolitics	Modern Geopolitics
Main goal	Control over territory and hard power	Economic, technological and information superiority
Objects of interest	Land, straits, ports	Cyberspace, space, energy corridors, technologies
Actors	States	State + non-state actors
Instrument of power	Military power	Soft power, economic influence, information
Global impacts	Local and regional interests prevail	Climate change, migration, pandemics, etc. are taken into account

Source: Compiled by the author based on Cohen (2009), Flint (2021), Buzan et al. (1998), Nartov (1999), and Luttwak (1999).

The next trend is the transition from physical to virtual spaces. Previously, the main interest was territorial control, but today, non-traditional spaces such as cyberspace, information space, telecommunications and space have also become objects of geopolitical interest. For example: the competition between the USA, China and Russia in the field of cybersecurity and artificial intelligence is considered an example of this.

The impact of global problems on geopolitics has increased. Previously, geopolitical interests were purely based on power and territory. Now, issues such as "climate change", energy factor, pandemics, migration flows, etc. also shape the interests of states. For example: the melting of Arctic glaciers has turned the region into a new object of geopolitical interest (resources, transport routes, deployment of military bases, etc.).

Progress towards a multipolar world model and the increasing role of non-state actors. In the classical era, only states were the main actors. In the modern era, "transnational companies", the UN, NATO, terrorist organizations, "technology giants" (Google, Meta, etc.) also have geopolitical influence. For example: Elon Musk's "Starlink project" played a strategic role in the Russia-Ukraine war.

The ongoing change in the structure of energy resources. In classical geopolitics, oil and gas were the main energy resources. Now, renewable energy sources, "green technologies" and

“energy security” give new content to geopolitical interests. For example: the European Union's “Green Transition Strategy” and efforts to build a new supply map accordingly.

It seems that geopolitical interests have an associative connection with any military-political processes, including military conflicts, and are one of the main factors determining the causes of their emergence (territorial-border, socio-economic, cultural, ethno-national and religious-sectarian, etc.), scale (local, regional, subregional and international), the behavior of the participating states; the position of international organizations; the duration of the conflict and the prospects for its resolution.

Definition of geoeconomic interests

However, most scientific sources indicate that the term “geoeconomics” has been in routine use since 1990 and is associated with the name of Edward Luttwak (1990). While extrapolating the dominant paradigmatic formula for defining the concept of geopolitics, he also applied it to geoeconomics, which he interpreted as the science of spatial, temporal, and political aspects of the economy and resources (Luttwak, E. N., 1999).

Cathrin Mohr and Christoph Trebesch define geoeconomics as “the study of the interaction between trade, diplomacy, and geopolitics” (Mohr, C., & Trebesch, C., 2025, January). Marianne Schneider-Petsinger describes geoeconomics as “the interaction of international economics, geopolitics, and strategy”. [8]. More figuratively speaking, geoeconomic interests are the use of economic instruments (trade, energy, investment, infrastructure projects, etc.) by a state or entity to “increase its political and economic power”, “weaken its rivals”, or “expand its regional and global influence”.

The main elements of geoeconomic interests are energy resources (oil, gas, water, etc.), trade routes and transport corridors (for example, the Middle Corridor, TRİPP), investment and financial flows, technology and strategic industries, economic relations as a means of cooperation or pressure. For example, China, through the “One Belt, One Road” initiative, is both gaining access to new markets and expanding its geopolitical influence by “investing billions of dollars in infrastructure projects in Asia, Europe and Africa.” This is a “geoeconomic interest” for China. In the geography where Azerbaijan is located, “control over the export and transportation routes of energy resources” is an area of geoeconomic interest for it (Nuri Najafov, Z., & Seyidov, J., 2026).

The purpose of geoeconomic interests is considered to be to gain “economic advantage” over competitors, to create or maintain a “sphere of influence in the region”, to ensure “national security” through economic means, and to provide access to strategic resources and markets for “sustainable economic development”.

The issue of the nature and structure of geoeconomic interests occupies an important place in international relations and economic policy. This concept covers the implementation of long-term strategic goals of both states (or alliances) and international corporations through economic means.

The essence of geoeconomic interests expresses the attempts of states and other power centers to achieve their geopolitical, national security and strategic goals using economic instruments. It is possible to estimate the following as its main characteristics:

1. Obtaining political results through economic means (gaining political and geopolitical power through economic instruments such as trade, investment, energy resources, technology);
2. Unity of competition and cooperation (although in some cases economic interests promote cooperation, sometimes they can also give rise to competition and conflict (for example, competition in energy markets);
3. Serving long-term strategic goals: (geoeconomic interests are not aimed at short-term profit, but rather at “establishing a sphere of influence”, “controlling resources”, and “increasing international influence”);
4. “Interregional influence”: (These interests manifest themselves not only within one country, but also on a regional and global scale).

Goeconomic interests, in addition to being an independent scientific category, have their own specific structure. This structure consists of several main elements and they work in an interconnected manner (Mohr, C., & Trebesch, C., 2025, January):

1. Resources: (this includes: natural resources (oil, gas, water, minerals, etc.) and human resources (labor force, qualified personnel);
2. Economic tools and mechanisms: (trade agreements, customs and tariff policy, financial flows and credit policy, investments (foreign direct investments, state investment funds, etc.);
3. Sanctions (as a means of economic pressure on competitors);
4. Transport and logistics: (strategic routes (railways, ports, pipelines), transport corridors (Middle Corridor, TRIPP, North-South Corridor, etc.);
5. Technology and information: (access to high technologies, digital infrastructure and artificial intelligence, information flow and cybersecurity);
6. Political and legal mechanisms: (economic diplomacy, cooperation with regional and international organizations (WTO, EU, ASEAN, BRICS and etc.), formation of the legal framework (bilateral and multilateral agreements).

The analysis leads to the conclusion that while the essence of goeconomic interests is based on the use of economic instruments to achieve political goals, its structure constitutes a broad system ranging from resources to the legal framework.

The conducted studies highlight the importance of identifying the differences between both scientific categories. Otherwise, it is more common to use these two categories under a single concept, which overshadows the objectivity of the study. The conclusion is that the main differences between geopolitical interests and goeconomic interests should be explained by their goals, means and forms of threat/competition. First, geopolitical interests are characterized as the struggle of states or power centers for “territorial”, “security”, “influence” and “geostrategic” superiority. This includes military, political and strategic interests. For example: the desire of the United States to increase its presence in the Middle East; Russia’s attempt to maintain its influence in the post-Soviet space. Goeconomic interests, on the other hand, are the interests of states and or the struggle of international actors for access to and control over “economic resources”, “commodity markets”, “energy sources” and “logistics routes”. Here, economic power is the main tool. For example: China's "One Belt, One Road" initiative; the European Union's energy security policy.

Secondly, the differences concerning objectives, focus, and priorities are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2: Comparison of Geopolitical and Geo-economic Interests

Geopolitical interests		Goeconomic interests
Focus	Political influence and security	Economic interests and wealth
Objective	Territorial control, military dominance, political influence	Energy resources, market control, trade routes
Priority	Balance of power and strategically important regions	Economic integration, investment and trade flows

Source: Compiled by the author based on Luttwak (1999), Schneider-Petsinger (2016), Mohr and Trebesch (2025), and Nuri Najafov and Seyidov (2026).

Third, this classification distinguishes between means and forms of control. Geopolitical instruments include the army, security blocs (NATO), intelligence, and military bases, political influence, and diplomatic pressure. Goeconomic instruments include economic sanctions, trade agreements, and investment, and loans, energy projects, and export-import policies as control mechanisms.

The latter difference can be determined in the context of the form of threat and competition. Thus, while “geopolitical struggle” often results in armed conflict and war, “goeconomic struggle” is usually carried out through “economic pressure”, “competition”, “sanctions” or “financial instruments”.

When determining the differences between these interests, it can be concluded that geopolitics seeks an answer to the question “Who will have power and control?”, while geoeconomics seeks an answer to the question “Who has more economic influence?”. In general, both concepts complement each other and are almost inseparable in modern international relations. In many conflicts, geopolitical goals are pursued through geoeconomic tools, or vice versa.

Discussion

The findings demonstrate that contemporary military conflicts can no longer be interpreted exclusively through the prism of classical geopolitics centred on territorial expansion and military superiority. Instead, they confirm that geopolitical competition has evolved into a multidimensional process in which military, economic, technological, informational, and energy-related factors operate simultaneously. This conclusion supports the theoretical arguments of Cohen (2009) and Flint (2021), who argue that geography remains strategically important but increasingly interacts with technological and economic capabilities.

The study further confirms Luttwak's concept of geo-economics as the continuation of geopolitical competition through economic instruments. The analysis shows that sanctions, energy dependence, transport corridors, technological restrictions, investment policies, and supply-chain control have become integral components of interstate rivalry. Unlike classical military confrontation, these instruments enable states to influence competitors without direct military engagement while simultaneously affecting defence capabilities and strategic resilience. The presented interpretation is also consistent with the contemporary understanding of geo-economics proposed by Mohr and Trebesch (2025), who emphasise the interaction between trade, diplomacy, and geopolitical competition.

An important contribution of this study is the systematic differentiation between geopolitical and geo-economic interests. Although previous studies frequently analyse these concepts separately, the present research demonstrates that they should be viewed as complementary rather than competing analytical categories. Geopolitical interests primarily concern territorial control, strategic influence, and security, whereas geo-economic interests focus on economic resources, markets, logistics, technology, and financial leverage. However, contemporary conflicts reveal that both categories increasingly overlap, producing complex patterns of hybrid confrontation in which economic and military instruments mutually reinforce one another.

The analysed examples—including the Russian-Ukrainian war, instability in the Middle East, competition over strategic transport corridors, and technological rivalry among major powers—illustrate that modern conflicts are driven by combinations of geopolitical and geo-economic objectives rather than by purely territorial disputes. These observations correspond with the broader literature on hybrid warfare, which identifies economic coercion, cyber operations, information campaigns, and technological competition as essential components of modern security environments.

The findings also indicate that the diversification of geopolitical thinking has significantly expanded the concept of national interests. Contemporary national security increasingly incorporates energy security, cyber resilience, technological sovereignty, supply-chain security, and control over critical infrastructure. Consequently, strategic planning should integrate geopolitical assessment with geo-economic analysis rather than considering them independently. Such an integrated approach improves strategic forecasting, risk assessment, and the formulation of comprehensive national security policies.

At the same time, several limitations should be acknowledged. The study is conceptual and relies primarily on qualitative analysis of theoretical literature and selected contemporary cases. It does not provide quantitative indicators for measuring the relative influence of geopolitical and geo-economic determinants across different conflicts. Future research could address this limitation by

developing comparative empirical models, composite indices, or scenario-based assessments capable of evaluating the contribution of individual geopolitical and geo-economic variables to conflict escalation and resolution.

Overall, the study supports the conclusion that neither geopolitics nor geo-economics alone adequately explains the dynamics of contemporary military conflicts. Their interaction forms a comprehensive analytical framework that better reflects the complexity of modern interstate competition and provides a stronger foundation for strategic decision-making in the field of national and international security.

Conclusion

Geopolitical and geoeconomic interests change the nature of military conflicts, transforming them from territorial conquests to struggles for resources, control over logistics routes and economic influence, and lead to the emergence of “hybrid” wars using non-military methods. Geoeconomics, which focuses on economic power, shifts the emphasis from simple military power to economic domination, including economic pressure and sanctions as part of military confrontation.

Geopolitical and geoeconomic interests act as one of the main structural factors in both the emergence and development (evolution) of modern military conflicts. These two factors often work closely together and make the causes of conflicts more complex.

Geopolitical interests are associated with attempts by states to strengthen their strategic positions. For example: control over strategic territories (straits, border zones, transit routes), expansion of regional influence, and the creation of security buffer zones. Geoeconomic interests are mainly related to resources and economic advantages: control over energy resources (oil, gas), trade routes and transport corridors, access to markets and investment zones.

When these interests overlap or collide, the likelihood of conflict increases. Modern conflicts often develop in stages, not statically. Geopolitical and geoeconomic factors can lead to increased escalation in the conflict, that is, the conflict over strategically important territories moves from the local level to the regional level, resource and economic interests can make it difficult to quickly resolve conflicts, giving them a long-term character, and instead of direct military confrontation, sanctions, economic pressure, information warfare and the widespread spread of “proxy” wars.

To protect their geopolitical and geoeconomic interests, great powers create alliance systems, indirectly intervene in regional conflicts, and turn energy and trade dependencies into political tools. This leads to conflicts becoming global rather than local.

As a result of the clash of geoeconomic and geopolitical interests, the concept of war has also changed. Cyberwars, economic wars (sanctions, trade wars), information and influence operations run parallel to traditional military conflicts.

Thus, geopolitical and geoeconomic interests are both one of the main causes of modern conflicts and an important factor determining how they will develop. The mutual clash of these interests makes conflicts more complex, long-term and multi-level.

The role of geopolitical and geoeconomic interests is not only concluded with the formation and escalation of conflicts, but is also considered a decisive factor in their settlement, because most conflicts are not only related to military, but also strategic and economic reasons. Therefore, peace processes are also built on balancing these interests.

The parties to the conflict often compromise when geopolitical losses increase and geoeconomic losses (trade, investment, energy flows) increase. Therefore, the calculation of interests plays a key role in the settlement process.

Global and regional powers intervene in peace processes to protect their geopolitical spheres of influence and at the same time to secure their economic interests (energy, transit, markets). This mediation sometimes accelerates peace, and sometimes complicates the processes.

Geoeconomic interests can promote conflict resolution through the lifting of sanctions, reconstruction projects, investment and trade opportunities. These “peace dividends” make the parties more inclined to compromise.

Peace agreements not only stop the conflict, but also redefine the regional balance of power and shape the security architecture.

Therefore, every agreement is the result of geopolitical compromises.

Sometimes the conflict may remain “frozen” or flare up again, because the parties do not want to completely give up their main strategic advantages.

Thus, geopolitical and geoeconomic interests play both a motivating and a limiting role in conflict resolution. Peace is not only the cessation of military conflict, but also finding a sustainable balance between these interests.

Funding

This study received no specific financial support.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Use of Artificial Intelligence

Artificial intelligence was used for language editing, translation, and technical verification of the manuscript.

References

- Baburin, S. N. (1997). *Territoriya gosudarstva: Pravovye i geopoliticheskie problemy*. Izdatel'stvo Moskovskogo Universiteta.
- Buzan, B., Wæver, O., & de Wilde, J. (1998). *Security: A new framework for analysis*. Lynne Rienner Publishers.
- Cohen, S. B. (2009). *Geopolitics: The geography of international relations* (2nd ed.). Rowman & Littlefield Publishers.
- Flint, C. (2021). *Introduction to geopolitics* (4th ed.). Routledge.
- Luttwak, E. N. (1999). Theory and practice of geo-economics. In *Turbo-capitalism: Winners and losers in the global economy*. HarperCollins Publishers.
- Mohr, C., & Trebesch, C. (2025, January). *Geoeconomics* (Kiel Working Paper No. 2279). Kiel Institute for the World Economy. https://www.kielinstitut.de/fileadmin/Dateiverwaltung/IfW-Publications/fis-import/a6a8892c-2825-48fb-ac26-aeae29a3c38a-KWP_2279.pdf
- Nartov, N. A. (1999). *Geopolitika*. YuNITI.
- Nuri Najafov, Z., & Seyidov, J. (2026). New Trends In Azerbaijan's Foreign Policy. *Social Development and Security*, 16(2), 33-40. <https://doi.org/10.33445/sds.2026.16.2.3>
- Schneider-Petsinger, M. (2016). *Geoeconomics explained*. [Chatham House](https://www.chathamhouse.org/2016/01/geoeconomics-explained)



This is an open access journal and all published articles are licensed under a Creative Commons «Attribution» 4.0.