

TAMAR MAZANASHVILI

FREE UNIVERSITY OF TBILISI
tmaza20@freeuni.edu.ge

THE IMPACT OF THE IRANIAN ISSUE ON EURO-ATLANTIC SECURITY

Abstract

The Middle East, as a major geopolitical and economic player, exerts a critical influence on Euro-Atlantic security. In the context of political instability and ongoing conflicts in the region, the Russia-Ukraine war, and energy security challenges, the impact of Iran, as one of the region's dominant powers, on Euro-Atlantic security is of particular interest.

Iran's geopolitical position, its nuclear ambitions, regional influence, and increasingly complex relations with major international actors play a significant role in shaping the security dynamics of the Euro-Atlantic space. In June 2025, amid escalating tensions in the region, the importance of the Iranian issue for the security of NATO member states became evident.

The article examines the main components of Iran's foreign, regional, and domestic policies through which the regime established after 1979 is attempting to expand its influence. Particular attention is given to the impact of each component on Euro-Atlantic security. The study concludes by analyzing the impact each component of Iran's policy has and/or may have on Euro-Atlantic security.

Keywords: Islamic Republic of Iran, Euro-Atlantic security, Axis of Resistance, Nuclear Program of Iran, The Strait of Hormuz.

Introduction

The strategic geographical location of the Middle East region at the crossroads of the continents of Europe, Asia, and Africa, and the abundant energy resources found on its territory, give the region a critical importance in shaping the contours of global security. Thus, the significance of the events taking place in the region and the interests of individual countries go beyond the region's borders and affect Euro-Atlantic security as well. Especially since the latter encompasses aspects such as energy security, economic stability, and effective counter-terrorism policy, among others.

Geopolitical stability in the Middle East remains a fragile issue. Regional powers, such as Iran and Saudi Arabia, are in a state of constant competition for dominance (CFR Education 2024). Recently, Iran has been playing a particularly significant role as a volatile actor in shaping the region's geopolitical processes. Iran's regional activities serve three political goals: to reduce the influence of the US and Western powers, to oppose the existence of the Israeli state in the region, and to engage in regional rivalry with Saudi Arabia. Iran's primary concern is to maintain the regime established by the 1979 Islamic Revolution (Cakirözer 2025, 2). Iran's influence on the regional and global security landscape is determined by the so-called "Iranian nuclear program" (Rekhviashvili 2025) and its close ties to proxy groups, militia networks, and aggressive international actors such as Russia.

Thus, Iran acts accordingly to its own goals and uses destructive methods, which puts Euro-Atlantic security at risk. The latter became clear after Israel attacked Iran's main uranium enrichment facility in Natanz on June 13, 2025 (Radio Tavisupleba 2025), and Iran retaliated with drone and missile attacks in Israel (Psaropoulos 2025). The US also joined the armed confrontation on June 21, attacking three Iranian nuclear facilities (RFE/RL 2025).

Anti-Western Coalition

On January 17, 2025, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Iranian President Masoud Pezeshkian signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement in Moscow, which aims to strengthen bilateral relations over the next 20 years. The main driving force behind this strategic partnership is their shared tense relations with the West. For Russia, Iran is a key partner to counter Western pressure after Russia annexed Crimea in 2014 and its full-scale war in Ukraine in 2022. For Iran, Russia became an important ally offering economic and military support amid sanctions and isolation (Azizi 2025).

Beyond the institutionalized partnership between Iran and Russia, their close ties are evident. Tehran is considered a major supplier of weapons to Russia, especially in terms of so-called kamikaze drones (Iranian Shahed-136), which allow Russian forces to inflict damage on Ukrainian infrastructure and civilian targets without losing military personnel (Syed 2022). Additionally, in September 2024, intelligence reports indicated that Iran had transferred the Fath-360 and Ababil short-range ballistic missiles (SRBMs) to Russia and had provided personnel with the necessary training to operate them (Cakirözer 2025, 9). Such support for Russia prolongs Russia's illegal aggression in Ukraine and directly threatens Euro-Atlantic security. More specifically, since Russia's start of a full-scale war in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, there have been several incidents where Iranian-made drones delivered to Russia have violated the airspace of NATO member states. For example, in September 2024, the Latvian Armed Forces reported that an Iranian-made Shahed equipped with Russian explosives had crashed on its territory (AFP 2024).

Russia's direct use of Iranian-made drones on the battlefield allows Tehran to test its weapons in real-world scenarios, gather important information, and improve its effectiveness against advanced Western air defense systems. Additionally, supplying Russia with high-quality equipment gives Iran a reputational advantage – despite years of international sanctions and isolation, its defense capabilities make Iran a global actor (Borsari 2024).

The Washington Summit Declaration issued by the NATO Heads of State and Government on July 10, 2024, also emphasizes that Iran's (along with North Korea's) military support for Russia's aggression in Ukraine has a significant impact on Euro-Atlantic security and increases the risk of escalation (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2024a).

Following the Russian aggression in Ukraine in February 2022, the contours of the balance of power have been outlined, and the opponents of the international order dominated by the US and Euro-Atlantic security have become evident: China, Russia, Iran, and North Korea, which experts call the “Axis of Upheaval”. This axis refers to a growing alliance of countries opposed to the Western world in economic and military terms (Center for a New American Security n.d.). Thus, the threat posed by Iran to the Euro-Atlantic space is manifested not only in the strategic partnership with Russia, but also in cooperation with the countries of the axis.

The actors of the “Axis of Upheaval” are united by the image of a common enemy, which is the Euro-Atlantic alliance, and aim to weaken its influence and establish a new international order. Thus, Iran's political ties are a significant threat to Euro-Atlantic security.

“Axis of Resistance”

The Washington Summit Declaration emphasized that conflicts and instability in the African and Middle Eastern regions have a direct impact on the security of Euro-Atlantic and NATO partners (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2024a). Since the Islamic Revolution in 1979, Iran and its allies have been engaged in a never-ending cycle of unrest and destabilization in the region (and beyond). This network of Iranian allies and proxies is referred to as the “Axis of Resistance.”

One of the most influential networks of the “Axis of Resistance” is the Iran-Hezbollah alliance. Iran is the main source of Hezbollah's weapons, training, and funding, providing the group with hundreds of millions of dollars annually, according to the State Department (CFR Editors 2024). Another proxy group associated with Iran is Hamas, a Palestinian group that opposes Israeli occupation and influence. The “Axis of Resistance” is a means for Iran to pursue its strategic interests and fight against Western powers, which also affects NATO's security.

Since 1984, Iran has been on the United States' list of State Sponsors of Terrorism, along with three other countries: Syria, Cuba, and North Korea (U.S. Department of State n.d.). Iran's strategic interests include funding and supporting violent groups that oppose Western influence in various political

realms. For example, Iran has been actively funding groups fighting against U.S.-backed forces in Iraq and Syria (Hassenstab 2024).

Strait of Hormuz

When considering Iran's impact on Euro-Atlantic security, it is of fundamental importance to consider its role as the "controller" of the Strait of Hormuz. The Strait of Hormuz is a narrow sea channel that connects the Persian (Arabian) Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, and the Arabian Sea. The Strait of Hormuz is a key point in terms of global energy security. So much so that its blockage could lead to a significant disruption of global energy supplies and a sharp increase in prices. More specifically, a critical volume of global energy supplies passes through this sea channel, since countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Iraq, and the United Arab Emirates supply their crude oil and oil products to the global market through the Strait of Hormuz. Qatar, the world's largest exporter of liquefied natural gas (LNG), ships its products through the strait. Given that there is no other alternative pipeline for transporting oil products on such a large scale in the world (other pipelines can only handle a small fraction of the total flow of oil, and building new pipelines is a long-term and expensive task), the role of the Strait of Hormuz as a pillar of the global economy is invaluable. According to the US Energy Information Administration (EIA), an average of about 21 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products pass through the strait every day – that is, 30% of all seaborne oil trade and 20% of global liquid petroleum consumption. As for LNG, approximately 4 trillion cubic feet of liquefied natural gas (LNG) is transported through the Strait annually (mainly from Qatar and the United Arab Emirates) – more than a quarter of the total volume of commercial LNG. Thus, the Strait of Hormuz is a critical point for the global trade network for both oil and natural gas. And it is Iran that controls it. More specifically, from a legal perspective, the passage through the Strait is regulated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which grants "transit passage" to ships (including warships) as long as they do not delay in the Strait. Iran has signed the treaty but has not yet ratified it, which leaves it with the potential to disrupt navigation. From a military perspective, the dominant force on the northern shore of the Strait is the Iranian forces (Kern 2025). According to US intelligence, Iran has thousands of naval mines that it can deploy in its waterways to disrupt commercial traffic. Its drones, for example, have been used against shipping in the past (Atlantic Council Experts 2025).

Given Iran's capabilities, the Strait of Hormuz plays an important role in shaping Euro-Atlantic security. On June 22, 2025, the United States joined the escalation in the region. In particular, President Donald Trump, Vice President Vance, Secretary of State Marco Rubio, and Secretary of Defense Pete Hegseth issued an address from the White House, according to which the US military, along with Israel, joined the escalation and carried out strikes against three nuclear, uranium enrichment facilities (Natanz, Fordow, Isfahan) against Iran (Moore and Pratz 2025). According to Pentagon intelligence, their operation has been suspended for at least several months (Froman 2025). This has an irreversible impact on Iran's nuclear program. The menace of US involvement in the regional conflict was followed by threats and potential retaliation by Iran regarding the closure of the Strait of Hormuz. For the Western world, the closure of the Strait of Hormuz would lead to a sharp increase in oil prices and a possible energy shortage. This, in turn, would lead to inflation, rising energy costs, and disruption to European industries (Fleming-Jones 2025).

Nuclear Program of Iran

The Nuclear Program of Iran dates back to 1957, and by 1960, construction of the US-supplied Tehran Research Reactor (TRR) had begun in Tehran. According to the program, Iran planned to build 10-20 nuclear reactors and generate more than 20,000 megawatts of nuclear power by 1994. Initially, Iran took significant steps to prove that it did not plan to create atomic weapons as part of its nuclear program. For example, it signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1968 and ratified it in 1970. After the 1979 revolution and the overthrow of the US ally, the Shah, the United States stopped supporting Iran's nuclear program. The Islamic Republic of Iran also abandoned its program after the revolution, but resumed it in 1982 and has conducted several uranium enrichment experiments since then. According to a 1995 US intelligence report, Iran was already clearly seeking to develop nuclear weapons. The Iranian government has consistently stated that it is working on uranium enrichment for civilian and peaceful purposes. In particular, it aims to convert Iran's electricity to nuclear energy and, in this regard, to turn oil

and gas into additional export commodities (Kerr 2019). In 2015, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) was reached between China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, the United States, the European Union, and Iran. The latter was intended to ensure that Iran's nuclear program would be for peaceful purposes only in exchange for sanctions relief (U.S. Department of State 2015). Although Iran claims that its nuclear program is for civilian purposes only, it has been actively violating the terms of the JCPOA since 2019. For example, it has violated the uranium stockpile limit, increased its enrichment activity above the limits allowed by the JCPOA, resumed activities at nuclear facilities that were previously prohibited, and, according to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), the agency is limited in its ability to fully monitor Iran's nuclear activities after 2021 (Mills 2024). Currently, according to the IAEA, Iran possesses more than 400 kg of uranium enriched to 60%, which is much more than the amount of enriched uranium needed for peaceful purposes and close to the level needed to produce nuclear weapons (Rekhviashvili 2025). This program poses a potential threat to Euro-Atlantic security by violating the non-proliferation framework and, in turn, presents a real menace to the strengthening of Iran's political agenda (Cakirözer 2025, 8).

Western Response

The issue of Iran and its policies has a multifaceted impact on Euro-Atlantic security. Therefore, the response policy of the Western alliances is becoming more critical than ever. At the 2023 Vilnius Summit, one of the main topics of discussion for the Allies was Iran's nuclear program, about which it was stated that Iran should not be able to create nuclear weapons and violate the Non-Proliferation Treaty. At the same summit, Iran was officially declared a supporter of Russian aggression and the main supplier of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles. At the 2024 Washington Summit, the destructive impact of Iran's policies on the security of the Euro-Atlantic space was emphasized. At this summit, the Allies developed an action plan, which included the appointment of a special representative. The latter serves as NATO's regional coordinator, with the help of which, in the West's view, diplomatic dialogues should be strengthened and knowledge about the processes taking place there should be expanded using all instruments of cooperation (Cakirözer 2025, 14-15).

NATO's Istanbul Cooperation Initiative (ICI) (North Atlantic Treaty Organization 2024b), established in 2004, is also significant; it plays a crucial role in combating the challenges posed by the Iran issue. For example, this format promotes regional security, counter-terrorism efforts, and military cooperation with Gulf partner countries. For example, by exchanging intelligence, the Euro-Atlantic space can prevent the threat posed by proxy groups supported by Iran. In addition, within the framework of the ICI, NATO is establishing diplomatic ties with partner countries in the region (Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, and United Arab Emirates). By strengthening them, it contributes to balancing Iran's power in the region (Cakirözer 2025, 14-15).

Conclusion

Iran's growing support for various violent and militia groups, its positioning as one of the actors of the anti-Western axis, its supply of weapons to Russian imperialism, and its plans to develop nuclear weapons make the Iranian issue a global security issue. Given that the Middle East is a region of geopolitical importance for the Euro-Atlantic space due to its geographical proximity and energy resources, the Western world remains vulnerable to the conflicts and unrest occurring there. Moreover, Iran poses one of the most acute threats to regional and global security precisely because of its unstable and often destructive policies.

Thus, the impact of the Iranian issue on Euro-Atlantic security is a key issue on the political agenda and requires coordinated efforts, a balanced, multifaceted approach in diplomatic, economic, and military terms from the Western world.

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