



# Geographical explanation of the factors disputed in the Karabakh geopolitical crisis



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## ABSTRACT

Geopolitical crises are among the international crises that have geographic nature and root. Therefore, despite international political or economic crises that may have more negative consequences than those of geopolitical ones, no crisis threatens the nations-states' factors as do geopolitical crises because the specialty of geographic basis is rooted in national and prestigious values. Thus, the compromise about them is quite hard and impossible, and these crises often last so long. In this regard, if a geopolitical crisis, like the case of Karabakh, is rooted in bilateral disputes over geographic factors, including geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic factors, it would have special complexities.

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## 1. Introduction

The history of the scientific studies on international crises is not long. At the mid-20th century some academic scientific and diplomatic political communities in the United States and England began to study international crises for the first time aimed at comparing them and determining their components as well as finding a model to predict and prevent them. The study of the international crises and the investigation of their management methods in the current complex global system are of great importance from various aspects. Knowing the crisis roots and reasons and the various kinds of international crises as well as their consequences that pave the way to correctly manage the states' foreign policy can be effective in reducing the negative consequences of these crises. Strategically, theoretical understanding is one of the methods to prevent the crises in international environment. In other words, the more precise studies and the more

profound analyses of the crises aspects and their reasons, the better and the more perfect recognition of them.

Investigation of different works in the domain of international crisis shows us that there is a theoretical vacuum in this relation. The deficiency that emanates from this matter is that no one has distinguished international crisis from geopolitical crisis. In fact, scholars have not considered geographic background where the crisis has taken place. Like other researches in the domain of international crisis, different researches related to the Karabakh crisis have not characterized that the crisis is a geopolitical crisis or a political crisis (see for example [International Crisis Group, 2005](#), and [De Wall, 2008](#)). Rather, these researches have not considered geographic background of the crisis (see for example [Cornell, 1999](#)). Current study tries to fill this gap. In fact, presenting a theoretical framework to distinguish geopolitical crisis and political crisis and characterizing different factors leading to the conflict and forces behind these factors make the research distinct from other works. In other words, we try to investigate the crisis from geopolitical point of view.

Geopolitical crises are those with geographic roots as their most distinct characteristic. Therefore, the main question is:

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what are the reasons of these crises? How can one explain the geographic factors affecting the geopolitical crises in a strategic analysis? Therefore, although various reasons and even political factors may create and prolong the geopolitical crises, the current study attempts to study and analyze the geographic factors affecting the geopolitical crises, including geographic-political, geographic-cultural and geographic-economic dimensions in the context of Karabakh geopolitical crisis through analytic-descriptive method.

## 2. What is a geopolitical crisis?

Before investigating the geopolitical crisis, this debate requires a comprehensive definition of the critical region. Region is the geographic context of any geographic-political phenomenon, in particular geopolitical crisis. If all factors constructing crisis are clearly distinguished and recognized, critical region has a distinctive geographic identity. Unlike convergent geopolitical regions, in critical regions there are no structurally or functionally homogeneous geographies. In these special regions, identity-finding of the region requires its elements to find political importance. In other words, critical regions should be considered as the result of the states' different and conflicted attitudes toward the structural and functional elements and characteristics of geographic region, which take identity in the context of states' competition or disputes (Valigholizadeh, 2012, p. 94) (Diagram 1).

Usually, according to the nature and the level of structural and functional homogeneity, geopolitical regions in their evolutionary process either reach geopolitical completeness (integration of states and mutual cooperation) or reach geopolitical regression (divergence and arising geopolitical crisis). In other words, if in the identity-finding process of a region divergent forces are prevalent, geopolitical structure will face a different destiny named geopolitical regression. In fact, if divergent forces following negative diplomacy, conflicted approaches and ideologies, disputes over geopolitical interests, territorial-cultural disputes in

geographic-political chess of region, and intervention of trans-regional actors prevail, divergence forces overcome integrative forces; consequently, divergence develops in the context of deep political-geopolitical disputes that are very likely to bring about regional instability and chaos, which could lead to conflict and war in the region. Therefore, due to the geographic-cultural homogeneity of the region, it is quite natural that the consequences of any possible dispute over geographic-political values or interests between the states can affect the whole region and thus critical region or geopolitical crisis is created due to such an instable sphere (Valigholizadeh, 2012, p. 95).

Geopolitical crises are specific crisis among international crises with geographic-political roots, which is its most significant characteristic. Although international, political or economic crises, which may have negative consequences and global reflections, are more than those of geopolitical crises, none of these crises threatens the nations-states' entity factors as geopolitical crises can do (Valigholizadeh, 2012, p. 95).

Geopolitical crisis is the consequence of conflict and dispute between states and organized political-spatial groups or political actors over controlling and seizing both natural and human geographic values and factors. The two significant characteristics of geopolitical crisis are as follows: they are stable and persistent and they are not easily resolved, because causes of crisis are geographic values that are among the national and collective interests. In other words, nations know them as collective and national interests; therefore, they are not negligible and compromise on them is hard. In contrast to the popular perception of international crises, geopolitical crises, despite their trans-regional political nature, are quite different from international-political crisis. Political crises are the consequence of tension in the context of relations between states and may be resulted in decreasing in or cutting the relations and even war between them. However, despite the long-standing nature of geopolitical crises, political crises are temporary and easily resolved (Hafeznia, 2006, pp. 126–128) (Diagram 2).

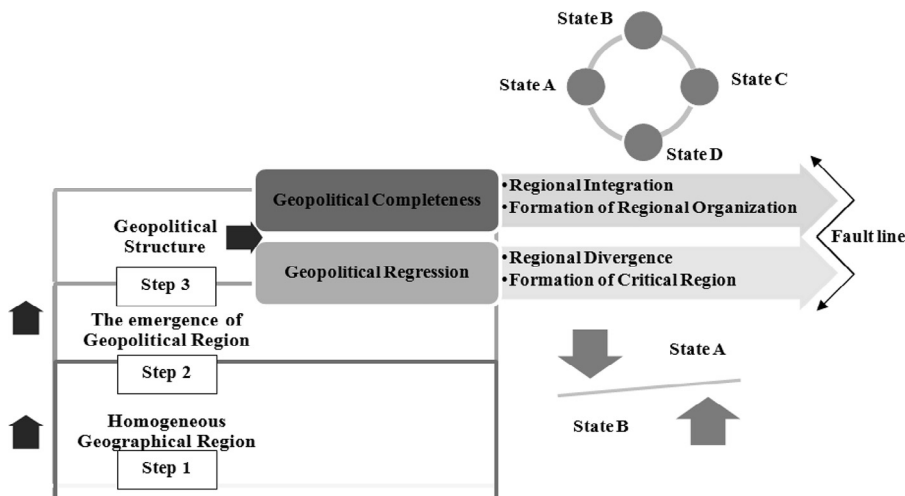


Diagram 1. The process of critical region formation (A. Valigholizadeh).

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