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<p>Russia's Foreign Policy in the Near Abroad: A Challenge for the Global and Regional Rivalry</p> <p>Küresel ve Bölgesel Rekabet Işığında Rusya'nın "Yakın Çevre" Politikası</p> <p>Video Link: https://youtu.be/YjYuOa9oQ1Y</p>	
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Küresel ve Bölgesel Rekabet Işığında Rusya'nın "Yakın Çevre" Politikası

Öz

1990'lı yılların başlarında Rusya'da Yeltsin-Kozirev ekseninde sürdürülen Batı yönelimli dış politika, beklentilerin karşılanmaması nedeniyle alternatif arayışları beraberinde getirdi. Bu kapsamda yeni Avrasyacı düşünceler Rus dış ve güvenlik politikaları üzerinde belirleyici olmaya başladı. Rusya, bu dönemde Sovyet sonrası coğrafyayı ayrıcalıklı çıkar alanı olarak tanımlayıp, bölgedeki hedeflerine ulaşmak için politikalar geliştirdi. Kuşkusuz Rusya bölgede yalnız değildi. Çeşitli küresel ve bölgesel aktörler de kendi çıkarlarına ulaşmaya çalıştılar. Bu, tarafları güçlü bir rekabete sürüklerken durumu daha da karmaşıklaştırdı. ABD, küresel stratejisinin bir parçası olarak bölgedeki Rus etkisini azaltmayı amaçladı. Bu amaçla NATO'nun doğuya doğru genişlemesini ve bölge ülkeleriyle ortaklık programlarını teşvik etti. Avrupa Birliği ise demokratik dönüşümü, hukukun üstünlüğünü ve kamu yönetimini desteklemek üzere Avrupa Komşuluk Politikasını başlattı. Türkiye ve İran gibi komşu ülkeler kültürel, ekonomik ve güvenlik kaygılarıyla bölgeye yöneldiler. Çin ve Hindistan da ekonomik ve güvenlik çıkarlarını elde etmeye çalıştılar. Rusya, jeopolitik çıkarlarını desteklemek için bölgeyi "Yakın Çevre" olarak adlandırarak münhasır etki alanı ilan etti. "Yakın Çevre", SSCB'nin dağılmasından sonra Rusya'nın ulusal kimliği, ulusal çıkarları ve güvenlik politikalarının tanımlanma sürecinde daima bir kavşak noktası oldu. Bu kavram sadece Rusya sınırlarına olan coğrafi yakınlığı tanımlamak için, yabancı aktörlerin bölgeye müdahale etmemeleri ve çıkarlarına zarar vermemeleri için uyarı amacıyla bilinçli olarak seçilmişti. Bu makale, Rusya'nın Sovyet sonrası alandaki politikalarını küresel rekabet ve güç mücadelesi bağlamında incelemeyi amaçlamaktadır. "Yakın Çevre" kavramının analizi ile başlamakta ve Rus güvenlik doktrinlerinde karşılığını araştırmaktadır. Ardından küresel ve bölgesel güçlerin politikalarına ve Rusya'nın bunlara yönelik tepkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Rusya'nın "Yakın Çevre"deki çıkarlarından asla vazgeçmediği veya geri adım atmadığı sonucuna varmaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Rusya Federasyonu, "Yakın Çevre", Güvenlik, Küresel Rekabet, Güç Mücadelesi.

Russia's Foreign Policy in the Near Abroad: A Challenge for the Global and Regional Rivalry

Abstract

As Russia's western-oriented foreign policy failed in the early years of Yeltsin's presidency, new policy alternatives came to the fore. Neo-Eurasianism became influential on Russian foreign and security policies. Russia defined post-Soviet space as its privileged sphere of interest and



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made policies to achieve its goals in the region. However Russia was not alone there. Global and regional powers pursued their own interests in the region as well. This complicated the situation bringing the parties to a strong rivalry. The U.S. aimed at reducing Russian influence in the region as part of its global strategy and encouraged NATO's eastward expansion and partnership programs with the regional countries. The European Union, on the other hand, launched European Neighbourhood Policy to support democratic transition, rule of law and public administration. Neighbouring states such as Turkey and Iran asserted themselves for cultural, economic and security concerns. China and India also pursued their economic and security interests. Russia declared the region as its exclusive zone of influence to promote its geopolitical interests by coining the term "the near abroad". This term didn't simply apply to its geographic proximity to Russia's borders, rather it was deliberately picked as a warning for external actors not to intervene in the region and attempt to undermine its interests. This paper aims to examine Russia's policies in the post-Soviet space within the context of global rivalry and power struggle. It begins with a conceptual analysis of the term and investigates it in the Russian security doctrines. Then it focuses on the policies of global and regional actors and Russia's responses towards them. It concludes that Russia has never conceded and will never retreat back from its interests in "the near abroad".

Keywords: Russian Federation, "the near abroad", Security, Global Rivalry, Power Struggle.

Introduction

After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia sought to reassert itself in its former periphery. To this end, Moscow concluded Minsk Treaty with Belarus and Ukraine, which created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS). Russia defined post-Soviet space as its exclusive zone of influence. The region was named as "the near abroad" in the national security and foreign policy doctrines. It was related to Russia's national interests, security policies and identity formation in one or another way. The term did not simply mean geographic proximity to the Russia's borders. Rather, it was specially picked to warn non-regional actors against any future infiltration into the former periphery.

During Putin's presidency, Russian foreign policy in the region was conducted to balance Western initiatives. These included deploying Russian military, not allowing foreign military buildups, constraining NATO's activities, supporting friendly regimes, undermining their Western orientation, accessing energy resources, controlling energy transit routes, and protecting Russian minorities.



However some international and regional factors prevented Russia from reasserting itself in the region. Russia's hegemony was not welcomed because of the past experiences and concerns of regional countries. The U.S. global strategy, NATO's eastward expansion and the E.U.'s enlargement strategy made thing worse for Russia. In exchange, Russia made use of its permanent seat in the UN Security Council, its membership in the OSCE and its active role in the CIS. Russians revisited and updated old treaties. They also benefitted from their position as an energy supplier, Russian minorities and anti-Western structures in the newly independent republics.

This article aims to reveal the strategies of global and regional actors in Russia's "near abroad" within the context of power struggle and competition. The paper asserts that Russia has been involved in an intense power struggle with global and regional actors in the post-Soviet sphere. Although Russia couldn't achieve all of its security objectives listed in the strategy documents, it counterbalanced pro-Western course of action through available means at its disposal.

Post-Soviet Space and "the near abroad"

The Russian Word «ближнее зарубежье» (blizhneye zarubezhnye) is used to refer to the post-Soviet states. This term has been commonly used by Russian experts, bureaucrats, intellectuals and decision makers after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The concept is important because it describes the new type of relationship between Russia and its former friends in the USSR. According to Özcan (2005, p.1), the term "near abroad" is mostly used by Russia within the context of "new priorities of Russian foreign policy". The new concept has at least two aspects. These were the emphasis on the former Soviet republics in "the near abroad" and explicit recognition of Russia's special interests in the region, which do not necessarily comply with those of Western democracies (White, 2004, p.228).

English equivalent of "blizhneye zarubezhnye" was first used by Fred Shapiro in his article titled "Near Abroad Wants to Be Far" in New Haven. Then, Strobe Talbott, columnist of the Time magazine, said "Many Russians have not yet accepted that the 14 former USSR countries are independent countries today. Russian politicians invented a new phrase, "the near abroad" in order to separate the former republics from the rest of the world" (Safire, 1994).

American linguist Kenneth Katzner emphasizes that "blizhneye zarubezhnye" in American English is the neutral form of the adjective "blizhniy" meaning "close to", while the word "zarubejye" is a noun that does not have an English equivalent. "Rubezh" means border and "za" means beyond. Terry Thompson, on the other hand, argued that the term "near abroad" was widely used by Soviet opponents in the 1970s and 1980s. Paul Goble of Carnegie Endowment used the term "near abroad" to refer to the non-Russian republics of the former USSR. It was emphasized that Goble used it in a political sense rather than a geographical or demographic



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concept. Russian political groups do not want to see the former Soviet Republics as fully sovereign entities. Naming the region "near abroad" not only characterizes the independence of these countries, but also alludes to the the global and regional powers that Russia has special rights in this region that transcend beyond traditional diplomatic agreements (Safire, 1994).

The term "near abroad" was viewed almost as important as the concept "détente" which appeared in the early 1970s and entered English vocabulary in 1992. It refers to the relaxation of relations between the two super powers of the Cold War. The "near abroad" is used to name the countries that were once affiliated with the Soviet Union and are today within the sphere of Russia's interests and influence. Some political writers attribute a second meaning to phrase and describe it as "ethnic Russians outside Russia's borders, living in minority, sometimes deliberately suppressed" (Safire, 1994).

Russia's near abroad can be divided into four different spaces with different geographical, ethnical and cultural features. Moscow's relations with newly independent states are in parallel to this grouping. The first group includes Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. These Baltic states had been the last members of the Soviet Union but were the first ones to leave it. They pursued completely pro-Western policy in the post-Cold War era.

Their cultural differences which distinguished them not only from Russia but also from each other, different languages, and different religions; Lithuania was Catholic, Estonia was Lutheran and Latvia was both Catholic and Lutheran. Neither linguistically nor religiously, were they close to Russians (Özcan, 2005, pp.117-128). Their pro-Western policies and integration with the West through EU and NATO membership were mainly because of their cultural, religious and linguistic differences from Orthodox Russians (Vushkarnik, 2001).

The second group consists of Ukraine and Belarus. Both made up the European part of the Soviet Union and had common Slavic roots. Romanian-speaking Moldova is also included in this group. Ukraine sought international legitimacy and support by the West. Belarus, on the other hand, aimed at integration with Russia. Moldova has some problems with Russia which haven't been solved yet (Hekimoğlu, 2007, p.136).

The third group consists of Central Asian states such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan seeks close relations with Russia because of its security concerns based on external threats. While Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are Russia's traditional partners in the CIS, Turkmenistan has adopted "neutral" foreign policy. Contrary to the past, Uzbekistan tends to improve its relations with Russia (Hekimoğlu, 2007, p. 136-137).

The fourth group includes the Southern Caucasus states: Azerbaijan, Armenia and Georgia. These republics sought Russian mediation to solve their problems with each other. However, except Armenia, they keep



themselves distant from the CIS. The South Caucasus is important due to its potential to affect the security and stability of Russia's southern borders (Hekimoğlu, 2007, p.137).

Although the term “near abroad” refers to the post-Soviet states as a whole, it essentially involves Central Asian and South Caucasus countries. It's because (1) These countries have religious and ethnic differences which may allow them to easily move away from Russia, (2) They are home to a significant number of Russian minority, (3) They have rich natural resources, (4) They have potential to affect Russia's security and stability, and (5) These countries overlap with Russia's *lebensraum*- territory for political and economic expansion.

Global Powers and “the near abroad”

The U.S. Global Strategy and the post-Soviet Space

One of the main problems of the U.S. foreign policy is that the lobbies are more influential than politicians in law-making process. Lawmakers can defend the interests of the lobby groups even if they conflict with the U.S. national interests in the Congress. The U.S. lobbies are grouped into ethnical (Jewish, Greek, Armenian, etc.) or sectoral (oil, weapons, etc.). The former attempts to influence U.S. foreign policy to promote the interests of their motherlands, the latter considers every means as legitimate in international arena to guarantee their own interests (Ari, 1997). Therefore, while analyzing US policy in the post-Soviet geography, those factors should be taken into account.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the US supported the stabilization of Russia and the withdrawal of nuclear weapons deployed in the former Soviet republics such as Kazakhstan, Ukraine and Belarus. The “Russia First” policy, pioneered by Strobe Talbott, had set the main goals of keeping the nuclear weapons of the Soviet Union within Russia and removing Russian military power from the Baltics. The Russian army withdrew from the Baltics in 1994. The removal of nuclear weapons in Belarus, Ukraine and Kazakhstan was completed in 1996 (Kasım, 2009, p.164).

The US policies in Central Asia in the 1990s can be grouped into four periods:

-1992-1993: The US conducted holistic policy towards the newly independent states, supported their democracies and market economies, and prioritized the safety of Soviet nuclear arsenal,

-1994-1995: The US strategic and economic concerns on Caspian energy resources shaped Washington's regional politics,

-1996-2000: The US strategic interests such as preventing Russia from filling the vacuum of the USSR and to this end thus strengthening the sovereignty of the regional countries.



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-September 11 and after: The relations of the US with the regional countries were defined in terms of their contribution to the war on terror. (Amanov, 2007, p.95-99).

Initially the US associated its regional security objectives with accessing, extracting and transiting energy resources. After 9/11, the US reasserted itself militarily fearing that regional instability could undermine its own security and international security (Kasım, 2009, s.163). Assistant Secretary of State Daniel Fried stated that the US was working to achieve its strategic interests in Central Asia. Fried defined these interests as "security", "energy and regional cooperation" and "freedom through reform" (A Strategy for Central Asia, 2005).

On the other hand, the US short and medium-term policies in the South Caucasus were based on the "American National Security Strategy in the New Century". According to this strategy, the US would not allow any actor to be influential in regions where the US had strategic interests. The Madeleine Albright doctrine envisaged the containment of Russia and free supply of Caspian oil and gas to international markets without Russia's involvement (Ivanov, 2005).

The declared foreign policy objectives of the US in Central Asia were; (1) To ensure the stability of Central Asia and to support the independence, sovereignty, democratic transition and liberal economy of the countries in the region; (2) To prevent any global or regional actor from achieving eventual control in the region; (3) To reduce Iran's influence and to support Turkey as a model; (4) To reduce Russian and Iranian influence on the Caspian energy resources, to ensure passage of pipelines through friendly countries; (5) To prevent the strengthening of radical movements and terrorist groups; (6) To liquidate nuclear weapons; (7) To prevent civil wars and border conflicts (Amanov, 2007, p.102).

The European Union's Policies as a Soft Power

The European Union (EU) pursued "soft geopolitics" to prevent crises and problems that could spill over into the Union in the relatively unstable 1990s. This policy was projected towards the neighbouring Balkans, the Mediterranean, and the post-Soviet geography. The EU was particularly affected by the crises in the post-Soviet republics due to their geographical proximity and historical, cultural and commercial relations (Zhussipbek, 2008, p.306). While Brussel's policies in Central Asia and the Caucasus differed, it was not even possible to mention about an institutional policy of the union until recently. The EU didn't appear institutionally in Central Asia. Instead some of its leading members were present there. However Brussel's strategy began to change in 2005.

Brussel established Office for Central Asia Special Representative and appointed a representative there for the first time in July 2005. Then, at the meeting held on 30 June 2007 between the EU Troika and the representatives of Central Asian countries, the "Central Asia Strategy", which constituted



the framework of the Union's Central Asian policy, was declared (www.mfa.kz). So the EU's interests in the region were officially declared for the first time. Integration of Central Asian countries into the global economic system was the primary objective.

In fact, the EU views Central Asia as a source of "soft security threats". So it is believed that the smuggling of drugs produced in Afghanistan through Central Asia and the "terrorist activities of radical groups" undermine the regional security (www.mfa.kz). On the other hand, the EU's relations with the South Caucasus were conducted through three different platforms: (1)Partnership and Cooperation Agreements, (2)Action Plans within the framework of the European Neighborhood Policy, (3)EU Special Representative for the South Caucasus.

Brussel's relations with the Southern Caucasus states were based on the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements signed in 1999. Action Plans were attached to these agreements in 2006 under the European Neighborhood Policy. They aimed at supporting reform processes in partner countries and strengthening their cooperation with the EU (Fischer, 2008, p.4).

With the entry into force of the Neighborhood Policy, the EU was obliged to assume a greater role in resolving conflicts and crises around it. Transnistria problem in Moldova, Nagorno-Karabakh problem between Azerbaijan and Armenia, Abkhazia and South Ossetia problems in Georgia were some of these problems. However, the EU failed to develop an appropriate mechanism to resolve these crises (Popescu, 2005, p.10).

On the other hand, EU policies in the post-Soviet space were inextricably intertwined with Brussel's relations with Russia. After the comprehensive enlargement in 2004, the EU entered into a competition with Russia in the post-Soviet geography. Russia viewed EU's growing influence as an effort to change the boundaries of its "sphere of influence". Yet most EU members saw Russia's policies as vital threats to the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the newly independent republics. Increasing disagreements over policies towards neighboring countries have contributed to the worsening of EU-Russia relations in recent years (Fischer, 2008, p.4).

Although the EU was the last actor to enter the South Caucasus, it played an active role. By openly declaring its interests in the region, the EU supported the potential transit corridor of oil and natural gas from the Caspian basin (Fischer, 2008, p.5). The EU stepped up its efforts to reduce its natural gas dependence on Russia after the Russian-Ukrainian and Russian-Belarusian gas transit disputes. (Kasim, 2009, p. 194). The 2008 war in Georgia didn't only affect the South Caucasus. On the contrary, it affected the geostrategic situation, EU-Russia relations, European security as a whole and Russia-US relations in the post-Soviet geography. The war preceded by a period when Russian-EU relations were at their lowest level. Yet the EU obtained a unique opportunity as a political player and mediator in a region where it has had a weak profile so far (Fischer, 2008, p.4).



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Foreign policies of the US and its European allies in the post-Soviet geography contain similarities and differences in accordance with their goals. The US and the EU wish for the integration of these countries into the global capitalist system, in other words into the civilized world by completing their political and economic reform processes, setting multilateral relations with the western institutions, securing the transit of energy resources to international markets, and non-proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) in the region.

On the other hand, the EU differs from the US by focusing on free trade, liberal economy and membership to the World Trade Organization (WTO) in the post-Soviet geography, supporting the continuation of the reform process and the establishment and development of democratic institutions (Zhussipbek, 2008, pp.307-308). Similarly, while the EU pursues a "soft power" policy in the South Caucasus, the US adopts a geostrategic approach. Therefore, the two parties cannot act in full harmony.

Regional Powers and "the near abroad"

China's Security, Energy and Commercial Objectives in the Region

For an analysis of China's Central Asian policy, the country's general foreign policy objectives and strategies constitute an important framework. Syaun (2008) asserts that China's main objectives are to modernize and preserve its sovereignty and territorial integrity over the next 50 years; to create favorable external conditions for the development of the country, to harmonize foreign policy and internal security problems, and to adapt to the contemporary world.

Throughout history, China's threat perception has been shaped by foreign security problems caused by its neighbours. To overcome this, China has tried to improve its relations with its neighbours, to promote stability beyond its borders, to solve border problems, and to support regional cooperation (Syaun, 2008). However China's priorities changed in the 1990s. Its national interests which were once defined as economic terms developed into security concerns and territorial integrity. China is concerned about foreign interest in the Uyghur Autonomous Region and any cooperation initiatives which bypass the central government (Antonenko, n.d. p.9).

In the 2000s, China tried to be a global production center. The increasing production level urged China to access energy sources and raw materials abroad. The Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus became important energy suppliers for China. However China's initiatives brought it to a competition with Russia. Moscow had long attempted to reassert its influence in the region and assumed leadership role through regional organizations or bilateral relations. Yet, the global economic crisis which outbroke in 2008, disrupted the supply and demand balances in both energy and raw materials.



China's Central Asian policy has two aspects. One is economic factors based on energy supply, and the other is security considerations. China is concerned about the risk of destabilizing the Uyghur Autonomous region through relative communities in Central Asia. China adopts two strategies to overcome this threat perception. (1) To develop cooperation with the regional countries through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. (2) To reduce their unemployment and poverty by hiring labor for East Turkestan's projects or by supporting their economic infrastructures. So China hopes to prevent domestic and foreign support given to the separatist movement (Syaun, 2008).

China has developed its relations with Russia and Central Asian countries both as a strategic step against the West and for creating a security belt along the northwest borders. Reducing defense costs in border areas and pacification of ethnic and religious conflicts in the region will create a suitable environment for the current economic development model (Ekrem, 2003, p.131).

Chinese foreign policy has been made in line with the domestic security concerns and economic goals. Firstly, China's relations with the Central Asian countries have been complicated for some time. The presence of the Western countries in the region has provided Central Asian countries with alternative foreign policy opportunities, and the powers have been balanced. Secondly, the strengthening of communication channels and economic support of Central Asian countries by the US and Western countries partially affected their desire to improve their relations with China. At the same time, their active security cooperation with the US led to the questioning of the existence of the SCO. Thirdly, security cooperation between China and Central Asian countries has been complicated by the strong military presence and financial assistance of the US. However, foreign policy orientations and priorities of the Central Asian countries changed following the "Color Revolutions" and they sought cooperation with China and Russia (Syaun, 2008).

China has three grand strategies such as short, medium and long-term in the 21st century, In this strategy, China emphasizes that it will promote its security and national interests through its economic power rather than military power. In the short term, China plans to control Hong Kong and Macau to which will contribute to develop the country's economy (Hong Kong has been given back by the UK as of date). In the medium term, China plans to influence Southeast Asian countries dominate by controlling Taiwan which is an economic and strategic country in the Asia-Pacific. In the long term, It aims to become to global power by becoming an great and influential country in the Asia-Pacific (Swaine and Ashley, 2000).

Under its grand strategy China plans to develop its economic relations and border security with Central Asian countries and Russia as well as promoting strategic cooperation and partnership with Russia, creating a



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security area in the northwest and then moving towards the Asia-Pacific region with all its power.

India's Energy and Security Objectives in the Region

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the formation of the CIS had important implications on India's foreign policy. The Soviet Union had been one of India's most important trade partners and its largest arms supplier. With almost one sixth of the world's population, India had to develop more ambitious and assertive foreign policy than medium powers.

While India's interests in Central Asia and its ability to defend them increased in the first decade of the millenium, the Delhi administration resorted to all traditional elements of power- economic, political, and military. India's foreign policy objectives were formulated to increase trade volume, to access and develop energy resources, to operate air bases, and to sell weapons in Central Asia (Khan, n.d. p.4).

India aimed at asserting itself in Central Asia as part of its general strategic approach which required increasing its influence and accessing reliable energy supplies. Central Asia became an important component of regional security even after the division of historical Raj between India and Pakistan. Its importance increased with the invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union. After the withdrawal of the Soviet forces, Pakistan tried to turn the region into its strategic heartland, and competed with its rivals in economic and political fields. As this strategy yielded no result, Pakistan supported Taliban to secure its position in Afghanistan. India, on the other hand, took a position to get rid of its position as a South Asian country and to stand up against the besieging China and Pakistan. Since 2000, India has prioritized Central in its foreign and defense policies and directed all its power tools to the region (Khan, n.d. pp.4-5).

India raised its strategic and military profile as well as its economic and political ties in Central Asia. It opened an airbase in the Ayni region of Tajikistan. That was India's second air base outside its borders besides Sri Lanka. Indian strategy included projecting its power and achieving its interests as well as threatening Pakistan in its backyard and and depriving it of its strategic depth (Khan, n.d. p.10).

In 1997, Indian Foreign Minister I.K.Gujral emphasized that India's foreign policy was mostly shaped within the framework of economic and infrastructure needs, and drew a vision of regional economic development covering Central Asia, which he described as "our immediate environment" (Khan, n.d. pp.17-18). India has conducted joint education, research and development cooperation with Central Asian countries. It has frequently participated in infrastructure projects, energy projects and military deals.

India held joint military exercises with Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in November 2003 and announced plans to strengthen cooperation with both countries in the fight against terrorism (Alibekov, 2003). India aimed to develop military relations with such Central Asian countries.



India's interests were essentially formulated on the basis of domestic security concerns and being a play-maker in Central Asia through economic and energy projects. With the perception of containment by two rival countries, China and Pakistan, India fought back against them in South Asia. However, according to Khan (n.d. pp.15-16), India's security perceptions played important role on its economic and other needs. Through a comprehensive strategy including policy options, India could conduct this policy to reach its vital interests and respond effectively to developments in the region. India will be able to implement this policy In this direction, India's geostrategic position will be between the neighboring countries towards which it directs its security policies, and the countries which form the expanded security horizon.

According to some experts, India wants to isolate Pakistan in the region and access the energy resources of the Central Asian Republics. India is trying to find allies for fear that it will not be able to get support from Russia as in the past and to achieve the above goals (Khan, n.d. p.3)

Provided that India's political principles in its relations with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan stem from its Afghanistan policy, the principles in the relations with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan stem from its Chinese policy (Khan, n.d. pp. 5-6). Thus, India's Central Asian policy is the product of broader strategic plans beyond its interests in specific areas. If Russia's relations with Pakistan develop dramatically in the future, India's relations with Central Asia will gain further importance.

Iran's Quest for Influence in Central Asia and the North Caucasus

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the emergence of Muslim countries in the South Caucasus and Central Asia expanded Iran's foreign policy interests. However, their relatively ethno-religious homogeneity has raised concerns that it would encourage separatist movements in Iran. Subsequent events had an impact on Iran's foreign policy, security perception and, in particular, the Caucasus policy. Therefore, Iran's regional policies were shaped by the fear of "separatism and secession" and by the strategy of transporting its energy resources to international markets (Kasım, 2009, pp.143-144).

As Iran got rid of the Iraqi threat as a result of the 1991 and 2003 Gulf Wars, its threat perception from this country increased even more as the USA became its new neighbor. When the USA overthrew the Taliban administration, another enemy of Tehran, and settled in Afghanistan after 9/11, Iran was also surrounded from the east. Considering that the USA developed its military relationship with the South Caucasus countries Azerbaijan and Georgia as part of war on terror, and its military presence in the Persian Gulf, it is obvious that Iran perceives threat from all directions.

The opening of a new front through Azerbaijan by the USA and Israel to weaken the Tehran regime pushes Iran to act pragmatically due to the security considerations. Therefore, it would be appropriate to examine Iran's



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South Caucasus policy in the context of the American threat, separatism-secession fear and energy competition. The future status of the Caspian is another issue to shape Iran's policies in the region. The Caspian also has security implications for Iran.

Instead of ideological, Iran conducted realist and pragmatic policies in the region. This is visible in its policy towards Armenia. Iran conducts its South Caucasus policy based on Realist and pragmatic national interests, not ideological. Although it appeared as a secondary actor (Özçelik, 2015, p.351) Iran did not support Azerbaijan during and after the Nagorno-Karabakh war, nor did not react Armenian invasion of Azerbaijani territory. Tehran did not open its borders for Azerbaijani refugees as well (Kasım, 2009, p.151-152). However, Iran allowed refugees from Afghanistan and Iraq in the country.

Iran's Azerbaijan policy is generally shaped by the fear of secessionist movements by Azeri people living in Iran, and the problem of energy supply. Iran wanted to take part in the transportation of Azerbaijani oil to international markets in the 1990s, but Washington did not allow this role. Thereupon, Iran had to sell the shares it bought from the Consortium. Iran's exclusion the energy transit project and containment by the US presence in the South Caucasus after 9/11, led the Tehran administration to cooperate with Russia (Kasım, 2009, pp.147-148). Preventing Turkey's influence in the region has also stimulated their cooperation. Considering that it would not spread its own model in the region, Iran was worried about the alternative Turkish model (Khan, n.d. 2).

Western orientation of Azerbaijan also played a role in Iran's threat perceived from this country in the early 1990s. Elçibey's prioritising his country's relations with the West, his support for the transition to the Latin alphabet and similar policies were perceived not only as anti-Russian but also anti-Iranian. The fact that more Turks (Azerbaijani Turks) live in Iran than Azerbaijan and that Azerbaijan often uses the "South Azerbaijan" discourse towards the northwest of Iran contributes to the threat perceptions.

The Tehran administration planned to balance the possible threat posed by Azerbaijan, due to the significant number of Turkish origin living in its country, through Armenia and followed policies close to Yerevan. With this strategy, Iran planned to use Armenia as a buffer country or to benefit from its cooperation with Yerevan as a leverage in case any Azerbaijani attempts towards the Turks in Iran (Kasım, 2009, pp.143,146).

US sanctions prevent Iran from playing an active role in the Caucasus. This situation negatively affects Iran's general political influence through energy supply and transportation (Kasım, 2009, p.157). Iran's rapprochement with Armenia in the fields of energy and transportation cooperation may disturb the USA in terms of its Caucasus policy. However, Iran isn't only disturbed by Washington in its energy policies. Even Russia, with which Iran maintains close cooperation in several areas, does not compromise its



interests in the energy fields, especially supply and transit issues were at the table. For example, as a result of pressure from Russia, the diameter of the Iran-Armenia natural gas pipeline was reduced from 1420 mm to 700 mm. Thus, Tehran's supplying gas to third countries through that pipeline has been prevented (Kasım, 2009, p.154). Russia's move has been a concrete example of its strategy for preventing alternative projects.

On the other hand, the USA focused on more radical measures to end Iran's nuclear program. The success of international sanctions led by the USA against Iran is closely linked to the attitudes of the neighbouring countries (Kasım, 2009, p.154).

Turkey's Role as a Bridge Between the Civilizations

Almost all of the important developments that marked 1990s took place in Turkey's neighbourhood and deeply affected the country. The dissolution of the USSR, the emergence of the CIS, and the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact are some of these developments. Ankara faced new opportunities as well as deep problems. These difficulties arose not only from the internal problems of the newly independent states, but also from the new policies of Russia, the legal heir to the Soviets.

Russia has considered Turkey as the only physical point of contact between the Transatlantic system, which Moscow could not fully trust, and the Eurasian system, which it strategically retreated (Sezer, 2002, p.231). In addition, Turkey's policies towards the former-Soviet states conducted in 1991 were perceived by some Russian circles as an "attempt to create a sphere of influence". This perception had wider implications on the U.S.-Russian relations, not limited to the Turkish-Russian relations (Güney, 2002, pp.357-360).

Between 1989-1991, Turkey pursued a cautious and Soviet Union-centered policy against nationalist movements that might have caused uncertainties in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Between 1991-1993, Turkey appeared as a role model and leader for the countries in the region. Not only did Turkey's policies exclude Russia, but also they also aimed at reducing this country's influence in the region (Aydın, 2001, p.276). Turkey has assumed a central role in the Turkish world which is beyond Russia's "near abroad" by benefiting from its historical, cultural, ethnic and linguistic affinity (Güney, 2002, p.348). Turkish diaspora could strengthen Ankara's hand in the region. (Özçelik, 2018, pp.57-76)

President Turgut Özal, in his speech at the opening of the legislative year of the Grand National Assembly of Turkey on September 1, 1991, stated that Turkey faced with a leadership opportunity that should not be missed (TBMM Record Journal, 1991, p.25). Özal believed that Turkey should play a more active role in the South Caucasus and Central Asia (Winrow, 2002, p.261). Özal's slogan "The Turkish World from the Adriatic Sea to the Great Wall of China" was later adopted by the Prime Minister Süleyman Demirel.



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Russia's "near abroad " policy is especially important for Turkey since the region is also viewed as the "near abroad" of Turkey. This proximity included not only geographical but also historical, cultural and religious elements (Dağı, 1998, p.87). Therefore, Russia-Turkey relations in the 1990s can be defined as controlled geopolitical competition and economic cooperation (Sezer, 2002, p.236).

While Turkey had a liberal and pluralistic Eurasian vision with limited sovereignty of Moscow, Russia envisioned integration within the former Soviet borders, if not under its control, at least under its leadership (Sezer, 2002, p.247). Ankara did not want Russia to re-establish absolute dominance over the countries of the region. Despite this, Turkish decision makers, believing that Russia would fill the power vacuum in the region in the 1993-1995 period, opted for more realistic, balanced and mutually cooperative policies that did not exclude Moscow (Aydm, 2001, p.276). In this diversion, Turkey's economic insufficiency played an important role as it was one of the vital means for achieving the country's foreign policy objectives.

Turkey perceived several security concerns from Russia as such; Russia's support for the Kurdish separatist movement and PKK terrorism; its impact on the Baku-Novorossiysk oil pipeline construction, its competition for the Caspian Sea oil pipeline projects; its troop deployments in Armenia and Georgia; its intention to use conflict resolution and peacekeeping missions in the region; its supplying arms to the countries surrounding Turkey; its violation the AKKA Wing Agreement (Sezer, 2002, p.237-239). In the Azerbaijan-Armenia conflict, the two countries took part in different fronts. Russia's military cooperation with Armenia has also increased Ankara's concerns about this country (Asker, 2017, pp.59-90).

Turkey's initial cautious policy then became more active thanks to the leadership and public opinion. This was also in line with the role defined by the West. As a result of the developments after 1993, Turkey realized that it would not be possible to ignore Russia while conducting policies in the Caucasus and Central Asia. So Turkey abandoned its assertive slogan "The Turkish World..." and attempted to develop its relations with Russia.

Turkey's foreign policy has been more influential when compared to that of Iran. However, both countries appeared as important actors in the region. Due to its Western orientation and strong ties with the USA, Turkey has been viewed as Washington partner in the region (Khan, n.d. p. 2).

Russia's Strategies in "the near abroad"

Russia's national security doctrine embodies the ruling elite's threat perception, national interests and strategies to achieve them. They also lay down guidelines to create Russian identity in the multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-cultural federation (Dağı, 1998, p.93). The hierarchical order of the doctrines are: (1)The National Security Doctrine (The National Security Strategy), (2) The Foreign Policy Doctrine, and (3) The Military Doctrine (Haas, 2009, p.2). The National Security Doctrine is the official



declaration of strategic priorities and measures which ensure the country's long term national security and sustainable development at home and abroad (Schröder, 2009, p.6).

The first national security doctrine was drafted in 1993. In that doctrine, Russian leadership defined the former Soviet countries as "the near abroad" to declare their unilateral interests in the region. This term has been closely associated with the national security interests in the subsequent doctrines. The 2000 National Security Doctrine reflected the concerns caused by the Kosovo conflicts in 1999 and also revealed the current policy priorities. The primary goal of the doctrine was to stop Russia's decline in political, economic and military fields in its international relations. Putin promised to end the domestic chaos during the Yeltsin era and to make Russia a respected state on the world stage (Chinyaeva, 2003).

Putin's primary goal was to make Russia a global power again. The president has strictly adhered to this goal throughout his terms of office. The doctrine's foreign security vision reflected new realities. It claimed that the bipolar world order had ended and that Russia was no longer a superpower like the USA. The doctrine underlined two possible trends in the future: (1) A multipolar world in which several economically powerful countries have emerged, (2) A world controlled by the West under the US leadership where the US interests will dominate (www.mid.ru).

The doctrine claims that specific countries attempt to weaken Russia politically, economically, militarily and efforts ignoring Russia's interests in the conflict resolution and the main issues of international relations, damage the positive changes achieved in international relations, stability and international security (www.mid.ru).

The following were listed as international issues in the doctrine; (1) NATO's enlargement into Eastern Europe and the danger of military build-up by the Russia's borders, (2) international terrorism, (3) weakening of integration processes in the CIS, (4) escalation of ongoing conflicts in the CIS (www.mid.ru).

In order to ensure Russia's security in the international arena, the doctrine envisages the realistic identification of threats to national security and the provision of tools to neutralize these threats in the medium and long term. The tools mentioned here are the creation of sufficient high-level military potential for Russia, more investment in military science and technology, and the military-industrial complex. The doctrine envisages Russia's leadership role in the defense of the CIS and its security role in various strategically important regions of the world. The doctrine explicitly linked Russia's ability to actively participate in decision-making processes on international issues with the country's military strength (www.mid.ru).

The doctrine defined Russia's nuclear capability as a deterrent factor against external nuclear threats both for itself or its allies. With this doctrine, Russia has lowered the threshold for using nuclear weapons. While the 1997



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Doctrine allowed the use of nuclear weapons in the event of a threat to Russia, the new doctrine allows such use to repel an armed attack should all other means of resolving the crisis fail. Experts interpret this change as a reaction resulting from the weakness of Russia's conventional power against NATO (www.mid.ru)

Moscow views international security issues as such: (1) Nonproliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD), (2) Resolving and preventing regional conflicts, (3) Combating international terrorism, (4) Combating drug trafficking, (5) Nuclear and radioactive security, global ecological problems (www.mid.ru).

The doctrine listed the factors that have repercussions for the positive transition in international relations, stability and international security as (1) The efforts of some countries to weaken Russia politically, economically, militarily and in other ways and (2) Attempts to ignore Russia's interests in resolving conflicts and major problems in international relations.

It has been argued that the main threats in the international arena stem from the following factors:

- the striving of particular states and intergovernmental associations to belittle the role of existing mechanisms for ensuring international security, above all the United Nations and the OSCE,
- the danger of a weakening of Russia's political, economic and military influence in the world,
- the strengthening of military-political blocs and alliances, above all NATO's eastward expansion,
- possible appearance of foreign military bases and large troop contingents in direct proximity to Russia's borders,
- proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and their delivery vehicles,
- a weakening of the integration processes in the CIS,
- outbreak and escalation of conflicts near the state border of the Russian Federation and the external borders of the member states of the CIS,
- territorial claims against Russia" (www.mid.ru).

As threats to Russia's national security; the doctrine points out the efforts of other states to weaken Russia's position in Europe, the Middle East, the South Caucasus, Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific Region, to prevent Russia's realization of its national interests and to reassert itself as one of the centers of influence in the multipolar world. According to Russian officials, the military threat level and its scope is increasing. NATO's shifting the practice of using military force to the level of strategic doctrine, without a UN Security Council resolution, destabilizes the entire global strategic situation (www.mid.ru).

Russia's national interests in the international arena are to preserve its sovereignty, to become a great power, to strengthen its position as one of the



centers of influence in the multipolar world, to develop equal and fair relations with all countries and especially with the CIS members and Russia's traditional partners, to develop equal and fair relations with the unions for integration, universal protection of human rights and freedoms, double standards are not allowed in this area, listed as (www.mid.ru).

In the doctrine, energy was defined as a strategic security asset and it was emphasized that the gradual decrease of energy resources could pose a threat, because the efforts of energy-poor countries to control assets could lead to armed conflicts. The protection of Russian citizens in "the near abroad" was also an important clause taken from past doctrines. Moscow used this principle as the main justification for its efforts to legitimize its military action against Georgia in August 2008 (Haas, 2009, pp.3-4).

Since the second term of Putin's presidency, the energy issue has gained weight in Russian security thinking. It was included as resource and supply security in such sections as "Russia in the World Community", "National Defense", "Improving the Quality of Life" and "Economic Development". The strategy described energy as a tool that strengthens Moscow's influence in the international arena and provides a resource to be used as a strategic deterrent (Haas, 2009, p.4).

Criticism of Russian decision makers towards the unipolar international relations system, the discomfort felt by the US's global policies, and the protection of Russians abroad have always been included in national security doctrines. Russia continued its efforts to update the "2000 National Security Doctrine" in 2007. It was envisaged that the new security doctrine would have a mechanism to automatically take action against new threats.

President Vladimir Putin approved the new version of the National Security Strategy on 31 December 2015. The national interests were listed as such: to strengthen the defense of the country, to ensure the inviolability of the constitutional order; to strengthen national consensus; to improve quality of life; to preserve and develop traditional Russian spiritual and moral values; to increase the competitiveness of the national economy; to consolidate Russia's status as one of the leading world powers (www.tass.ru). As Asker (2010, pp.2-8) pointed out, Russian national interests in "the near abroad" were formulated in the strategy documents.

Conclusion

Russia defined post-Soviet space as "the near abroad" and declared the region as its privileged sphere of interest. Russia confirmed that it was committed to its interests in the region by incorporating them in the official doctrines. The "near abroad" did not simply mean geographical proximity for a region viewed by Russians as their geopolitical extension. It was a word specially picked to warn against future infiltration of non-regional actors into the region. By developing this concept, Russia had declared that it would not give up its interests even when it was in a fragile social, political and economic situation in the 1990s. Later, Russia proved that it



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would not refrain from using force when necessary to achieve these interests in 2000s.

Russians have sought for creating a safe zone, a kind of security belet beyond their borders since they were from time to time ruled by invading foreign powers throughout their history. On the other hand, global powers and regional countries pursued different interests in the post-Soviet space. Their interests often conflicted with each other.

The "near abroad" became an important crossroads in the process of defining Russia's national identity, national interests and security policies after the collapse of the USSR. The strategy of reasserting dominance in "the near abroad" was realized step by step since Vladimir Putin assumed acting presidency on December 31, 1999. To this end, several regional organization, security and integration processes such as Commonwealth of Independent Nations (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and, Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) were encouraged.

Putin aimed at creating a counterbalance against the Western influence in "the near abroad". For this reason, he supported policies such as preserving Russian military presence in the region, preventing non-regional military structures, limiting NATO's activities, controlling friendly regimes by supporting them, restricting their participation in Western organizations, controlling energy sources and transit routes, and protecting the rights of Russian minorities.

There were several obstacles before Russia's reasserting its hegemony in the region. The past experiences and concerns of former Soviet republics about Russian hegemony, the US's global strategies, NATO's eastward expansion strategy, the EU's admission of new members and implementation of several partnership programs made it difficult for Russia. Of course Russia had some advantages at hand. It holds a permanent membership in the UN Security Council, a membership in the OSCE, a leading position in the CIS, an important energy supplier. So Russia aimed at increasing its influence by updating past agreements, benefiting from Russian minorities and anti-Western structures. The threats that Russia perceived mainly from the West were effective in shaping its foreign and security policies towards the region. As Russia got stronger, it implemented a more active and interventionist foreign policy.

In the 2000s, Russia engaged in an intense power struggle with global and regional actors in order to eliminate the threat it perceived from the West towards its interests in its "near abroad" and to reassert its influence in the former periphery.



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