

USA – RUSSIA RELATIONS IN THE OBAMA PERIOD: REFLECTIONS OF RESET POLICY

Önder ÇOBAN*

Makale Geliş Tarihi/Received: 26/07/2021

Makale Kabul Tarihi/Accepted: 22/11/2021

Makale Yayın Tarihi/Published: 31/12/2021

Atf İçin/To Cite: Çoban, Ö. (2021). USA – Russia Relations in the Obama Period: Reflections of Reset Policy. *Uluslararası İlişkiler Çalışmaları Dergisi*, 1(2), 94-110.

Abstract: The main theme of the article is the reset policy by which USA put forward her relations with Russia during the Obama era, and which constitutes a process of rapprochement in bilateral relations. In addition, the research question discussed in the article, to what extent has the reset strategy succeeded in USA-Russia relations? The reset strategy, which revealed a process of convergence in military, political and economic issues in bilateral relations, also played an important role in Russia's process of becoming a rising power. In this context, serious steps have been taken on issues such as disarmament, Iran's nuclear program, missile defense systems and cooperation in the fight against terrorism. The USA and Russia, which took joint measures against countries such as Afghanistan and North Korea, turned to a global cooperation process. However, Putin's return to the presidency in 2012 marked the beginning of the end of the zero policy. Particularly in the South Caucasus, the Middle East and Ukraine, a period of great disagreement with the USA has been entered. The annexation of Crimea in 2014 was the last spark that caused the USA to abandon the reset policy to a large extent.


Keywords: Barack Obama, Reset Strategy, Russia, Cooperation, Rising Power

OBAMA DÖNEMİNDE A.B.D.-RUSYA İLİŞKİLERİ: RESET SİYASETİNİN YANSIMALARI

Özet: Makalenin ana teması, ABD'nin Obama döneminde Rusya ile ilişkilerinde ortaya koyduğu ve ikili ilişkilerde bir yakınlaşma sürecini oluşturan reset politikasıdır. Ayrıca makalede tartışılan araştırma sorusu, ABD-Rusya ilişkilerinde sıfırlama stratejisi hangi ölçüde başarılı olmuştur? İkili ilişkilerde askerî, siyasi ve iktisadi konularda bir yakınlaşma sürecini ortaya çıkaran reset stratejisi Rusya'nın yükselen bir güç olma sürecinde de önemli rol oynamıştır. Bu bağlamda silahsızlanma, İran'ın nükleer programı, füze savunma sistemleri ve terörle mücadele kapsamında işbirliği gibi konularda ciddi adımlar atılmıştır. Afganistan ve Kuzey Kore gibi ülkelere karşı ortak önlemler alan ABD ve Rusya, küresel bir işbirliği sürecine yönelmişlerdir. Ancak Putin'in 2012'de yeniden devlet başkanlığına dönüşü, sıfırlama politikasının sonunun başlangıcı olmuştur. Özellikle Güney Kafkasya, Ortadoğu ve Ukrayna'da ABD ile büyük anlaşmazlık sürecine girilmiştir. 2014 yılında Kırım'ın ilhak edilmesi ise reset politikasının ABD tarafından büyük ölçüde terkedilmesine neden olan son kıvılcım olmuştur.

Anahtar Sözcükler: Barack Obama, Reset Stratejisi, Rusya, İşbirliği, Yükselen Güç

* Lecturer, Afyonkarahisar Health Sciences University, ondercoban1994@gmail.com

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1194-4608>

Introduction

The relations between the USA and Russia, which were extremely tense during the Bush period and saw the peak of the crises with the Georgian War in 2008, gained a new dimension after the Obama period. Obama stated that he was distant to the cowboy diplomacy used by those who criticize the American foreign policy during the Bush era. In the USA National Security Strategy Document published on May 27, 2010, it was seen that the USA took a step so that the two nuclear powers, which had tense relations especially towards the end of the Bush Era, could turn a white page again (Dilek, 2019: 39). As a matter of fact, thanks to the strategy named as reset policy, cooperation was experienced on many issues, especially until 2012. Then, with the arrival of Putin, the reset strategy was damaged and bilateral relations entered a period of deterioration. The Obama government, which suffered a great loss of reputation after the events in Crimea in 2014, had to abandon this policy.

In this study, which comprises an analysis of the reflections of the reset policy on the Russian and USA relations, the period of 2009-2014 is discussed. USA President Obama's zero policy has been one of the factors that caused Russia, which is a rising power, to become stronger in its region. In addition, the mutual competition process in the Middle East finally brought the reset policy to the end. However, thanks to the reset, an important friendship process has been experienced in bilateral relations.

According to Khalifazadeh (2014: 83), the Obama administration's "reset" has been seen as an important tool to improve relations with Russia and to solve the problem of trust. The purpose of the reset policy was to replace disputes with cooperation on issues that are the most critical goals of the United States. However, in this study, the negative consequences of the reset policy and some crucial developments after 2012 have not been mentioned much.

In another important study, Aristova (2013) found it odd because of the Obama government's wrong policy, as well as the "big deal" between the USA and Russia as an element of the administration's efforts to reset it with Russia. But here, the development process and positive results of the reset strategy of the relations between both countries are not mentioned. Therefore, in this article, the effects of the reset policy on Russia's transformation to a rising power will be discussed.

In addition, political scientists at both sides of the Atlantic expressed deep concern about Obama's success in enhancing Russia-USA relations. For example, some have criticized Barack Obama for his policy of "surrendering" to Russia and entering into a "dangerous bargaining" process with it, even "not seeing evil". David J. Kramer (2010) spoke for the Washington Post as follow: "Obama would follow a 'Russia first' policy for the sake of Russia's neighbors and focus on 'Russia only' policy, overlooking the region or even leaving it".

Similarly, Dr. Ariel Cohen (2010), Heritage Foundation researcher stated that "only Russia" policy harms the interests of the country to a great extent. He harshly stated that Obama's "resetting" was ineffective in enhancing mutual relations and that Russia was given a lot for the sake of American goals. As a matter of fact, he never mentioned the positive results of the reset tactic. On the other hand, Michta (2014a) stated that the "reset" strategy has disappeared and is weak in defending and advancing American interests. In addition, Barack Obama's "reset" has

shown America to be weak around the world, and this situation has brought up the miscalculations of Putin about America's investment in global responsibility and foreign policy strategies.

On the other hand, according to Charap (2009), the reset strategy was an opening tactic, not a long-term policy. The Bush government's strategy of alternating encirclement and distancing from Russia demonstrated the need for a plan and direction for immediate decisions. Therefore, this distinction is important in the development of the reset policy.

In contrast to the mentioned studies, this study will mainly examine the consequences of the Obama administration's relations with Russia in regions such as the Caucasus, Crimea and Syria. Yılmaz (2019) mentioned that, there was only a short-term improvement in relations with Russia thanks to the reset policy. This positive atmosphere, which coincided with the Medvedev period, gave its place to new problems after Putin became president again. The Obama administration generally had difficulties in reflecting the liberal internationalism and had to pursue politics based on real politics.

As a result, the literature mainly focused on both positive and negative aspects of the reset policy. In this study, the reflections of the reset policy in the regions which has not been mentioned before will be examined. Therefore, this situation will allow the analysis of the reset strategy as a whole within an analytical framework. As a result, different from the studies conducted, this study will try to analyze the crucial role of the reset strategy in terms of Russia's position in becoming a rising power. In addition, the effectiveness of this policy in the Crimean events will be analyzed and different findings will be obtained from the common literature.

1. Emergence of Reset Policy and Subjects of Bilateral Cooperation

The Cold War era witnessed an effort to establish power and hegemony on a global scale between USA and Soviet Union. As a matter of fact, after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, both the Russian people and the newly independent countries found themselves in a new process. In addition, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the USA was perceived by the Russians as both an ideological and a strategic rival (Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012: 152).

Furthermore, like many countries in the world in the early 2000s, Russia under Putin administration also made efforts to balance the hegemonic power of USA. Although, after September 11, support messages were given to the USA by the Russians, some later developments brought bilateral relations into a competitive dimension. Bush's initiatives had led Russia to think that the USA's intention was to seek world domination (Efegil, 2008: 113). Moreover, the Russian-Georgian War of 2008 has deteriorated bilateral relations further (Rojansky and Collins, 2010: 2).

Barack Obama, who won the Presidential elections held in the USA in November of the year after the war, was elected as the new leader of his country. Obama, who ruled his country until 2016, abandoned most of George W. Bush's policies after his election as President. In addition to being a democrat, Obama, who advocated a liberal understanding of internationalism, started a new era in relations with Russia and advocated a strategy to reset mutual relations (Yılmaz, 2019: 1).

The 2010 National Security Strategy was created with an understanding of security in certain regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq, and in certain regions such as Afghanistan and Iraq, instead of a global scale (centered on the Broader Middle East in the 2006 Strategy) and an indefinite period of war in its 2002 predecessor. Thus, America gave up the gradual unilateralism of the Bush era by re-emphasizing its alliances and operating multilateralism. This strategy ended the “Transition Period from Unilateralism to Multilateralism” that started in 2006. But here, the USA has positioned itself superior in its relations with its allies in accordance with the hypothesis of strong side and weak allies (Kandemir, 2011: 144).

According to Kramer (2010: 61), Obama's efforts to improve the deterioration in relations with Russia were praised by Russians. So much so that the crisis process experienced after Russia's invasion of Georgia in 2008 has largely disappeared thanks to the reset strategy. Although Russian foreign policy officials viewed Obama's strategy with suspicion, an important turning point in bilateral relations emerged.

In fact, Obama's reset strategy has emerged as a must. As a matter of fact, the failure of the policies implemented under Bush administration, the consequences and economic difficulties in regions such as Iraq and Afghanistan put Obama in a different search. Indeed, Obama's first promises were to reset relations with Russia and prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons (Yılmaz, 2019: 6). Similarly, Cohen (2011) argued that the reset strategy is an important tool to eliminate distrust between two countries. According to him, what was aimed by the Obama Administration was the establishment of permanent, not temporary, cooperation mechanisms with Russia.

In addition to these, the reset strategy developed by Obama has had important consequences for areas such as the South Caucasus region, Afghanistan and Iran, which are still key regions in the relations between two countries. As a matter of fact, by 2008, the USA - Russia relations were described by many states as the new Cold War. Actually, the strategies that the previous US Presidents (especially Clinton and Bush) tried but failed to realize have succeeded thanks to the reset strategy under Obama (Goldgeier, 2009).

As mentioned, many events that trigger the reset strategy are actually a result of the strategies implemented during the Bush period in the USA. The most important of these are Iran's nuclear program, NATO's expansion strategy towards the East, the missile defense systems planned to be established in Central Europe and the 2008 Russian - Georgian War (Khalifazadeh, 2014: 83).

On the other hand, important foreign policy writers from several countries have raised their concerns about Obama's reset strategy. Indeed, they emphasized that this strategy would be insufficient to improve mutually distorted relationships. In this context, they argued that Obama actually surrendered to Russia and even entered into a very dangerous bargain with him. Therefore, they blamed the Obama administration, by arguing that the reset strategy meant excessive concessions to Russia (Aristova, 2013).

Whatever comments may be made, US-Russia relations, which took a very bad turn after the 2008 Russian-Georgian War, underwent a significant transformation after Obama's appointment. So much so that, thanks to the reset strategy, mutual common interests and increasing mutual communication have become possible to establish various cooperation

mechanisms. In fact, the Presidential Commission established between the parties within the framework of bilateral cooperation has brought partnerships in many important areas ranging from agriculture to security (Rojansky and Collins, 2010: 2).

As a result, Obama's reset strategy for Russia, who took office in the USA after eight years with George W. Bush, created a new atmosphere for two countries reaching the dimensions of global cooperation. Expressing his satisfaction with this situation, Russian leader Medvedev followed his colleague in many ways. Moreover, Medvedev, speaking in the Russian Parliament after Obama's victory, gave warm messages about the West (Zygar, 2016).

1.1. Obama - Medvedev Collaboration: First Reflections of the Reset

The reset strategy developed by Barack Obama has been an important element of the changing - USA global strategy. In addition, the Obama Administration believed that the continuation of the George W. Bush administration's foreign policy strategies would harm American national interests. As a matter of fact, Obama, who opposed unsuccessful operations such as the invasion of Iraq, argued that the USA should be a more moderate country in order to be the strong leader of the World (Suslov, 2015).

According to Zygar (2016), the newly elected American government informed Russia that the environment of mutual crisis and competition that occurred during the Bush period is now history. Speaking at a conference first held in Munich, Vice President Joe Biden mentioned that the two countries should press the reset button in bilateral relations. Then, the foreign ministers of both countries, Sergei Lavrov and Hillary Clinton, in Geneva, pressed the symbolic reset button that will carry the relations between two countries to a new era.

After pressing the reset button, Medvedev first visited the USA in April 2009, and then Obama visited Moscow in July. As a matter of fact, both leaders made important statements after mutual talks. The most important issues dealt with in this context have been related to the transition of American soldiers to Afghanistan via Russia and the efforts to prevent the proliferation of nuclear weapons. Barack Obama, who also had a meeting with Putin within the scope of this visit, gave the impression that the visit was important (Kramer, 2010: 61).

In addition, Vice President Joe Biden, who visited Georgia and Ukraine after Obama, touched upon the demographic problems of Russia, its deteriorating economic structure and its diminishing reputation in the region. Moreover, referring to the importance that Russia attaches to the nuclear weapons reduction process, Biden has addressed many problems faced by the country. Emphasizing that this situation is positive for American interests and that cooperation can be made on many issues, Biden gave the first signals of the agreements to be made (Spiegel, 2009).

In this context, first of all, a document was created between the parties regarding Russia's long-term development programs. As a matter of fact, this document, which was approved by the Russian leader Medvedev in February 2010, revealed the strategy of Russian foreign policy to carry out common economic policies with the Western world. In addition, this document aims to increase the interdependence between the West and Russia and to develop new investment opportunities (Blank, 2014: 333).

According to Charap (2010), one of the most successful results of the reset policy is the treaty signed between USA and Russia in April 2010 on the Reduction and Restriction of New Strategic Weapons (NEW START). This agreement, which was seen as the priority issue of the reset strategy by Obama, brought about a significant decrease in the arms assets of both parties. As a matter of fact, the signing of the New START Treaty was seen as an important opportunity for the future of relations between both countries. In addition, this treaty has shown the significant progress brought about by the reset policy between the parties.

In addition, with the New START Agreement, the military strategies of the Bush Administration have been changed to a great extent. As a matter of fact, approximately 1550 warheads were determined and some of the heavy bombers were included in these figures. In addition, restrictions were placed on the ICBM and SLBM type weapons of the parties and a limit of approximately 700 units was determined for such weapons (Blank, 2014: 336).

According to Suslov (2015), the most concrete success of the reset strategy was New START. According to him, this treaty, which has a very symbolic importance, is critical in terms of developing bilateral relations and replacing the START agreements signed previously. Moreover, according to Stent (2014: 221), the assurance that Russia will restrict its nuclear existence by this agreement has been an important element of cooperation. In addition, this agreement, which was seen as extremely critical for Russia's process of becoming a rising power, was deemed necessary in terms of international prestige. Mutual talks allowed Medvedev's country to take place on an equal footing with the United States.

Within the framework of this agreement, the parties also made commitments for the loss of approximately 70 tons of plutonium assets and the destruction of nuclear weapon depots (Philipps, 2010). As a matter of fact, these commitments have strengthened the environment of mutual trust between the parties. President Medvedev and Obama gave messages on mutual friendship at the APEC Summit held in Japan in 2010. Indeed, while Obama referred to "My friend Dmitri" and "a quality partner", Medvedev spoke as "we understand each other very well" (Stolberg, 2010).

New START has given a rapid impetus to the international struggle against the increase in nuclear elements and terrorist activities. So much so that this treaty, which prevented states without nuclear weapons from pursuing nuclear militarist strategies, also prevented access to civilian nuclear technologies. The parties, which made significant progress after this agreement, also tried to create a reliable environment among themselves (Charap, 2010).

Another important reflection of the reset policy is the establishment of a cooperation mechanism between Obama and Medvedev on the missile defense systems. The abandonment of Obama's missile defense systems project to be placed in Poland and the Czech Republic after the non-proliferation treaty had important consequences. As a matter of fact, the American Administration aimed to create a different missile defense system against threats from Iran. Moreover, Obama denied the claims that there was a Russian influence behind this decision. Frankly, then Defense Minister Robert Gates also made statements supporting Obama (Kramer, 2010: 65 - 66).

Cooperation in the field of missile defense systems has been one of the most critical issues in bilateral relations. As a matter of fact, an important mechanism has been developed within the framework of the European Progressive Adaptive Approach (EPAA) between Obama and Medvedev, which have turned to cooperation in this field thanks to the reset strategy. However, Russia's call for binding laws on this issue has not been evaluated by the United States (Deyermond, 2012: 77).

In addition to these, a request was submitted to the USA by Medvedev for a new security agreement in November 2009. However, the Obama administration partially disappointed Medvedev by arguing that security agreements were already handled within the OSCE framework. As a result, according to Putin and Bush period, the parties that made significant progress in this field gave great importance to this issue in terms of their national security (Ulyanov, 2015).

Apart from these, one of the first reflections of the reset policy was the support of the Obama Administration for Russia's World Trade Organization (WTO) membership process. As a matter of fact, the friendship process that occurred by the reset policy accelerated the membership negotiations (Blank, 2014: 334). In addition, the President of the Russian National Economic Council paid a visit to USA in April 2010. Moreover, commitments have been made by the Obama administration to provide all kinds of technical support to accelerate the membership process within the framework of Russia's Customs Union (The White House, 2010).

To summarize, the first reflections of the reset policy have brought improvement between two countries ranging from nuclear cooperation to the WTO membership process. In addition, the disruptions in economic relations during the Bush period have largely disappeared and the 123 agreements that were suspended have been re-enacted by the Obama government. After the reset, cooperation was developed in not only on these issues but also in the areas of engagement, education, culture and arts. According to Rojansky and Collins (2010: 3), this was one of the most important contributions of the reset policy made Russia becoming a rising power.

1.2. Strategic Cooperation Areas (Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea)

Mutual friendly relations developed between USA and Russia by the reset strategy have been the trigger factor for cooperation on strategic issues such as Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea. As a matter of fact, both countries have common interests in these regions has led the Obama and Medvedev administrations to seek common interests. In addition, according to Kramer (2010: 69), this situation has brought a short-term and not comprehensive cooperation mechanism to the agenda.

In this context, Migranyan (2009), the Secretary of the Institute for Democracy and Cooperation in the USA, first brought up the cooperation of both countries on sanctions against Iran. It has been argued that in order for Russia to continue to impose sanctions on Iran, the United States should avoid openly intervening in the former Soviet territory. Moreover, it was stated that the USA should not provide any support to the countries that are hostile to Russia.

With US support, Russia found it unacceptable for Iran to have nuclear weapons. Indeed, Iran was declared as a potential threat in the statement published in Moscow in July 2009 by Medvedev and Obama. The same statement made by Medvedev again at the UN General Assembly in September of the same year gave hope to the USA regarding the sanctions to be

imposed on Iran. As a result, the decisions taken against Iran were supported by both countries (Sestanovich, 2008: 12).

Russia then gave up the S-300 missiles it had previously planned to be given to Iran. One of the most concrete achievements of the reset policy was that Russia changed this strategy, which had previously given these missiles to Iran despite the reactions of the USA and Israel. As a matter of fact, the Russians, who were afraid that Israel would hit Iran, informed the Israeli president that delivery of the S-300s were abandoned. In other words, Russia has shown the whole world that there were cooperation with the USA on Iran.

In addition to these, Russia, disturbed by the secret uranium presence in Iran's city of Qom, supported the resolution 1929 at the UN Security Council under the leadership of the USA. In this context, cooperation was achieved against Iran's nuclear program. Moreover, Medvedev described these sanctions against Iran as smart sanctions (Ulyanov, 2015). However, the demand not to exceed the sanctions against Iran before and after the reset strategy was the only request of Russia (Blank, 2014: 355).

The resolution numbered 1929, issued after both countries' intense struggle against Iran's nuclear program, also created a preventive content on the ballistic missile program. Moreover, the USA and Russia stated that the failure of Iran to fulfill its obligations regarding the nuclear program, thanks to this decision, would be a heavy cost for the country. In this context, the strong cooperation between Obama and Medvedev has occurred in the matter of expelling P5 + 1 as well as enriched uranium in the country (The White House, 2010).

Besides Iran, another country in which a cooperation mechanism was created within the scope of the reset strategy between the USA and Russia was Afghanistan. As a matter of fact, the operations carried out by the USA and NATO against terrorist groups in Afghanistan increased the need for Russian support in this period. Russian support for this struggle was provided by allowing the free passage of territory and airspace for USA and NATO troops. In fact, the Pakistani Government's closure of the Southern Roads on the grounds that its soldiers were killed by the USA increased the need for Russia in this sense (Rojansky and Collins, 2010: 3).

Russia, on the other hand, adopted an agreement in 2009 that offered an opportunity to transport military equipment and supplies to Afghanistan over its airspace. As a matter of fact, within the framework of this agreement signed in Moscow in July, approximately 4500 flight rights have been given to the USA. Moreover, these roads opened to the USA by Russia were considered as an important alternative by the Obama Government and approximately two flights were made daily (Charap, 2010).

In this context, the transit agreement made to ensure peace and stability in Afghanistan has facilitated the interventions of the USA and NATO (Kramer, 2010: 71). As a matter of fact, the Northern Distribution Network (NDN) paved the way for sending equipment to American troops in the region. In fact, approximately 65 percent of this aid was provided by the passageways established through Russia. In other words, Russia's support for this struggle enabled the USA to expand its routes. Moreover, Russia's support was provided not only by flight permits, but also by helicopters and fuel support (The White House, 2010).

According to Charap (2010), one of Russia's support to the USA was the recognition of the right to pass the railroad starting from Latvia to Afghanistan. Providing extremely advantageous facilities and convenience for the US to reach Afghanistan in nine days, this route enabled most of the equipment to be transported via Russia. Not only providing support through routes, Russia has also supported initiatives to prevent the spread of the drug trade in Afghanistan. Medvedev, who signed a joint declaration with Obama, ensured that Russian anti-narcotics personnel were sent to Afghanistan.

Another issue where bilateral cooperation came to the fore was North Korea. As a matter of fact, this country's nuclear weapon tests in May 2009 met with reaction from Russia. Russia even supported the UN Security Council resolution condemning North Korea on this issue. Not satisfied with this, North Korea made a re-trial in the summer of the same year. Russia reacted to this situation during this period due to friendly relations with the USA. In addition, Russia's low commercial and economic interests with North Korea was an important factor in its behavior in this way (Kramer, 2010: 69).

Later, the UN Security Council took the decision no 1874 on North Korea's nuclear tests. This decision, which clearly condemns North Korea's nuclear activities, also brought some sanctions to the country. As a matter of fact, this decision prohibiting the export of nuclear weapons to North Korea and the purchase of weapons by North Korea also stated that the countries that are members of the Security Council are responsible for the inspection of all prohibited products entering this country (The White House, 2010).

2. The Return of Putin: Dispute Process and Emergence of Major Conflicts

As mentioned before, after the emergence of the reset strategy, friendly relations were established between Russia and USA, and cooperation was achieved on many issues. For example, cooperation was made on nuclear issues, an agreement was reached on missile defense mechanisms, and joint steps were taken in critical regions such as Iran, Afghanistan and North Korea. In fact, cooperation was not limited to these, and the WTO membership process of Russia was supported, and friendship mechanisms were developed in all areas through various economic and commercial agreements (Rojansky and Collins, 2010: 1).

However, this atmosphere, which coincided with the Medvedev period, came to an end in 2012 after Putin became president again. According to Yılmaz (2019: 19), as a matter of fact, following the arrival of Putin, the Obama administration had difficulties in maintaining the liberal internationalism approach it had maintained in relations with Russia since 2009 and had to pursue a policy based on real politics. Moreover, Putin's re-presidency in 2012 has been described as a threat to Russia-US relations and a blow to Obama's policy of reset (Kuchins and Zevelev, 2012: 159).

In this context, Russia's reaction to the West after 2012 was expressed not only in political issues but also in national security strategies. As a matter of fact, the Putin Administration reacted to the US 'strategies, regional interests and NATO's activities (especially in the Middle East). In the military doctrine announced in Russia under Putin, NATO was described as one of the biggest foreign threats (Ondrejcsak, 2016: 19).

The upheavals that broke out in the Middle East in the spring of 2011 and called the Arab Spring, brought along some disagreements in USA and Russia relations. As a matter of fact, the biggest disputes in this region were experienced in Libya and Syria issues. The friendship process created between Obama and Medvedev contributed to the conclusion of an agreement for Libya in March 2011. As a matter of fact, common views were shared with the effect of the reset strategy in the first place because the Gaddafi regime was opposed by both countries (Zygar, 2016).

The dispute between the parties on Libya occurred after NATO's flight decision. As a matter of fact, Medvedev supported the UN Security Council's resolution on Libya, while Putin opposed the attempts to kill the Libyan leader. It should be emphasized that the disagreements that emerged on this issue and the developments in the following period greatly damaged the reset strategy (Ulyanov, 2015). Syria became the most important address of the conflicts that followed.

In fact, Russia's desire to maintain its strategic position in the Mediterranean region and presence of its naval base in the region were the most important factors in supporting Syria. Therefore, Russia's constant veto of UN Security Council resolutions on Syria was an important source of disagreements between Putin and Obama administrations. As a matter of fact, Russia, which is one of the biggest supporters of the Assad regime in Syria, has been the biggest obstacle of the US initiatives against this country (Wezeman, 2013).

In addition to these, the sanctions made by the UN Security Council against the Assad regime since 2012 have been vetoed by Russia and China. As a matter of fact, this situation caused the USA to contradict with Russia and to have different allies. In addition, the recognition of the National Coalition of Opposition and Revolutionary Forces in Syria increased the tension between Moscow and Washington. Moreover, the adoption of the Magnitsky Act by the USA paved the way for Russia's intervention in human rights violations in the region. This situation was the biggest source of the damage of the reset strategy in the Middle East (Pifer, 2015: 115).

Especially after 2013, Russia has become the biggest challenger of the USA-backed global system (Ondrejcsak, 2016: 19). According to Stent (2014: 246), the reason for disagreements between two countries regarding the Middle East was due to ideological and philosophical topics. USA efforts towards humanitarian intervention were at odds with Russia's strategy of non-intervention in internal affairs. As a matter of fact, since the intervention against Iraq initiated by the USA in 2003 was a source of failure and instability, it was not a coincidence that there was a dispute with Russia on this issue after 2011. In other words, the Putin administration opposed the USA policy in the region, fearing that similar results would occur.

The South Caucasus was another important region where the conflicts between the Putin Administration and the Obama government that damaged the reset strategy. In fact, the USA, which reacted to the Russian - Georgian War in 2008, established close relations with both the countries of the region and Russia with the effect of the reset strategy. Therefore, the USA, following a balance strategy between the two sides, wanted to cooperate with Russia against Iran to prevent possible threats in the region (Blank, 2014: 336).

In fact, although bilateral relations showed a positive course in general by the reset strategy, Russian foreign policy towards the South Caucasus continued to be a source of problems between two countries. While Russia defends its right to "privileged interests" in the land it sees as its backyard, it perceives the presence of the West and NATO in this region as a threat (Trenin,

2009). On the other hand, the USA implemented strategies within the framework of the open door policy to the region. As a matter of fact, the support of Georgia's NATO membership process caused heavy reactions from Russia (Medvedev, 2009).

Furthermore, although the reset policy did not cause much debate between the USA and Russia in the Caucasus region at first, Obama administration's strategies to develop military capacity brought the relations to a competitive dimension. In addition, the strategies of the USA to regain the reputation it lost in the region after 2008 especially disturbed Putin. Finally, after the change of power in Georgia in 2013, Georgia's close relations with the West brought Russia and the USA face to face once again. (Ulyanov, 2015).

In summary, the reset strategy that initiated many cooperation processes in bilateral relations has gradually weakened due to the conflicts emerged after 2012. As a matter of fact, the disagreement that first emerged in the Middle East and after the Obama government increased its influence in the South Caucasus, it reached a competitive dimension. According to Ulyanov (2015), although the commissions established between the parties provided cooperation, this was not sufficient. Moreover, the prominence of the characteristic influence of the leaders prevented the realization of some cooperation issues on an institutional basis.

As a result, the fact that bilateral relations moved to the dimension of disagreement caused the reset policy to cease to be a positive strategy. After this period, while Russia was described as a cooperative power by the USA, the Putin Administration took the opposite steps against the USA. The USA, on the other hand, continued its struggle not only in the Middle East but also in the South Caucasus in order not to compromise on regional security and not to leave its allies in the region alone (Ondrejcsak, 2016: 18).

3. End of Reset Strategy and Russia as a Rising Power

The relations and conflict process that deteriorated as a result of the policies implemented by the Putin Administration after 2012, entered a worse period with the events in Ukraine in 2014. As a matter of fact, this situation has witnessed results that deeply affect the reset strategy. Developments in the Middle East and Obama's policies towards Syria encountered Russia's response in Crimea. So much so that the Crimean events were an important message that Russia gave to the world. The Crimean events, a result of the Putin Doctrine, were experienced as part of Russia's strategy to revitalize the empire and to become a superpower again (Khalifazadeh, 2014: 87).

The first anti-government demonstrations in Ukraine in 2013 were met with criticism of the Ukrainian government's actions against civilians. Subsequently, the Obama Government condemned the Russian intervention and accused the Putin Administration of not respecting the will of the people in Ukraine as in Syria. Therefore, Russia was held responsible for the situation in Ukraine. Russia's response to this situation was a military intervention in Crimea and an occupation of this region. However, as the US reset strategy is still ongoing, it has not gone beyond efforts to seek diplomatic solutions.

In addition to these, Russia started military exercises both in Armenia and in the Caspian Sea in February 2014. Vice President Zhirinovskiy spoke humiliating words for Ukraine while calling for Russia's invasion of Georgia (Khalifazadeh, 2014: 87). Fedunyak (2014) reported that

Ukraine would be attacked by Russia, just like Georgia, which suffered in 2008. He also described this country as a victim of Russia's new war approaches. In this context, Russia resorted to the strategy of using force in Crimea and the events flared up.

The events that continued with the annexation of Crimea by the Russians and the process of internal turmoil experienced created a great crisis environment in the USA - Russia relations. These developments, which dealt a significant blow to the reset strategy, put the bilateral relations in a worse process. In this context, the USA stated that Russia violated international law and that some sanctions would be applied. Subsequently, border violations between NATO and Russia took place and the tension reached high levels. Therefore, deterioration in USA-Russia relations deeply shaken the reset strategy (Kuchins, 2016: 7).

In addition, the annexation of Crimea and the Russian domination of Ukraine affected the strategic situation in the region. As a matter of fact, the Russians, targeting the territorial integrity of Ukraine, ignored the European security and military strategies. After this date, Russia was perceived by the USA as an important military threat. Because, after this incident, Russia has emerged as an important power not only in the Black Sea, but also in Central and Eastern Europe. The Putin Administration, which organized psychological operations, propaganda activities and various military exercises, turned to a very comprehensive power struggle (Ondrejcsak, 2016: 20).

Although the USA and NATO could not take very concrete steps after the Crimean events, they took some initiatives. Prioritizing economic sanctions, the Obama Administration also tried to prevent activities in the region with military unit reinforcements. For example, in June 2014, a financial aid of 1 billion dollars was provided to the region by the USA. In this context, NATO, which carries out activities to support the USA, has tried to take various measures on the Black Sea coastline (The White House, 2014).

After the Crimean Crisis, a general perception has emerged that the deterioration in Obama-Putin relations is incompatible with Putin's interests and poses an extremely threatening element to international security. Despite the Obama Administration's pressure on Putin regarding the Minsk 2 commitments, no steps were taken. As a matter of fact, the Ukraine issue and the events in Crimea were described as the biggest frozen conflict process that took place after the dissolution of the USSR (Kuchins, 2016: 22).

In addition, the annexation of Crimea by Russia has emerged as an unsuccessful result of the reset strategy used by Barack Obama in his relations with Russia. Indeed, the failure of this strategy has produced significant results in the long run. The State Department Rice (2014) argued that this policy is driving the country to failure and the country should regain its power in the international environment. In addition, after the Crimean crisis, Russia took action to balance its military presence in Armenia in Georgia and Azerbaijan. Indeed, it is inevitable to emphasize that the reset strategy is ineffective in improving the political complexity in the South Caucasus and in ending regional problems. Indeed, it is inevitable to emphasize that the reset strategy is ineffective in improving the political complexity in the South Caucasus and in ending regional problems (Khalifazadeh, 2014: 89).

In line with the analysis, it is possible to say that the turning point in Russia - USA relations was the Arab Spring and the developments after it. The conflict between Putin and Obama was later reflected in the Caucasus and the events in Ukraine. As a matter of fact, Putin, who described Medvedev as naive and inexperienced, fought to bring the Russian power in the region to the highest levels with the annexation of Crimea. In other words, Putin's re-leadership in Russia was the beginning of the end for the reset policy (Kuchins, 2016: 21).

The events in 2014 initiated an important change process not only in Europe and NATO but also in the US regional policy. As a matter of fact, within the scope of Obama's reset policy, Russia was wanted to be included in the international system under the leadership of the USA. However, as can be seen, while this process did not cause a great change in bilateral relations, it could not go beyond a short-term moderate process and some cooperation initiatives. Therefore, after 2014, the USA had to abandon this strategy and focused its attention on the developments in the region (Ondrejcsak, 2016: 13).

One of the most important consequences of the reset policy was that it caused Russia to strengthen its influence in the region and to consolidate its position. In addition, Russia put pressure on the USA to withdraw in the South Caucasus and increased its influence on the countries in the region. As a matter of fact, it was understood that the USA gave up its reset strategy and it was seen that it was insufficient to protect the interests of the country. In fact, the Obama Administration realized that the reset strategy made its country weak, and again turned to efforts to increase engagement activities in the regions around Russia (Michta, 2014b).

Obama Administration, which had to end its reset strategy, followed a strategy of increasing its investments in countries under the influence of the Soviet Union. In addition, it was understood that the USA should have a closer relationship with the countries in the region and it had to develop new strategies. Apart from these, the EU had to renew its Eastern Partnership project and NATO had to take a step towards tighter policies (Khalifazadeh, 2014: 90).

As a result, the US Secretary of State and the President of France paid a visit to the South Caucasus countries in the summer of 2014 in order to eliminate the loss of reputation caused by the reset policy. Thanks to these visits, various contacts were established with the countries of the region and it was aimed for the Western countries to regain the dominance in the region. An Obama policy has begun to emerge, wanting to show that Russia is against its imperialist goals. In other words, it has been understood that the USA should abandon its reset policy and show its global power again for peace.

Conclusion

Barack Obama introduced a new strategy that started a new era in the relations between the USA and Russia after this date. With this policy, which was first announced by Biden in 2009 and called the reset strategy, a process of rapprochement and cooperation was experienced in the USA and Russian relations, albeit for a short time. As a matter of fact, moderate relations have been experienced until 2012, thanks to the reset policy between the two countries, which cooperate in many issues. However, these moderate relations continued in Russia in 2012 as long as Putin became the leader again.

Thanks to the reset policy, the two countries have taken important steps in economic and political cooperation. In this context, serious steps have been taken in areas such as the limitation of nuclear weapons, combating terrorism, and cooperation in missile defense systems. In addition, important support was provided from the Obama Administration during the membership process of the World Trade Organization, which has an important impact on Russia's becoming a rising power. In addition to these, joint activities were carried out in countries such as Afghanistan, Iran and North Korea, and the bilateral cooperation process reached high levels.

However, after 2012, bilateral relations, which entered the competitive process again because of Putin, started to harm the reset strategy. For example, during the Arab Spring, mutual struggle started in the Middle East and especially tense relations were experienced in Syria. In addition, the competition in the South Caucasus region has reached the highest levels and the process of returning to the crisis environment in 2008 has started. Therefore, the reset policy has been called a failure for the USA and a negotiation process with Russia.

The reset strategy, which is referred to as an unsuccessful policy of the Obama administration, was largely abandoned after the Crimean incidents in 2014. As a matter of fact, the developments in Ukraine and the USA's failure to take a concrete step towards these developments increased the reactions towards this country. The USA, which supposedly reacted to the annexation of Crimea by Russia, left Georgia alone against Russia in 2008, this time it left Ukraine alone. Therefore, this situation weakened the reputation of the USA in the region and harsh criticisms against the Obama administration came to the fore. In addition, the Obama administration had to abandon this strategy and turn to a process of cooperation with countries in the former Soviet space.

From the point of view of Russia, our analysis has shown that the reset policy has important contributions to the process of this country becoming a rising power. The cooperation process experienced during the Medvedev period and the developments after it played an active role in increasing Russia's regional and global power. Russia, which strengthened its hegemony over the South Caucasus, annexed Crimea and put Ukraine under pressure. As a result, Russia, strengthened in military, economic and political terms, emerged as the party that was successful in the reset process, which can be considered as Obama's failure.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar(lar) çıkar çatışması olmadığını beyan eder.

Disclosure Statement: No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

References

- Aristova, M. (2013). US-Russia Relations of Reset: Results and Perspectives. Research Institute of European and American Studies (RIEAS), <http://www.rieas.gr/research-areas/global-issues/russian-studies/2048-usrussia-relations-of-reset-results-and-perspectives.html>.
- Blank, S. (2014). “Beyond The Reset Policy: Current Dilemmas Of U.S. – Russia Relations”. *Comparative Strategy*, 29(4), 333 – 367.
- Charap, S. (2009). Beyond The Reset Button. *Foreign Policy and Security*. <https://www.americanprogress.org/issues/security/news/2009/05/20/6032/beyond-the-reset-button/>.
- Charap, S. (2010). Assessing The “Reset” and The Next Steps For U.S. Russia Policy. Center For American Progress, https://www.americanprogress.org/wp-content/uploads/issues/2010/04/pdf/russia_report.pdf.
- Cohen, A. (2010). Time to Revise Obama’s Russian ‘Reset’ Policy. The Heritage Foundation, <http://www.heritage.org/research/reports/2010/10/time-to-revise-obamas-russian-reset-policy>.
- Cohen, S. F. (2011). Obama’s Russia ‘Reset’: Another Lost Opportunity. *The Nation*, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/obamas-russia-reset-another-lost-opportunity/>.
- Deyermond, R. (2012). “The Republican Challenge to Obama’s Russia Policy”. *Survival*, 54(5), 67 - 92.
- Dilek, M. S. (2019). “Obama Döneminde Amerika Birleşik Devletlerinin Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejisi”. II. Uluslararası Giresun Güvenlik Sempozyumu Bildiri E- Kitabı, 35 – 48.
- Efegil, E. (2008). “Bush Doktrini ve Dünya Güvenliğine Etkileri”. *Hacettepe Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları*, 8, 103 – 122.
- Fedunyak, S. (2014). Putin’s Doctrine” As a Threat to the International System. Wilson Center, <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/putins-doctrine-threat-to-the-international-system>.
- Goldgeier, J. M. (2009). Obama Calls Arms Treaty a Priority. Hoover Institution, <http://www.hoover.org/publications/policy-review/article/5474>.
- Kandemir, E. (2011). “ABD Başkanları G. W. Bush ve B. Obama Dönemlerinde Yayımlanan Ulusal Güvenlik Stratejilerinde İttifak Söylemleri ve S. Walt’un İttifak Teorisi”. *Savunma Bilimleri Dergisi*, 10(2), 122 – 151.
- Khalifazadeh, M. (2014). “The Obama Administration’s Russia “Reset” Policy and The Southern Caucasus”. *Central Asia and The Caucasus*, 15(3), 78 – 91.
- Kramer, D. J. (2010). U.S. Abandoning Russia’s Neighbors. *The Washington Post*, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/05/14/AR2010051404496.html>.
- Kuchins, A. C. (2016). *Elevation and Calibration: A New Russia Policy For America*. Washington: Center On Global Interests.
- Kuchins, A. C. and Zevelev, Igor A. (2012). “Russian Foreign Policy: Continuity in Change”. *The Washington Quarterly*, 35(1), 147 – 161.
- Medvedev, D. (2009). Address to the President of Ukraine Victor Yushchenko. President of Russia Website, <http://www.kremlin.ru/eng/text/docs/2009/08/%20220759.shtml>.

- Michta, A. A. (2014a). U.S. Needs New Bases in Central Europe. *American Interest*, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/06/11/u-s-needs-new-bases-in-central-europe/>.
- Michta, A. A. (2014b). A Strategy For Eurasia. *American Interest*, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2014/04/14/a-u-s-strategy-for-eurasia/>.
- Migranyan, A. (2009). Moscow's Iran Connection. *National Interest*, <http://www.nationalinterest.org/Article.aspx?id21982>.
- Ondrejcsak, R. (2016). "U.S. Policies Towards Russia in The Light of War in Ukraine: From Engaging a "Cooperative Power" to Defensive Containment of Regional Challenger". *Security Studies*, 13 – 26.
- Philipps, M. (2010). The New Start Treaty and Protocol. *The White House Blog*, <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2010/04/08/new-start-treaty-and-protocol>.
- Pifer, S. (2015). "US-Russia Relations in the Obama Era: From Reset to Refreeze?". *OSCE Yearbook*, 111 – 123.
- Rice, C. (2014). Will America Heed The Wake – Up Call Of Ukraine?. *The Washington Post*, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/condoleezza-rice-will-america-heed-the-wake-up-call-of-ukraine/2014/03/07/cf087f74-a630-11e3-84d4-e59b1709222c_story.html.
- Rojansky, M. and Collins, J. F. (2010). "A Reset For The U.S. – Russia Values Gap". *Carnegie Endowment For International Peace*, 1(1), 1 – 16.
- Sestanovich, S. (2008). "What Has Moscow Done?: Rebuilding U.S. – Russia Relations". *Foreign Affairs*, 87(6), 12 – 28.
- Spiegel, P. (2009). Biden Says Weakened Russia Will Bend to U.S.. *Wall Street Journal*, <http://online.wsj.com/article/SB124848246032580581.html>.
- Stent, A. (2014). *The Limits Of Partnership*. Oxford: Princeton University Press.
- Stolberg, S. G. (2010). Obama Calls Arms Treaty a Priority. *New York Times*, <http://www.nytimes.com/2010/11/14/world/europe/14diplo.html?ref=us>.
- Suslov, D. (2015). *US-Russia Relations In The Early and Late 1990s*. Moscow: Faculty Of World Economy and International Affairs - Higher School of Economics.
- The White House (2010). U.S.-Russia Relations: "Reset" Fact Sheet. <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/us-russia-relations-reset-fact-sheet>.
- The White House (2014), Fact Sheet: U.S. Support and Reassurance Initiatives For The Baltics and Central Europe, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/09/03/fact-sheet-us-support-and-reassurance-initiatives-baltics-and-central-eu>.
- Trenin, D. (2009). Russia's Spheres of Interest not Influence. *The Washington Quarterly*, http://www.twq.com/09october/docs/09oct_Trenin.pdf.
- Ulyanov, I. (2015). Assessing The Obama – Medvedev Reset in US – Russia Relations. *E – International Relations*, <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/09/03/assessing-the-obama-medvedev-reset-in-us-russia-relations/>.

- Wezeman, P. (2013). Armaments, Disarmaments and International Security. SIPRI Year Book, <http://www.sipri.org/yearbook/2013/files/sipri-yearbook-2013-chapter-5-section-3>.
- Yılmaz, B. (2019), Barack Obama'nın İkinci Başkanlık Döneminde Türk – Amerikan İlişkileri (Yayımlanmamış Yüksek Lisans Tezi). Ankara: Yıldırım Beyazıt Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü.
- Zygar, M. (2016). The Russian Reset That Never Was. Foreign Policy, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/12/09/the-russian-reset-that-never-was-putin-obama-medvedev-libya-mikhail-zygar-all-the-kremlin-men/>.