



## Is the Understanding of Geopolitical Security Russia's Destiny?

### *Jeopolitik Güvenlik Anlayışı Rusya'nın Kaderi mi?*

Yiğit Karasu<sup>a</sup>

<sup>a</sup>Marmara Üniversitesi, Siyasal Bilgiler Fakültesi, YiitKarasu@hotmail.com, ORCID: 0009-0008-4701-1504

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#### ABSTRACT

This article discusses why the Russian Federation is obliged to understanding geopolitical security or not. Russia's security has always been related to its geography throughout its history. From the Mongols to Napoleon to the occupation of Nazi Germany and the Cold War, it had to follow a security policy dependent on the geography of Russia. But why is Russia stuck in geopolitical security? To answer this question, this article is divided into 3 parts. In the first part, geopolitical security and geopolitical theories related to Russia are explained. Russia's perspective on geopolitical security and how the world views Russia's geopolitical security become more understandable. In the second part, it is discussed how Russia's dependence on geopolitical security is shaped by the events and processes in geography, historical sociology, and international relations. Third, whether there is an alternative path for Russia after the collapse of the Soviet Union; It is also discussed why Russia failed to take this path and how it returned to historical habits during the Putin period. It was aimed to discuss these issues in the article. In this way, with this article, Russia's geopolitical security imperatives will be better understood, and Russia's future will be more predictable in the future.

#### MAKALE BİLGİSİ

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#### ÖZ

Bu makale Rusya Federasyonu'nun jeopolitik güvenlik anlayışına ne derece bağımlı olduğunu tartışmaktadır. Rusya'nın güvenliği tarihi boyunca hep coğrafyası ile ilişkili olmuştur. Moğol saldırısından Napolyon işgaline, NAZI Almanya'sının istila girişiminden Soğuk Savaş dönemine kadar Rusya her daim coğrafyasına bağımlı bir güvenlik politikası izlemek zorunda kalmıştır. Makalenin ilk bölümünde başlıca jeopolitik teoriler kısaca açıklanmış, Rusya'nın jeopolitik güvenlik anlayışı ile bu teorik çerçeve arasında bir bağ kurulmuştur. İkinci bölümde, Rusya'nın jeopolitik güvenliğe olan bağımlılığı coğrafi, tarihi, sosyolojik ve uluslararası ilişkiler dayalı tarihsel bir arka plan içinde incelenmiştir. Üçüncü bölümde, Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılması sonrasında, güvenlik anlayışı bakımından, Rusya için alternatif bir yolun olup olmadığı tartışılmıştır. Özellikle Putin döneminde tarihsel alışkanlıklara nasıl dönüldüğü üzerinde durulmuştur ve makalede bu konuları tartışmak amaçlanmıştır. Bu çalışmanın hem Rusya'nın jeopolitik güvenlik zorunluluklarının daha iyi anlaşılması hem de Ukrayna'da olduğu gibi Rusya'nın çıkarlarına yönelik çatışmaların daha doğru analiz edilmesine katkı sağlayacağı umulmaktadır.

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## Introduction

Today, the ghost of geopolitics haunts Europe again. This ghost has been resurrected by Russia. Ironically, Russia expands into Ukraine and pursues an expansionist foreign policy in general, thinking it is protecting its security. But what is the main reason why Russia thinks this expansionist and aggressive path is the more suitable it's national security understanding? Classical geopolitical security has been a part of the realist security, and national identity of Russia. Some academics, strategists and researchers have developed geopolitical theories due to Russia's position. For example, the British geographer Halford John Mackinder says that Russia is the heir of the Mongolian empire on the geographical pivot of history (Gray and Sloan, 2013, p. 22). Because of this situation, it is of great importance that we look at the geopolitical theories and Russia's point of view related to Russia.

Russia has a path it has followed throughout its history. To make sense of this path and to better read the consequences of this path, we need to take a look at the geopolitical theories about Russia. However, if we specify what the understanding of geopolitical security and classical security are, other geopolitical theories will be understood more clearly. For this, in the first part, we will first explain geopolitical security and classical security, and then we will look at geopolitical theories related to Russia.

In the second part, before talking about Tsarist Russia and the Soviet period, information about the geography of Russia will be given, so the definition of security will be examined through the relationship of Russia with its geography. After that, an overview of how this path was historically determined in Russia will be presented. To understand why Russia has historically become this way, we need to look specifically at the changes Russia has gone through. Tsarist Russia was very influential in the transition to the early modern capitalist era and its traces continue. Russia existed as a tribute state in its adventure from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 16<sup>th</sup> centuries. However, with the change of various economic and governance movements, it turned into an agricultural bureaucracy. These transformations have left deep traces in Russia's geopolitical and classical security perception. Especially after the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Russia gradually expanded. This expansion was directed to the East for raw materials and to the West for reasons such as political participation and manpower during the Tsarist period. However, the main reason behind them was security. Then, the Soviet period will look at how the infrastructural problems described in the Tsarist period combined with the geopolitical perspective in the international system. The answers we can give to this are of critical importance in observing Russia's attitude in Europe today.

In chapter three I will discuss: is it the fate of Russia to have this understanding or could Russia have followed a different alternative path? The answer to this question lies in the integration of Russia's relations with the West after 1990 and the failure of this integration. Examining this integration will help us understand why the war between Ukraine and Russia broke out today and why Russia could not see the Western states as friends and a new approach collapsed. This research aims are to try to answer the question "Was Russia's adoption of the classical understanding of geopolitical security a necessity for Russia?" Using a totalistic understanding of history, it tried to answer this question by examining history, geography, and Russia's theoretical perspective on the world with data and events.

### 1. An Introduction to Geopolitical Security Understanding

But first of all, what is geopolitics? The word geopolitics was coined by the Swedish geographer Rudolf Kjellen (Herwig, 2013, p. 219). One of the aims of geopolitics is to emphasize that political dominance is not just about having power in terms of human or material resources, but also a question of the geographical context in which that power is exercised: "In nearly all international transactions involving some." opposition, resistance, element of struggle or conflict, location, space and distance between the parties were important variables. This importance is embodied in the motto "Power is local". In other words, political demands are projected from one place on the Earth's surface to another through space (Gray and Sloan, 2013, p. 2). In addition, geopolitics is not a concept that never changes, produced only by that geography. On the contrary, local structures constitute the state, and the power struggle based on geography in the international system constitutes geopolitics. That is, it can be reproduced linguistically according to the conditions (as seen in the Cold War example).

The understanding of geopolitical security is the evaluation and discussion of a nation's national security by considering its geography, climate, and neighbors. For geopolitical security, although this situation shows differences in many geopolitical security theories, it predicts a foreign policy and security understanding that is dependent on geography. Realist security is an issue that attracts the attention of academics, strategists, and policymakers. The reason for this is that it has great ties with the Realist school of thought and even that geopolitical security is a sub-branch of realism. However, although Geopolitics bears great similarities with Realism, geopolitical security also examines different areas from realism and touches on points different from the classical security understanding shown

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by realism. For example, while classical geopolitics presents a determinist picture in which the essence of a nation and accordingly its foreign policy is defined by geography, it differs from realism's foreign policy understanding that is shaped by absolute interests. However, it is important to remember that geopolitical security and realist security are two sides of the same coin. The reason for this lies in the fact that geopolitics uses the state-centered perspective, the world system, and the concept of self-help, which are the basic principles of realism. There are great similarities between the international system thesis of neo-realism and geopolitics (Walt, 2010, s. 1-5).

Since geopolitics is a sub-branch of realism, Russian geopolitics is an integral part of it. When we look at these statements of neorealists about the international system, we see that Russia is identified with its geopolitical situation. Because, due to Russia's geopolitics, it is constantly open to invasion. This situation has created distrust in Russia throughout history and has pushed Russia to a forced enlargement due to its geopolitical situation. When we look at the example of Russia, which consists of plains, this theory also gains historical accuracy. Russia has been exposed to various mass invasions throughout its history and has always tried to solve this situation by expanding its borders. When this situation is examined within the scope of neo-realist theory, it shows that system insecurity has a geopolitical infrastructure. Classical geopolitical theories will give us a clearer picture of Russia's vulnerabilities and how Russia is trying to fill that gap. Therefore, knowing the classical and neo-classical geopolitical theories within the scope of Russia's geopolitical security will explain why Russia feels insecure within this system. To make this statement, we need to know the geopolitical theories associated with Russia and we will look at Russia's geopolitical understanding in this section.

### **1.1. Classic-Geopolitical Theories Related to Russia**

Classical geopolitics is the study of the influence or influence of certain geographical features (these are the locations of regions, states, and resources, as well as topography, climate, distance, migration, sizes and shapes of states, demography, etc.) on states. However, classical geopolitics, unlike neoclassical geopolitics, approaches geography more deterministically and gives less importance to other institutions than geography. When we look at classical geopoliticians such as Mahan, Spykman, and Mackinder, we see very geographical determinism very clearly. In short, he claims that the structure, interests and security of the classical geopolitical state are based on geography.

When considering classical geopolitical theories and their connection with Russia, the first person that comes to mind is Sir. Halford Mackinder. Although Mackinder's famous heartland theory is a theory based on British interests, it makes an important reference to Russia's geopolitical position and its security. According to the Heartland theory, the Hun tribes from the interior of the Eurasian continent determined the history of Europe. The Huns, who crossed the plains of Eastern Europe and Siberia, invaded Europe with their horses and completely changed the political geography. In this context, the theory tells us how the Huns invaded Europe thanks to the flat areas of Eurasia, but also tells us that the interior of Eurasia, that is, the "historical pivot area", as Mackinder puts it, is open to occupation. However, according to Mackinder, only one land power can capture the pivot area because it is closed to naval forces. It is Russia because of its land power that can manage the world's largest space. Control of the Pivot Area is the key to control of the World Island, saying that the country that controls this place will control the world. But as a prerequisite for this it must be checked in Heartland (Eastern Europe). So how will this control be achieved? Mackinder's answer to this is the railway that emerged with the development of transportation technologies. As transportation technologies develop, this big gap will be easier to control. A closed international system would also initiate this. Because Russia, which is a land power in a closed international system, will become even more aggressive (Cohen, 2014, p.17-19/ Gray and Sloan, 2013, p. 20-23)

When we examine Mackinder's heartland theory, we see that it is quite connected with Russia. It even gives us clues about Russia's security. The steppes opened Europe to occupation. However, this also facilitates the occupation of the pivot area. Besides, to control the pivot area, the ground power (Russia) must both constantly mobilize its soldiers and control the heartland. Throughout history, Russia has expanded its territory in both Central Asia (Pivot Area) and Eastern Europe (Heartland). We can still see this situation today. For example, Russia invaded Ukraine for the fight against Heartland, besides, it intervened in Kazakhstan in 2022 to reduce China's influence in Central Asia (Pivot Area) and still maintains its ties with Central Asia with CSTO.

The other two most important names from classical geopolitical theories are Ratzel and Kjellen. These two German and Swedish geopoliticians base their theories on social Darwinism and biology. According to Ratzel, the state is an organic structure, and, like any organism, its growth is necessary for its survival. In this context, as the state expands and captures or controls the small states around it, it will open a "living space" (Lebensraum) for itself. Likewise, Kjellen shares the same view with Ratzel. The state must expand to achieve 'autarky', that is, self-sufficiency.

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According to Kjellen, the existence of the state may be endangered if control and expansion cease (Herwig, 2013, p. 220).

The connection of this theory with Russia is again related to its geography. Today, although social Darwinism is not tolerated as a means of providing power, Russia has constantly expanded both historically and today to keep its biological existence alive. This is not only an expansion into the empty plains of Siberia, but it has also dominated and controlled the eastern European states throughout history. When this control was loosened, Russia began to doubt its security and accordingly did not hesitate to use hard power. As an example, he paved the way for military intervention with the Brezhnev doctrine to prevent Eastern Europe from leaving communism, that is, from Russian control (Solovyev, 2004, p. 87). With the Yugoslav Civil War, Russia suspended its pro-Western attitude, and in 2008, Georgia openly invaded as a result of its close relations with the West. In other words, Russia continues to use hard power to protect its borders and biological existence, which it considers vital for itself and considers it necessary for its biological existence.

## **1.2. Neo-Geopolitics Theories Related with Russia**

On the other hand, neo-classical geopolitics, unlike classical geopolitics, does not put only geographical factors at its center. Instead, it adds cultural, economic, and political factors along with the geographical location of the state. The best example of this is understood from the theses of academics and researchers such as Huntington and Kaplan. For example, Huntington's article on the clash of civilizations can be considered one of the neo-classical geopolitical theories in terms of its claim that culture and geopolitics are parallel to each other. In other words, even losing a geographical determinist point of view completely removes geography from being the absolute determining factor by including many parameters in it.

With the disintegration of the Soviet Union after 1990, a great power vacuum emerged in Eurasia. It is a matter of great curiosity whether Russia or the West will fill this geopolitical gap, or whether another state will attempt to fill it. This issue is still not completely closed. Because struggles continue in this geopolitical field. So, how would the Soviet Union's "near abroad" trigger Russia's geopolitical security concerns, and what are the related views?

In this section, it would be better to focus on 2 geopolitical theories made after 1990, especially to understand the geopolitical situation of Russia and the world. These theories are Brzezinski's great chessboard and Huntington's clash of civilizations. Brzezinski's theory is a theory of geopolitics, but Huntington's thesis may not seem directly related to geopolitics. However, Huntington's giving us a map of civilizations and possible security problems (Fault lines) gives us a geopolitical perspective.

If we first look at Brzezinski's theory, it is largely a reinterpretation of Mackinder's Heartland theory for the post-Cold War era. According to the theory, a power vacuum has formed in the "Balkans of Eurasia", that is, in central Asia, and the US-backed Western powers should increase their forces there before Russia reveals its true intentions (Brzezinski, 2005, p. 176-177). To do this, the USA has the two countries that are the engines of Western Europe, these countries are France and Germany (Brzezinski, 2005, p. 92-105). Russia, on the other hand, does not intend to hand over control of the heartland and the pivot area to the West. That is why the security and cooperation of Europe's security belt, namely France, Germany, Poland, and Ukraine, is imperative for the United States (Brzezinski, 2005, p. 122-123). On the contrary, he emphasizes that Ukraine is an indispensable country for Russia. According to Brzezinski, Ukraine is the most important country that Russia has both in terms of identity and geostrategic. According to Brzezinski, Russia cannot be a European and an empire without Ukraine (Brzezinski, 2005, p. 161-166).

When we consider this theory of Brzezinski, it will be easier to understand why Russia was so intrusive, especially against Ukraine and the Former Soviet Union countries after Putin, although striking similarities and evidence were obtained in Russian history and political life. But we'll leave the explanation for that in the next section.

According to Huntington's famous theory Clash of Civilizations, the world is divided into civilizations. These civilizations have core states, and the core state of each civilization has more say than other states of the same civilization. These civilizations have points of conflict, and conflict is likely on these fault lines because civilizations are in constant conflict. Russia has an important place as one of the core states. Because, according to Huntington, Russia is the core leader of its expansion area, historically and as an identity. The reason for this identity and history formation is geography because Russia has transformed the places it can reach and occupy into its civilization. Although the Russian-led Slavic civilization was expelled from Eastern Europe and a Western European-supported civilization was formed, Russia still has ties that cannot be broken with Ukraine, Belarus, and Central Asian countries due to geography. Russia maintains these ties by interfering in the internal affairs of other states and by maintaining

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its economic and military relations with the above-mentioned states, thanks to the identity proximity it has achieved thanks to its geographical size (Huntington, 2005, p. 227-234). For example, CIS, Eurasian Economic Union Initiative, and CSTO can be given as examples.

Huntington thus highlights possible future and present conflicts for us. For example, Russia's intervention in South Ossetia and Abkhazia or the Chechen War. However, since these will be called in another chapter, I leave this part for now as the proof of the theory on Russia.

### **1.3. Russian Geopolitics and Security Understanding**

The geopolitical and geopolitical security perspective in Russia has an important history spanning centuries. This understanding is an expansionist understanding that has been coming since Russia defined itself as the Third Rome. However, this understanding is devoid of any scientific basis and methodology (Solovyev, 2004, p. 86). However, it would not be wrong to say that these Russian leaders and academics were attracted by the characteristic structure of geopolitics and their reductionist and stereotypical approaches. For this reason, geopolitical schools began to develop in Russia over time. Although these schools were tried to be combined modernly with the ideas of important geopolitical thinkers such as Mackinder, Haushofer, Kjellen and Ratzel, geopolitics was ignored during the Soviet period, especially since the concept of geopolitics was associated with being NAZI, originating from Haushofer in the Soviet Union (Solovyev, 2004, p. 87). With Perestroika, geopolitical schools that have been returning from the past in Russia have started to resurrect. Three of these theories stand out. The Eurasian approach, which argues that Russia has a special place in the Eurasian continent, is the Westernist approach, which predicts that Russia is a part of the West and to act together with the Western states, and the Revisionist school, which argues that Geopolitics is a global struggle and expansionism.

The Eurasian school was undoubtedly the most popular among them, and especially with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, neo-Eurasianism had a significant impact on Russia's foreign policy and understanding of security. Especially in neo-Eurasianism, two names came to the fore: Dugin and Panarin. According to Dugin, Russia has always been a multinational land empire. In short, it is not a nation-state. It does not unite with any foundation in the Western sense (Dugin, 2018, p. 31-33). Russia has a special mission of its own. This mission is Russia's taking the leadership of the Eurasian continent in the war between the land power and the sea power and breaking the hegemonic unilateral world power of the Western values (Liberalism, democracy, etc.) attached to the sea power. After this break, the world must be bipolar or multipolar. Russia will control the Heartland and Pivot Area, the world's largest space, through interactions with various geopolitical actors. In this way, Russia will turn into both an energy giant and a land empire. Dugin supports Russia's claim to be an empire because, according to Dugin, this is Russia's destiny. Likewise, Panarin also supports duality in geopolitics. In other words, he sees the struggle between sea power and land power as inevitable. However, Panarin brings a more revisionist basis to Neo-Eurasianism. According to this idea, the stability of Russia depends on its enormous size. Therefore, the only way out for Russia is to re-establish the former Soviet Union. In this way, both Dugin and Panarin will prevent the unipolarity of the world from being unipolar by Russia and a new bloc will be formed against the West thanks to the newly formed Eurasian union (China, India, Central Asia) (Solovyev, 2004, p. 90-91/ Diec, 2019, p. 145-147).

The Westernist school, on the other hand, entered Russian history as a result of the policy of taking the West as an example since the Russian Tsar Peter the Second. Russia has both been in the order of Europe and has tried to provide security in this order. However, with the Soviets, a clear anti-Westernism arose and Westernism was shelved until the rule of Boris Yeltsin. However, with the rule of Boris Yeltsin, Westernism became popular again. Fully aligned with the West and even improved relations with NATO. However, as a result of the bad politics and atmosphere of the 1990s, Westernism is now a completely shelved idea in Russia.

The basic view of the revisionists is that geopolitics cannot survive unless it controls space and cooperates with other disciplines. If it wants to survive as a geopolitical science, it has to do with military, politics, civilization, communication, demographics, etc. must recognize that its formats have been significantly transformed. For example, Pleshakov's innovation in Russian geopolitics was to examine geopolitical issues in the context of emerging political ideologies. The proposed framework fits well with some past geopolitical developments such as the Cold War, but it doesn't seem to have much to offer for understanding the present and the future. Likewise, another geopolitician, Tsymburskiy, took this issue forward and found it right to take a more Eurasian approach to Revisionist philosophy. According to him, Russia's capital must be relocated and Russia, a geopolitical island, repeats itself with 150 years of military transformations and points to Russia's territory so that this situation creates stability. Sorokin and Gadzhiev, on the other hand, defend the multipolar world against the unipolar world, like the Eurasians, and emphasize that the geo of geopolitics is a global ideological struggle (Solovyev, 2004, p. 92).

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Although Russia has various schools and different thinkers related to foreign policy and security, today's foreign policy and security understanding of the Russian state oscillates between certain fusions of these 3 ideas. Although these ideas are controversial for Russian leaders, they have periodically shaped Russia's perception of security. Especially when we look at it from a geopolitical point of view, Russia has come very close to Eurasianism from a statist perspective with the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Especially with the occupation of Ukraine, as Russia moves further away from the international arena, it shifts to the Eurasian axis.

## **2. What is the Effect of Russia's Geography and History on Russia's Understanding of Security?**

Geography is an age-old element that has shaped the history of states in one way or another. Of course, although it is not the only factor, it is effective in the decisions of the state in history. Since the world has almost always been full of states with a classical security understanding for the last 2000 years, the importance of geography is increasing even more.

When we look at the example of Russia, we can see the traces of history and geography better. The reason for this is that the classical understanding of security, which has become a part of Russia's identity, has formed its history. Although this is valid for every state, the society affected by its geography is less than Russia in the realization of historical events. For this reason, knowing Russia's geography and important turning points in its history is very important to understand how Russia's security perception is formed.

### **2.1. Is the Geography of Russia a Vulnerability of Russia?**

For years, maps have been drawn centered in Europe, thanks to Europe's political power and its colonization of the world. According to these map drawings, Russia is divided into two. This division is indicated by the Ural Mountains and is divided into European Russia and Asian Russia. However, this distinction is not geographically correct. On the contrary, the Ural Mountains do not divide Russia. As Vernadsky said, the Ural Mountains facilitate the transition and unite Russia. In other words, the geography of Russia is clear compared to the Russians and this geography is Eurasia (Verdansky, 2011, p. 21).

Eurasia, this huge geography where Russia is located, consists of 4 basic belts. The first of these belts is the Tundra Belt, which stretches across the Arctic Sea; the second is the Forest Belt, which spreads from the south and reaches the deserts of Mongolia; the third is the Steppe Belt, which spans the south of the forest area, and finally the Aral and Mongolian Desert Belt. However, two of these generations had a serious impact on the history and security of the Russian people. These belts are Forest and Steppe Belts. The reason for this is that nomadic communities (Nomadic tribes), which have an important place both in the expansion of Russia and in the history of Russia, tried to invade Russia from these generations. Russia According to Vernadsky, the reason for its spread to these generations and throughout Eurasia is not due to imperialism or the ambitions of the Russian leader. The reason for this spread is hidden in the logic of geography. If Russia did not go to these spreading areas, there would always be people coming from this wide space. For this reason, Russia has constantly spread by utilizing the space in front of it. As Mackinder said, as Western Europe opened to the new world, Russia continued its movement into this great space. This expansion brought the Russian colonists to the Pacific Ocean in 1650 (Vernadsky, 2011, p. 22-23). According to Kotkin's data, Russia expanded its territory by an average of 50 square miles per day for 100 years, beginning in the 16th century (Kotkin, 2016, p. 2).

Paradoxically, although this expansion of Russia was made for security, this degree of geographical size created greater security problems. The fact that Russia's borders do not end with a geographical barrier, that is, the borders are artificial, created a perception of security that Russia is constantly on the alert. In short, this situation gave rise to the logic that Russia needed to expand further to maintain its previous position. Thus, a "security dilemma" stemming from geography emerged. This has made Russia a country that is constantly in need of conventional power and hard power. Thus, Russia's endless adventure of insecurity began (Kotkin, 2016, p. 4).

### **2.2. Geopolitical Security Understanding During Tsardom.**

Before and after the Tsarist period, Russia planted the seeds of the geopolitical security understanding that would occur in the Soviet Union and with the collapse of the Soviet Union. These were formed not only as a result of Russia's geographical sensitivities but especially during the construction of bureaucratic and economic institutions during the Tsarist and Romanov Dynasties. In the 13th century, the invasions of the Mongols created a deep fear of invasion in Russia, so a part of Russia's production was completed as a result of the Russian state's geopolitical relations with

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each other. In addition, it caused the death of old trade routes and prevented the development of capital in Russia like other European counterparts. This made Russia a capital-deprived country and, with Tilly's use, a coercion-intensively rich country. Unlike other states, Russia tried to increase the direct administration before the French Revolution. To ensure direct rule, tsars such as Ivan III and Ivan IV set up bureaucratic structures above the feudal lords and tried to centralize power as much as possible. But Russia had too few men to maintain central government and use force, and this encouraged conquest. As a result of the encouragement of the conquests, the peasants, with whom the state did not have to agree, began to pay the financing of the conquests. Thus, the institution of serfdom deepened even more in Russia. Then, in this capital-scarce region, the logic of the state and war made rulers distribute land only to loyal lords, eliminating any possible public agreement (Tilly, 2020, p.238-241).

The taxes imposed on the peasants, especially during the reign of Peter the Great, both supported the westernization reforms of the state from above and increased the dependence between the crown and the lords. In 1700 Peter passed a law on the enlistment of free serfs and created a noble class that was completely loyal to the Tsar alongside the nobility. This gave rise to a hierarchy defined, supported, and governed by the state that was unimaginable in Western Europe. This centralization continued increasingly during the reign of Catherine the Great. As a result, as Moore says, the dominance of landlords and feudal institutions over the commodity-producing farmer paved the way for authoritarianism to be seen later in Russia (Tilly, 2020, p.36). At the same time, it gave rise to a rapid modernization that was weak and open to social revolutions, and thus incomplete modernization led to social revolutions (Tilly, 2020, p.242/ Skocpol, 1976, p.182-183).

As we mentioned, infrastructural conditions have increased centralization and authoritarianism within the country, and increasing authoritarianism, the people required the use of coercion, the need for raw materials in the early modernization period, and the fear of being invaded, mainly due to geographical weaknesses, have caused Russia to follow an expansionist policy. For example, according to Stephen Kotkin, Russia expanded its territory by an average of 50 square miles per day for 100 years, beginning in the 16<sup>th</sup> century. (Kotkin, 2016). In other words, as Mearsheimer said, being the strongest and most widespread meant being the safest for Russia (Mearsheimer, 2003, p. 21). Because of capital, hierarchy, being able to do diplomacy with European states (Russia being considered the dominant power after the Napoleonic wars is the biggest example of this), state sovereignty depended on security expansionism. This paved the way for the legitimacy that allowed the state to continue its geopolitical and classical security discourse in the Soviet and post-Soviet states. For example, the claim of Tsarist Russia to be the 3rd Rome is supported by security concerns with this unique mission of Russia.

### **2.3. Geopolitical Security Understanding During the Soviet Period.**

Geography, serfdom, incomplete modernization, and authoritarianism, which paved the way for geopolitical and classical security during the Tsarist era, were transferred to the Soviet Union in different forms. This prepared the necessary infrastructure for classical security discourse. However, one of the reasons for the security discourse in Russia during the Soviet Union period was the full entry of the Soviet Union into the international arena and the start of the Cold War. Thus, Russia continued to maintain discourses that legitimize its obsession with the geography of Russia and its security during and after the Soviet period.

With the end of the Second World War, Russia, which was previously excluded from the international system due to Communism, was now one of the new founders of the system. However, with the Nazi occupation, both Russia's perception of security against threats from Europe had increased and the perception of geopolitical security had completely changed.

Russia had new security problems with its new position. He was again protecting imaginary boundaries. These imaginary boundaries were the boundaries of a linguistically produced world. In the new ideological geopolitical era, where these two ideologies and economic orders collide, Russia also found a new universal mission for itself: Communism (Agnew, 2004, p. 103/ Kotkin, 2016, p. 3-6).

In this new order, the Western bloc and the Soviets had roughly the same stereotyped perceptions and hostility. But the definition of security had now completely changed. In the new definition, the world was separated not only by a linguistic discourse but also by a "nuclear fence". This nuclear fence kept the Cold War cold and prevented the two sides from engaging in direct conflict. Instead, geopolitical wars started as proxy wars (Agnew, 2004, p. 102).

In these proxy wars, Russia was trying to pierce the containment strategy that the USA was trying to implement against it. While doing this, he was acting within his own Russian borders. Because Russia's borders are seen as directly related to Russia's stability, as we mentioned above, and the spread of Communism meant that Russia would create

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satellites around Russia that would act as a buffer state for itself. The more these states, the more expanded Russia and the safer Russia would be.

However, although Russia economically discovered natural gas reserves in the 1960s (Kaplan, 2022, p. 204), it still could not find the mass mobilization and economic power to fight with the USA and the Western bloc. The bipolar world created by these imaginary borders collapsed, succumbing to the pressure of reform within Russia itself. As a result, Russia, the superpower of the bipolar world, is now a "normal state" as a "normal state" in 1991 (Kotkin, 2016, p. 7), based on the classical security understanding of that it has established since Tsarism, and the expansion of the understanding that sees the expansion of borders is essential both in Eastern Europe and in Central Asia. (Approximately 2 million square miles of land). Despite this, the weakness of the economy of this country, which has the largest land area in the world, and its influence in the new world order was evident. It was time for Russia to stumble in security and geopolitics (Kotkin, 2016, p. 3).

### **3. Alternative Approach vs. Return to Traditional Patterns**

With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the world order completely changed. In the world order, the US-supported Western camp and its values have sat on top of the world as a unilateral hegemon. The world was now talking about the West and the universality of its values. It seemed as if history had come to an end, as was the title of Fukuyama's famous article. Russia survived a Soviet Coup in 1992 and Yeltsin was elected President. Yeltsin would follow a Western-centered foreign policy and security approach in his early years by following world trends. The old-fashioned geopolitical security and realism were now shelved.

But things would not go as expected and Realism and geopolitics, the old specter of Russia, would be resurrected. This alternative approach of Russia would soon return with Primakov, and then with Putin, the doors of pragmatism and then Eurasian expansionism would be opened, and landscapes reminiscent of Europe's 20th century would emerge.

#### **3.1. Rapprochement with NATO: Liberal Westernism of Yeltsin and Kozyrev**

In 1992, Yeltsin, the president of the newly formed Russian Federation, appointed Kozyrev as foreign minister. Of particular importance was Kozyrev's appointment as foreign minister. This situation showed that New Russia was looking for a new alternative. This was because Kozyrev had an Atlanticist vision according to the "Russian school of thought". The Atlanticist perspective was based directly on liberalism and the thesis that Russia is a Western country. The West was not an enemy to the Atlanticists because they were Westerners themselves. Since they are Westerners, they aim to act in cooperation with the West in the international arena they are in and to clean up the damages caused by the former Soviet economy and bureaucracy with liberalism. The concept of security is no different. According to Atlanticists such as Kozyrev, geopolitics and realism are policies that reflect the past in the Soviet Union's system. As a result, they thought that the Soviets expansionist and ideological sense of security had to be abandoned, and Russia's neo-liberal, democratic, and pro-Western credentials needed to be established as a new rational consensus and the only viable foreign policy option (Morozova, 2009, p. 668). In short, a game theory in which the Russian security concept was not a zero-sum game (realism), but a win-win (liberalism) situation was started to be applied. In this context, the Atlanticists thought that a threat to Russia could come from authoritarian countries. They predicted that if Russia could achieve internal democratization and economic liberalism, they would be able to stop the conflicts taking place on the "near broad". In short, in the Atlantic understanding, Russia was now trying to put the individual at the center of the state and was trying to remove itself from the former Soviet sphere (Bjelakovic, 2001, p. 119-123).

However, this situation did not last long. The coalition formed by the Nationalists in Russia began to criticize both the economy and foreign policy of the Atlanticists in 1992, using the bad economic conditions as a result of Yeltsin's shock therapy. The main view of the nationalists was based on a state-centered security understanding in Russia and a realist-geopolitical understanding that said that the former interests of the Soviet Union should be preserved. With the success of the Nationalist opposition in the 1993 parliamentary elections, Yeltsin's power fell into disrepair. The result was the 1993 parliamentary crisis and Yeltsin became increasingly authoritarian (Bjelakovic, 2001, p. 133-135). With this success of the Nationalists, although Yeltsin retained his power, the Nationalist discourse was now clearly active in foreign policy. When we look at the foreign policy concept and military doctrine of 1993, it is striking that there is a concession between liberal and realist values. In addition, it has begun to be said that Russia is a "great power" instead of a "normal" state. Militarily, the West and NATO are no longer seen as partners, but rather as a threat. The protection of Russia's "near abroad" interests highlights a return to geopolitical security.



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### 3.2. Back to the Realism: Primakov and Multipolarity

After the Atlanticists gradually lost power as a result of the Chechen war and Yeltsin's economic policies in 1996, and after the concessions in foreign policy against the Nationalists in 1993, Yeltsin completely changed his stance. As a result, with Kozyrev's resignation in 1996, Primakov became first foreign minister and then prime minister in 1998. Primakov is clearly defined as a statist in the Russian school of thought. In other words, Primakov, who is on the line of the Nationalists, shares the same foreign policy and security vision with the Nationalist bloc (Bjelakovic, 2001, p. 180).

In Primakov's view, Russia was a great power, and this position of Russia was indisputable. Russia should be considered equal to other great powers in the world. The "new world order" announced by President Bush was certainly a security threat to Russia and was the result of Western unilateralism. Primakov, on the other hand, chose to adopt the principle of multilateralism. According to Primakov, Russia had to protect its territorial integrity in a multipolar world, relations with the CIS had to be developed, and it was Russia's duty to resolve the hot conflicts in the countries within the former Soviet sphere of influence besides the CIS. Unlike Kozyrev, Primakov did not see NATO as a partner, but NATO enlargement was a security threat to Russia. Primakov was in favor of using economical soft power instead of hard power. The reason for this was that Russia was trying to strengthen its former Soviet interests by expanding its geo-economic area and supporting the multipolar world with economic interaction with other countries (Bjelakovic, 2001, p. 180-183).

To sum up, Russia had reverted to the classical realist understanding of security. While NATO's expansion and shift to Eastern Europe increased Russia's concerns about the heartland, the Eurasian, Nationalist, and Statist discourse based on Russian interventionism and the protection of interests had returned. Now the slogan "Russia first" had returned (Bjelakovic, 2001, p. 180).

### 3.3. Putin's way

Putin is undoubtedly an astonishing leader who has left his mark on the history of Russia. As with many supporters, millions follow their actions with horror. So what is Putin's latest game? Why is Putin acting this way and what is behind Putin's bumpy diplomacy? Such questions began to be asked more and more, especially with the Russian occupation of Ukraine. However, words or questions about Putin's personality often connect us to Putin's authoritarian rule. However, the situation has nothing to do with this. Foreign policy is likely to change dramatically when leaders expect the status quo to result in continued painful losses (Igor, 2016, p. 2). Because Putin was not that authoritarian or expansionist in his first term.

In his first term, Putin was advancing on a non-expansionist, realist line. Among the Russian schools of thought, he had an Atlanticist (economically), Statist (pragmatic foreign policy), and later increasingly Eurasian attitude. This attitude allowed Putin to develop relations with the West and facilitated Russia's intervention in soft power and near broad, as it was in the Primakov era. When we look at the national security concept of the year 2000, the things as a threat to Russia are as follows:

- 1) The 1998 economic crisis showed Russia's vulnerability the international financial market,
- 2) NATO's Kosovo operation, NATO enlargement, and the war in Chechnya are the three main threats to Russia's security (an obvious geopolitical security concern about Heartland),
- 3) Weakening of international organizations like OSCE, UN, and CIS are also threats to Russia's security (BITS, 2001, p. 3).

This situation gives us a perspective on how Putin and his administration firstly base their understanding of realist security and how they interpret the world system. At the same time, when we look at the foreign policy concept of 2000, we see that there is an open attempt to establish relations with a geopolitical Eurasianism and the former Soviet area. We see that efforts are being made to develop bilateral relations, especially with Asian and CIS countries. However, in the same concept, the protection of Russian minorities is underlined, and this signals to the West that Putin's administration can intervene against its neighbors at any time after NATO's intervened in Kosovo (BITS, 2001, p. 9).

Color revolutions began to break out in Russia's near abroad during Putin's second term. With these color revolutions, Liberal and pro-Western governments began to form around Russia. For example, the Rose Revolution and the coming to power of pro-Western governments in Georgia and the Orange Revolution and Ukraine gradually increased geopolitical sensitivities in Russia. This triggered Russia's old geopolitical and realist perception of security. When

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the Chechen problem and terrorist activities were added to these, Russia caused the loss of its soft and willing (but far from partnership) attitude with the West. The biggest reason for this was that Russia saw the color revolutions as a game plan of the West. What Russia, which is a "revisionist" in the eyes of the West, is trying to do is to try to preserve its geopolitical status quo. However, Russia achieves this status quo with "old school" methods, namely the use of hard power (Mead, 2014, p.70-72).

In 2008, Putin and Medvedev exchanged prime minister and presidency seats. Even though Medvedev had his own vision, Putin was still active in foreign policy and had a resurgent perception of security. However, there were new events in the world that triggered Russia, and this would make Russia even more aggressive. With the 2008 world economic crisis, Russia saw the weakness of both the USA, the EU, and Japan, whose strength in the world market decreased, and started to turn to the rising global South and Asian markets. The 2008 Russian foreign policy concept proves this. According to the concept, Russia should strengthen its relations and economic ties with the EEC, as well as increase the integration of the economic community, as in Belarus (such as the use of a common currency with Belarus). In addition, the concept mentions that the CIS countries are Russia's security priority and underlines the protection of the Russian minority under the name of humanitarian intervention. We see Russia's humanitarian intervention attempt and its return to traditional hard power in the 2008 Russia-Georgia war. The Russian annex showed that the Soviet sphere of influence could be intervened openly and opened Pandora's box (russiaeu.ru., 27.05.2023).

When we come back to the 2010 years and Putin's power in the 2020s, it became clear that realism and the protection of geopolitical interests with hard power. The overthrow of the Ukrainian Yanukovich government in 2013 sounded alarm bells for Russia and signaled that the heartland was clearly trying to be taken over by the West. Although Ukraine is not critically important to the West (historically), it is incredibly important to both Russia's identity and geopolitical security. There are 2 reasons for this: First, it is a geopolitical symbol of Russia's independence and great power. The second is again a geopolitical symbol, the Russian World (*Russkiy Mir*) cannot exist without Belarus and Ukraine. For these reasons, Ukraine is one of Russia's primary geopolitical security interests (Igor, 2016, p.3/ Dannenberg, Cilluffo, Cardash, 2014, p.3). As a result, Russia entered the annexation attempt of Crimea. This situation pushed Ukraine and other Eastern European countries to experience more security concerns and brought them closer to the West. This paved the way for Russia to see this situation as a geopolitical security risk. As a result, the door to Russia's invasion of Ukraine was opened. Now Russia has reverted to its old geopolitical and realist understanding of security. Effectively using hard power to defeat its opponents has been the main foreign policy tool.

## **Conclusion**

Russia is almost a picture of the geopolitical theories and realism that have been said about it. The reason for this is the creation of a discourse suitable for diffusion, as well as infrastructural problems such as serfdom, incomplete modernization (especially in the Romanov dynasty), authoritarianism, and excessive strengthening of the central government during the Tsarist period. There are many reasons for this picture, but the result is the same: enlargement to remove Russia's distrust of its geography. For this reason, Russia has had a special purpose throughout its history and has refused to be a "normal" state. Russia's geopolitics not only adds to the image of greatness but also adds a sense of special mission. Russia tried to enter the Eurasian chessboard with the power given by its geographical size, and a struggle was entered into the European continent with the West. However, the historical problems and infrastructural problems and the design of the international system, during the Soviet period and after, dragged Russia into a security quagmire and increased Russia's security concerns. Russia's further expansion to protect the homeland consisting of plains did not make Russia safer, on the contrary, it made it more insecure. On top of this situation, the search for a universal mission (3rd Rome-Communism-Eurasianism), which led to the permanent exclusion of authoritarian regimes and Russia from the world stage, further securitized the Russian identity and geography. From this point of view, Russia has always been unable to get out of the classical security understanding imposed on it by geopolitics and has been stuck with the realist security understanding.

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## YAZAR BEYANI

**Araştırma ve Yayın Etiği Beyanı:** Bu çalışma bilimsel araştırma ve yayın etiği kurallarına uygun olarak hazırlanmıştır.

**Etik Kurul Onayı:** Bu araştırma etik kurul izni gerektiren analizleri kapsamadığından etik kurul onayı gerektirmemektedir.

**Yazar Katkıları:** Yazarın katkısı %100'dür.

**Çıkar Çatışması:** Yazar açısından ya da üçüncü taraflar açısından çalışmadan kaynaklı çıkar çatışması bulunmamaktadır.

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