

Araştırma Makalesi / Research Article

Rethinking Eurasian Geopolitics: Assessing Türkiye's Influence and the Organization of Turkic States' Impact*

Çağatay Özdemir**

Abstract

This study examines power shifts in the Eurasian Region in the 21st century using traditional geopolitical approaches. These approaches center on the geographical factors that drive the expansion of borders, considering the control exerted by states over geographical areas. The study uses qualitative research methods to evaluate the position of Türkiye, which has gained an active role in global politics with its developing political and economic power within ever-changing Eurasian geopolitics. Composed of three parts, the study examines geopolitical ruptures in Eurasia during the Cold War. It delves into the areas of dominance held by the United States (U.S.), China, and Russia, which came to the forefront during discussions of the unipolar world order in the international system after the end of the Cold War. Simultaneously, the study explores a shift in actors within the international system, as well as changes among global and regional powers. The focus of the study is on issues such as Türkiye's political presence, security phenomena, economic developments, energy investments, and diversity in Eurasia, wherein Türkiye's presence and influence in Eurasia following its position shifting from a regional actor to a global actor, are revealed. While Türkiye's presence in the region constitutes the

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main focus of the study, the effect of the Organization of Turkic States on Eurasian geopolitics is also examined.

Keywords

Eurasia, Türkiye, Geopolitics, Balance of Power, Organization of Turkic States.

Avrasya Jeopolitiğini Yeniden Düşünmek: Türkiye'nin Nüfuzunu ve Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'nın Etkisini Değerlendirmek*

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Öz

Bu çalışmada devletlerin coğrafi alanlar üzerinde denetimiyle, sınırlarının genişlemesi için gerekli olan coğrafi sebepler üzerine odaklanan geleneksel jeopolitik yaklaşımlar merkeze alınarak Avrasya Bölgesinde 20. yy. sonrası yaşanan güç değişimleri incelenmiştir. Çalışmada nitel araştırma yöntemleri kullanılmış, gelişen siyasi ve ekonomik gücüyle küresel siyasette etkin rol kazanan Türkiye'nin konumunun, değişen Avrasya jeopolitiği içerisinde değerlendirilmesi amaçlanmıştır. Üç bölümden oluşan çalışmada Soğuk Savaş döneminde Avrasya'daki jeopolitik kırılmalar, Soğuk Savaşın sona ermesiyle uluslararası sistemde tek kutuplu dünya düzeni tartışmalarıyla öne çıkan Amerika Birleşik Devletleri (ABD) ve Çin ile Rusya'nın Avrasya üzerindeki hâkimiyet alanları ele alınırken aynı zamanda uluslararası sistemdeki aktör değişimleri ile küresel ve bölgesel güçler temellendirilmiş ve bölgesel bir aktör olan Türkiye'nin küresel bir oyuncu olmasıyla Avrasya'daki varlığı ve etki alanı ortaya konulmuş, Türkiye'nin Avrasya'daki siyasal varlığı, güvenlik olguları, ekonomik gelişmeler, enerji yatırımları ve çeşitliliği gibi konulara odaklanılmıştır. Türkiye'nin bölgedeki varlığı çalışmanın ana eksenini oluştururken Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı'nın Avrasya Jeopolitiğine etkileri de incelenmiştir.

Anahtar Kelimeler

Avrasya, Türkiye, Jeopolitik, Güç Dengesi, Türk Devletleri Teşkilatı.

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Introduction

Throughout history there has always been a myriad of factors that establish the position of states in the international system. One of them is their capability to make sense of the geography in which they are located and states have always made efforts to design their policies within the boundaries of their geography. As of the 20th century, the power struggle among Europe's major states, and the conflicts arising from their colonial competitions, have laid the groundwork for the emergence of geopolitics as a distinct field.

This study aims to analyze the position of Türkiye, which has gained an influential role in global politics, within the framework of the ever-changing Eurasian geopolitics. It establishes a hypothetical framework, dealing with how Türkiye is positioned within the international system in the context of the geopolitical theories of Eurasia. In particular, this work offers a discussion over the process in which the dynamics of the Cold War era were shaped in the light of geopolitical theories. The academic discussions concerning the geopolitical approaches of the states have mainly focused on how and for what purpose geography is valued. In his theory that attaches priority to seas, Alfred Thayer Mahan argued that powers that dominate oceans and open seas would be more influential over global politics (Mahan 30). On the other hand, Halford Mackinder, Nicholas Spykman, and George Kennan place Eurasian geopolitics at the heart of their studies. In addition, German geopolitical thinkers such as Friedrich Ratzel and Karl Haushofer, while carrying out studies that dealt with Eurasia through Russian geography, built the geopolitical approach of Nazism with concepts such as "lebensraum" and "organic state" (Strausz-Hupé 40-138; Haushofer 33-36).

In the context of the subject of this study, the geopolitical standpoints of Mackinder, Spykman, and Kennan were used as a basis for the construction of the historical and theoretical basis. The study also covers the geopolitical approaches of Zbigniew Brzezinski and Alexandr Dugin to gain insight into the geopolitical approaches of the time that followed the end of the Cold War.

The study adopts qualitative research methods using an analysis of documents as a data collection method. Focusing on conventional geopolitical

approaches, the study reviews the shift in power that arose in Eurasia following the 20th century. While Türkiye's presence in Eurasia constitutes the main focus of the study, the effects of the Organization of Turkic States on Eurasian geopolitics are also examined. Taking this perspective into consideration a literature review was conducted as part of this study and data was analyzed in line with the stated purpose.

Understanding the Geopolitical Position of Eurasia in the 20th Century

There is a general consensus that it was Rudolf Kjellén who first described the term geopolitics in 1899 as it refers to politics linked to geographic space. Denoting various schools and frames of thought in itself, this phrase is a phenomenon conceptualized by ancient Greek thinkers in semantic terms. In ancient Greek, "ge" means land and "politike" means policy, and the term geopolitics was created by combining these two words (Agnew 6). While geopolitics refers to the interaction of human and physical geography with domestic and international policies, it arose from how states define their position within the global system in the context of powerhouses (Toklu 46).

Geopolitics is a geographic term; however, it influences many disciplines in terms of its meaning and quality. There is no universal definition for it as it covers a variety of fields (Tuathail 49). In the context of international relations, geopolitics is a geographic analysis of a space with focus on spatial components (Sideway 225). The influence of geography on politics is not a new concept. Studies over geopolitics date back to the 19th century and the studies of the scientists interested in geography and politics such as Mackinder, Mahan, and Haushofer have been instrumental in molding conventional views of geopolitics. In conventional geopolitical terms, a state is described on an axis as a consequence of positive and adverse effects associated with its geographical location and alliance relations (Flint 20-26). Conventional theories of geopolitics consist of land, air, marine, and rimland dominance. In literature, there is a wide range of conceptualization and descriptions over geopolitics. Within this context, this article progresses with a focus on the Eurasian region, anchored in the framework of classical geopolitical theories.

Growing means of transportation brought about by technological developments has caused a shift in paradigms. Niall Ferguson highlights that

the world became smaller and more controllable together with the advent of railway networks, steamboats, and telegraph lines. Such developments brought the geopolitical position of Eurasia in the international system into question once again and made the concept of geopolitics an area of power struggle among states (Agnew 5-10; Ferguson 172).

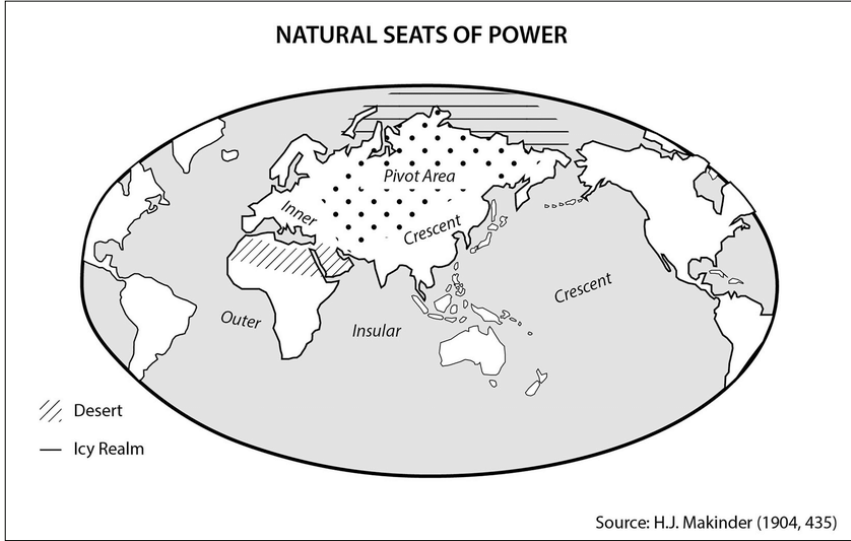


Figure 1. Pivot Area (Heartland) (Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot” 435)

As it can be noted from Figure 1, Mackinder argues that the geographical space that covers the Russian Empire and Mongolia offers a huge potential in population and agricultural produce and argues that Eurasia would create a revolution in human relations with wider geographical realities, and that this territory should be referred to as “the heartland of the continent” (Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals* 55; Alcenat and Scott 2008). Mackinder described the geopolitical position of Eurasia, which he called “heartland,” as “whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland; whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island commands the World” (Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals* 106).

Spykman developed the theory of “rimland” in response to the theory of heartland by Mackinder. Highlighted in Figure 2, he described the region situated in the rimland of Eurasia as a buffer zone between the mainland

and marginal seas, and argued that the rimland serves as a vast buffer zone between the naval power and the land power, and further underlined that any motto pertinent for the power politics of the old world order had to be: “whoever rules the Rimland commands Eurasia, and whoever rules Eurasia commands the world” (Spykman 41-43).

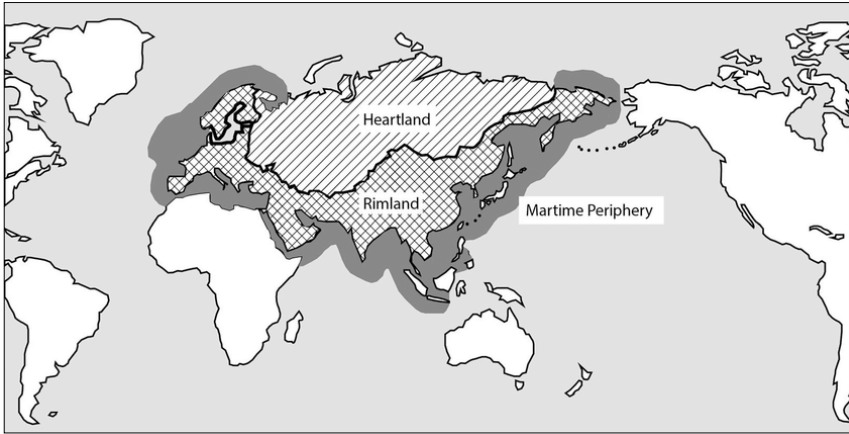


Figure 2. Heartlands and Rimlands (Mitchell 412)

Spykman predicated the rimland, which is referred to as the internal crescent by Mackinder, on the basis of his geopolitical approach, and viewed the Soviet Union as the biggest threat to the U.S. interests in Eurasia. While advising the U.S. to prevent another influential power from dominating the rimland, Spykman argued that the policies to prevent the Soviet Union from exercising power in Eurasia would play a key role in regional influence. More so in the absence of cooperation being established between the U.S. and the Soviet Union following the end of World War II (Erol and Oğuz 78). It is possible to say that Spykman’s rimland approach towards Eurasia directly influenced the geopolitical foundation of the containment policy.

Kennan pointed out that the mainstay of any policy to be adopted by the U.S. against the Soviet Union must be the long-term, patient, and strict containment of Russia’s expansionist policy. He further noted that the pressure leveled by the Soviet Union at the institutions of the Western world can be responded to with a masterful and cautionary force to be imposed by various political and geographical instruments (Kennan 861-862). In the context of Eurasia, the U.S. developed a containment policy based on

the theory of rimland, trying to restrict the influence of the Soviet Union across the region.

On September 8, 1954, the U.S., France, the United Kingdom, New Zealand, Australia, Pakistan, and Thailand founded the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization known as SEATO or Manilla Pact (Armaoğlu 460). In the same vein, Türkiye and Iraq entered into the Baghdad Pact on February 24, 1955, which was later joined by the United Kingdom, Pakistan, and Iran respectively (Armaoğlu 526-527). The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 caused the U.S. to revise its containment policy. While the U.S. backed the resistance movement in Afghanistan and exerted efforts to cause the Soviet Union to fail and get out of Afghanistan, it also revised its containment policy in order to cover the Persian Gulf (Erol and Oğuz 79). As for another aspect of the Cold War, the invasion of Afghanistan was going to constitute the implementation of the Brezhnev Doctrine, through a swift and full-fledged military response, as the domination of capitalism in a socialist state was viewed as a threat to the entire socialist regime. In his speech delivered in the Congress in 1980, U.S. President Jimmy Carter announced that the U.S. would take any measure necessary including military force against any external interference in the Persian Gulf (U.S. Department of State Office of the Historian 50). As a result, the power struggle over the Eurasian geopolitics at the time of the Cold War was built on the geographical advantage of the Soviet Union and the containment policy of the U.S. based on the concept of rimland.

Actors of Eurasian Geopolitics following the Cold War

U.S.

With the dissolution of the Soviet Union at the end of the Cold War, the U.S.' main objective for Central Asia was to earn the trust of the states in the region, achieve stability, and grow in capacity in order to counter any revival of Russian influence (Maynes 121). It was argued that the U.S. needs to have a military presence in Central Asia. As a matter of fact, it is known that the goal of eliminating regional destabilizing factors including extremist terrorist organizations cannot be achieved only through financial aid delivered to the states in the region (Erhan 133). The collapse of the Soviet Union gave rise to both new opportunities and new tests for the U.S.

in Central Asia. It meant the end of the efforts to keep the U.S. away from Eurasia from the standpoint of geopolitics. Since the end of the Cold War, the U.S. has had the chance to influence a vast geographic territory ranging from the Persian Gulf, which makes up the southern border of Eurasia, to former Soviet republics (Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* 175-176).

The U.S. laid out the foundation of its geopolitics for the region under the Silk Road Strategy Act. The act covers issues such as improving and strengthening independence, sovereignty, democratic governance, and respect for human rights and promoting the commercial interests and investments of the U.S. across the region (U.S. Congress).

The U.S. built its Central Asia policy on an economic basis as part of the Silk Road Strategy Act. From a geopolitical perspective, it is safe to say that the U.S. is focused on its commercial interests and uninterrupted supply of energy. This mindset is mirrored in a document titled “A National Security Strategy for a New Century” released in 1999 by President Clinton’s Administration. The document underlines how the U.S. backs the declaration of the Trans-Caspian Gas Pipeline, based on the pipeline agreement between Baku, Tbilisi, and Ceyhan, and how the pipeline would create major gains for the region as well as the U.S. Furthermore, it was reported that the aforementioned agreements would serve the independence and economic prosperity of the Caspian states (White House 34). Prior to the Afghan War, which started in 2001, the U.S. had built its Eurasian geopolitics on the politically and financially stable and robust characteristics of the Central Asian countries. It was argued that the countries in the region would grow more resilient to Russia’s policies, which were intended to expand its sphere of influence, while providing new opportunities for the commercial interests of the United States.

The terrorist attack against the U.S. on September 11, 2001 was a breaking point for the international system. The military campaigns launched by the U.S. against Afghanistan in 2001 and Iraq in 2003 made significant impacts across the region and the rest of the world. The geopolitical standpoint of the U.S. for Eurasia and the relations with the Central Asian countries underwent substantial transformation. While Maynes argued that the U.S. administration’s growing interest in the region was “natural,” he also noted that the U.S. fears that the Central Asian countries – unless

directed correctly – will, knowingly or unintentionally, turn into a haven for the terrorists who carried out the attacks against the Pentagon and World Trade Center (Maynes 121). In the aftermath of September 11, the Bush Administration described the U.S. policy on Central Asia based on three goals that complemented one another: achieving regional security, domestic reforms, and energy supply (Nichol 29). The U.S. had the chance to carry out military operations in various parts of the world based on the motto of counter terrorism, developing mutual relations with many countries along the way. Some Central Asian countries are among those that the U.S. has enjoyed close cooperation with (Erhan 143). In addition to good relations with the Central Asian countries, the U.S. improved its geopolitical might, directly consolidating its military and political presence in the region.

The U.S. deployed 3000 troops on air bases in Kyrgyzstan and 1000 troops in Uzbekistan, for the war in Afghanistan. In addition to its military presence, the U.S. provided \$580 million in aid to the region in the fiscal year 2002 (Maynes 122-123). In an effort to boost its political influence over Central Asian countries, the U.S. Administration has assigned experienced figures to diplomatic positions in the region and intensified contacts of the high-level Congress members with the region (Maynes 123). From the geopolitical point of view, the influence of the U.S. in Central Asia following the Cold War is considered important for its global vision too (Tuathail and Agnew 78-79).

One can infer from the U.S.' geopolitics that its regional presence would not be confined to the war in Afghanistan. For instance, U.S. Caspian Representative Elizabeth Jones laid out the perspective when she said: "We rely on Central Asian Governments for the security and well-being of our military troops and collection of intelligence, and the U.S. will not get out of Central Asia after securing peace in Afghanistan" (Nichol 30). Similarly, the strategic deployment of the U.S. in Central Asia will still be relevant in the context of counter terrorism. Because military bases located in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, as well as Pakistan, are of great importance in the fight against the Taliban and Al-Qaeda (Menon 189). Central Asian governments also view the U.S.' strategic presence in the region as a stabilizing force and safeguard against Russia and other threats (Menon 191). While the mutual relationship boosted the geopolitical power

of the U.S. in Central Asia, it also laid the groundwork for the creation of circumstances for stability and peace for the countries in the region. The U.S. presence particularly in Central Asia enabled the U.S. administration to gain power in global politics, playing a part in Eurasian geopolitics. To this end, U.S. Deputy Secretary of State Robert Blake stated on November 18, 2009 that the Obama Administration attached great priority to establishing partnerships and improving the political presence of the United States in Central Asia (Nichol 30).

As a result, the post-Cold War and economic-based geopolitics of the U.S. for Central Asia underwent major transformations in the aftermath of September 11. The U.S. has had the opportunity to influence Eurasian geopolitics by boosting its military, political, and economic presence in the region. This is intended to prevent Russia from regaining strength to influence the region, especially through the close relations with the former Soviet Republics in Central Asia.

China

China's geopolitics is built on securing land borders and improving its influence on Eurasia (Schreer 504). In recent years, China has signed agreements to resolve border disputes with many countries, including Russia, the Central Asian Republics, Vietnam, North Korea, and Mongolia (Schreer 504). In addition, China intends to grow into the most influential strategic actor in Eurasia through the Belt and Road Initiative and Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

The Belt and Road Initiative is a project intended to improve the means of transportation between China and the rest of Asia, the Middle East, Africa, and Europe. Launched in 2013, the initiative covers over 65 countries that make up over 62 percent of the global population and offers a great potential for economic transformation (Bird et al. 2). Additionally, China has spent approximately \$1 trillion so far to implement the Belt and Road Initiative, and experts forecast that the expenditures could exceed \$8 trillion (McBride et al.). While the Belt and Road Initiative offers a great economic potential, it also provides major insights into the geopolitics of China for Eurasia.

Through his vision, Chinese President Xi Jinping intends to create a vast network of railways, energy pipelines, and highways that would

link Pakistan, India, and the rest of Southeast Asia via the former Soviet Republics. According to Xi, an international network of this scale will expand the global use of China's currency and put an end to the bottleneck in Asia's link with the rest of the world (McBride et al.). Making efforts to develop means of railroad and highway transportation across Asia, China aims at keeping the energy supply provided through Central Asia and the Middle East away from the military presence of the U.S. (McBride et al.). It tries to score major gains across the globe through the ties forged based on economic relations and improve its influence on geopolitics in Eurasia. China exploits the economic relations with other countries as an element of pressure when it comes to matters that are crucial for its homeland security and interests including those relating to Taiwan and Uyghurs.

The instruments that China exploits to gain power for geopolitics in Eurasia are not confined to foreign debt as it intends to forge more comprehensive relations with the countries in the region. Pantucci argues that sales of weapons from China to Central Asian states is an important example for the Belt and Road Initiative. Similarly, through the Digital Silk Road, which represents the cyber and digital dimension of the Initiative, China is making substantial investments and projects in the Belt and Road Initiative area through major technology companies like Huawei, ZTE, and Hikvision (Pantucci 68). As China grows into the main supplier of security and defense technologies in the region, one can expect an increase in the dependence of Central Asian countries on China for their national security.

SCO is another initiative that China has attached importance to for the Eurasian geopolitics. China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan laid the foundations of the SCO, entering into the "Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Area" in 1996 and the "Agreement on Mutual Reduction of Military Forces in the Border Areas" in 1997. In 2001, the SCO grew into an international organization when it was joined by Uzbekistan in addition to the countries known as the Shanghai Five (Bailes and Dunay 4). China was concerned about settling issues with its neighbors and strengthening regional cooperation while the founding declaration of the organization refers to many goals to be achieved (Shanghai Cooperation Organization).

Pantucci argues that China's security operations in Central Asia are analyzed based on SCO as it is the very first regional security organization joined by China other than the United Nations and situated in the heart of Central Asia considering the geographical location of the member states (Pantucci 61). In addition to the reports, the presence of the organization serves a more complicated purpose than regional security for China. Through SCO, China develops relations with the member states through regional buy-ins, and enjoys an international network where it can test its foreign policy instruments (Pantucci 62). China tries to respond to two crucial needs through regional security, as having a dominant geopolitical influence in Eurasia is the key to achieve its foreign policy objectives given its vision to grow into a global powerhouse: Access to the region to improve the Belt and Road Initiative and to gain natural resources in what Mackinder calls the heartland (Hynek 85).

Mackinder developed his theory based on the argument that Eurasia has grown into a central region with its means of transportation such as railways and air travel. China lays out a similar geopolitical perspective as part of the Belt and Road Initiative, intending to improve the links of transportation among the Eurasian countries. Achieving regional security and cooperation through SCO, China would like to position itself as a power that secures peace and stability for the Eurasian geopolitics.

Russian Federation

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Russia found itself, as an heir to the collapsed Soviet Union, in an international environment with new geopolitical challenges. Nevertheless, Russia continues to be a major geopolitical power despite the waning state apparatus and ongoing problems. Russia's presence had a substantial impact on the states that gained independence from the Soviet Union (Brzezinski, *Out of Control* 44). The Central Asian states wanted the Soviet Union to maintain its presence to a certain extent because of their lack of organizational infrastructure and potential political and economic uncertainties that may be caused by transition (Okur 46). From the perspective of global politics, Brzezinski argues that the Central Asian states that gained independence cause a major withdrawal in the south-eastern border of Russia and draws the attention of non-regional

powers because of its diverse set of underground resources (Brzezinski, *Out of Control* 93).

Adopting the Near Abroad Doctrine and Eurasianism, Russia tried responding to the challenges, taking into account the geopolitical transformation of the international system. In an article he penned, Russian Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev laid out the outline of the doctrine and geopolitical objectives. Kozyrev argued that Russia cannot afford to withdraw from the areas of conflict in the former Soviet Union territories unlike the U.S. That is why Kozyrev demands the U.S. to keep its military presence away from the region and the Western states to provide the support requested in his reference to the developments in Tajikistan and Georgia (Kozyrev 68). Russia wanted to maintain its presence and influence in the former Soviet Republics despite the potential instability and conflicts in the region. Given its new foreign policy doctrine, Russia argues that it is crucially important for the domestic interests of the former Soviet Republics. In this sense, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Baltic states are viewed as territories on which crucial interests of Russia are focused (Litera 45).

Kozyrev highlights the effect of the CIS member states on Russia's foreign policy. He noted that Russia backs the sovereignty and independence of the former Soviet Republics and Russia and CIS member states need close cooperation among themselves (Kozyrev 68-69). Russia concluded that it needs to maintain its military presence in the region called "near abroad" given the strategic interests in the former Soviet states and potential threats facing them (Litera 45). As a result, an aspect of the security policy for the near abroad is built on humanitarian safety. The rights of the Russian population residing in the former Soviet Republics and the arduous challenges facing them during the Cold War are considered as relevant by Russia (Kozyrev 69). Safeguarding the rights of the Russian population residing in the near abroad and access to dual citizenship are some of the priorities in Russia's near abroad doctrine (Litera 45). From the geopolitical standpoint, Russia has made efforts to maintain its influence over the former Soviet Republics in political and economic terms through international organizations and the relations with the Russian population in those republics in cultural and humanitarian terms. Since the 1990s, Russia has been consistently working

on regional integration and this includes the establishment of international organizations such as the CIS, the Eurasian Economic Union, and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (Huasheng). One of the reasons behind the policy is that potential conflicts with the Islamic states located throughout the southern border are a matter of concern (Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* 95).

Eurasianism is one of the key components that molds Russia's Near Abroad Doctrine and Eurasian geopolitics. Redefining the Russian identity in the imperialist context, Eurasianism offers a cultural and ideological framework for the Russian influence in Central Asia to grow (Okur 52).

Dugin argues that Russia will drive itself and all the peoples in Eurasia into a disaster unless it re-establishes its political, commercial, and strategic influence over the former Soviet states (Dugin 10). While analyzing Eurasian geopolitics, Dugin also attempts to outline the roadmap that Russia should follow. He analyzes the Cold War through the lens of geopolitical science's sea power-land power dichotomy by comparing the United States' influence over the rimland regions with the Soviet Union's dominance over the heartland (Dugin 51). He also describes Eurasian geopolitics as an approach that goes beyond geographical imagination, taking into account both the geopolitical reality and positions of the states in the balance of power and their economic needs (Dugin 54).

Unlike the Eurasian thinkers of the 1920s, Dugin does not view it as a matter of East-West contrast in a reductive and romantic way. Dugin argues that Russia should forge alliances: in Europe with Germany to which it attaches particular importance, in Asia with Japan whose Pan-Asia ideology it admires, and with Shiite Iran whose revolutionary spirit and mysticism it emphasizes in the Islamic geography. Dugin also argues that Russia should achieve its objectives, targeting the U.S. and international organizations and corporations that make up the liberal world order. One can infer from Dugin's views on Central Asia and the trend of Eurasianism that Central Asia is primarily viewed as a geopolitical location that opens out to the Indian Ocean, which is an objective to be achieved for the heartland (Dugin 181). Billed as a large piece of the Eurasian continent geographically, Central Asia is also viewed as being within the context of Eurasianism through its ethnic distribution.

As a result, Russia dealt with Eurasian geopolitics based on the Near Abroad Doctrine and Eurasianism following the Cold War. As part of the Near Abroad Doctrine, Russia tried to maintain its regional policies through various instruments, considering the former Soviet republics a part of its own national and security interests. Attaching particular importance to the Russian population residing in the former Soviet Republics, the Russian foreign policy considers it an instrument of sustaining the relations with the near abroad at the level cultural and humanitarian interaction and a means of intervention.

Türkiye's Strategy on Eurasia and the Organization of Turkic States

Türkiye's Multilateral Strategy on Eurasia

Türkiye adopts an inclusive and cooperative perspective on relations with the region, developing a comprehensive understanding including politics, economy, transportation, and energy. Incorporating soft and hard power into its foreign policy, Türkiye has developed a Eurasian strategy based on the relations with the Turkic Republics in Central Asia.

While the bipolar world was undergoing transformation following the Cold War, Türkiye enjoyed new geopolitical opportunities relating to being in Central Asia's near abroad. The independence of the Central Asian Republics provided the Turkish foreign policy with a new context. Relying on shared language, history, and culture with the Central Asian states, Türkiye tried to develop relations with them based on common interests and cooperation (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations with").

Türkiye has made efforts to build cooperation and relations with the Central Asian countries in a wide spectrum based on its inclusive policy. Purtaş argues (21): "Türkiye has strengthened the Turkic world, establishing partnerships with the Turkic states based on equality and respect for their sovereignty." Türkiye adopts a policy that pays attention to regional vulnerabilities of Russia in its relations with the Turkic states, avoiding any conflict with the interests of Russia while taking the regional concerns of Russia into account, and has developed multilateral and comprehensive relations with the Turkic states through policies that add to regional stability and peace (Purtaş 20). As pointed out by Yüce, a variety of major variables have all been influential over the establishment of Ankara administration's relations

with the Central Asian Republics. These include shared human and cultural unity, the regional geopolitics, dynamics of relations between Russia and the countries in the region, and the ongoing nature of building domestic and foreign policies on the part of the countries in question (Yüce 11).

As Türkiye repositioned itself in both domestic and foreign policies during the Cold War, there were times when the country could not put its foreign policy objectives into practice. This is particularly clear to see in Türkiye's relations with the Central Asian Republics. However, Türkiye has become an actor with more influence in regional and global terms as a result of political and economic transformation. The shift in the position of Türkiye has paved the way for the re-establishment of good relations with the countries in the region on a reasonable basis. The fact that currently all of the bilateral relations are based on strategic cooperation is one of the clearest examples of the prevailing situation (Yüce 12).

Türkiye has amplified political, economic, and cultural cooperation with Central Asia while building partnerships intended to improve the military capacity of the countries in the region. It has also solidified its geopolitical influence over Caucasus and Central Asia through the relations based on military technology and capacity building. Signed by and between the Republic of Türkiye and the Republic of Azerbaijan, the Agreement on Strategic Partnership and Mutual Assistance is of capital importance. The agreement describes the relations between two countries as a strategic partnership and includes major commitments in military terms.

As a result of the aforementioned agreement, Türkiye demonstrated significant resolve by adopting the concept of "Two States, One Nation" in its approach to Azerbaijan, thereby implementing a document that will contribute to regional stability. In addition, Türkiye and Azerbaijan have amplified their cooperation in military and defense industries and exchanged a great deal of experience and know-how through joint military drills. The Joint Air Defense Drill of Türkiye and Azerbaijan has been conducted since 2013 in Türkiye under the title of TURAZ Falcon and of TURAZ Eagle in Azerbaijan. In addition, Türkiye and Azerbaijan were joined by Georgia to conduct a military drill called "Caucasus Eagle" back in 2012 (Aslanlı 5-7).

The strategic and military cooperation between Türkiye and Azerbaijan played a major role in the victory won in the Second 44 Day-Long Karabakh War in 2020. The delivery of Turkish-made Bayraktar TB2 unmanned aerial vehicles and TRG-300 rockets to Azerbaijan is billed as a major factor that shifted the course of the war (Gök 131). It is also argued that the exchange of experience and know-how by Türkiye with Azerbaijan, which has been around for years now, played a major role in coming out victorious as the former is equipped with an army experienced in defense and technology (Gök 132).

In addition to its robust and experienced army, Türkiye is billed as a major military power by neighboring countries and Central Asia thanks to its burgeoning defense industry. This both improves Türkiye's geopolitical influence on Eurasia and helps Türkiye enjoy the position of a reliable and strategic partner in geopolitical analyses of the Central Asian countries. The Middle Corridor Initiative serves as a major aspect of Türkiye's geopolitics on Eurasia. This initiative of transportation and shipment is primarily intended to reduce the distance between Türkiye and Central Asian Republics and improve Türkiye's position in Eurasian politics in a win-win mode. The Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022) reported: Originating in Türkiye and going through the Caucasus, the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan, and opening out to Central Asia and China, the Trans-Caspian East-West Middle Corridor constitutes one of the key components of the revival of the historical Silk Road. The Middle Corridor originates in Türkiye and goes through Georgia, Azerbaijan, the Caspian Sea, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan or Kazakhstan respectively through railways and highways before culminating in China (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Türkiye's Multilateral").

Given its geographical location and economic capacity, Türkiye stands out as one of the best options for economic and commercial partnerships in Central Asia and Middle East. Türkiye is clearly situated at a crucial location considering the strategic routes ranging from East to West which the Middle Corridor moves through (Canlı 5). The cooperative foundation of Türkiye's foreign policy is evident in its approach to regional transportation projects. Türkiye has strategically developed its own multilateral transportation strategy, emphasizing collaboration and interconnectedness. In this context,

Türkiye is increasingly seen as a key player and potential competitor to China's Belt and Road Initiative, showcasing its growing influence in regional infrastructure development (Toprak 26).

Türkiye intends to add to the regional development and prosperity through the Middle Corridor. Once the Middle Corridor is put to effective use, the Central Asian countries will arguably enjoy major economic gains thanks to the great trade volume between Europe and China. In addition, it is reported that infrastructure investments to be made in Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan and efforts to facilitate international trade as part of the project will help the Trans-Caspian cooperation grow and expand (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations with"). President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan (2022) laid out the strategic relevance of Türkiye's multilateral transportation policy as follows: "Improving the transportation links of the Central Asian countries with neighbors is our common interest. Türkiye promotes multi-modal transportation corridors and backs the revival of the modern Silk Road that links Asia to Europe. To this end, I attach capital importance to the Trans-Caspian East-West-Middle Corridor Initiative and the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway, which is the backbone of the middle corridor."

Under the Middle Corridor Project, Türkiye aims at improving the relations with the Central Asian countries based on cooperation and prosperity, and by solidifying its strategic influence over Eurasian geopolitics. With this goal in mind, Türkiye develops policies in consideration of the strategic importance of not only multilateral transportation projects but also energy lines.

The Southern Gas Corridor covers four projects: the Trans-Anatolian Gas Pipeline (TANAP), Trans-Adriatic Pipeline (TAP), South Caucasus Pipeline, and the Shah Deniz Stage II Development Project. In addition, the Southern Gas Corridor is intended to boost the energy supply from the Caspian Sea to Europe and diversify the routes of energy (TANAP). The Southern Gas Corridor made it to Europe upon the completion of the Trans-Adriatic Pipeline in late 2020. Crossing into the lands of Türkiye, TANAP is the key segment of the Southern Gas Corridor. This is how Türkiye has taken its input for the security of regional energy supply one step further (Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Relations with"). It is the

Southern Gas Corridor that has enabled Türkiye to secure the global and regional energy supply through the diversification of resources and routes, which is one of the key instruments in Türkiye's energy policy. Türkiye not only adds to stability and security in Eurasia but also contributes to the economic development of the Caspian region in particular.

The Southern Gas Corridor also serves the foreign policy objectives of Türkiye and its perspective on Eurasian geopolitics. In an address dating back to 2015, President Erdoğan said that not only Shah Deniz gas but also peace would be brought to Europe under TANAP. Pointing to the strong ties to be established between Europe and the Caspian region as part of the Southern Gas Corridor, he noted that the whole of Eurasia is in need of this project.

Türkiye designs its energy policy considering all of Eurasia on the East to West axis. Diversifying the energy supply between Europe and Asia and sustaining the supply in a secure flow make up the strategic position of Türkiye and help the country influence various aspects of the Eurasian geopolitics.

In the aftermath of the Cold War, Türkiye exercised its soft power, incorporating cultural and historical elements into the political, security, and economic aspects of its foreign policy for the Caucasus and Central Asia. Harnessing shared history, language, and culture, Türkiye takes notice of significant ties with the former Soviet republics that try to forge their national identity. International organizations have established development programs for the countries that gained independence in the aftermath of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. To this end, Türkiye founded the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency in 1992 to forge robust partnerships with the Central Asian countries, especially the Turkic Republics.

As Türkiye grew into a more influential actor in regional and global politics, thanks to its stable political structure and robust economy starting from the 2000s, the country diversified its soft power instruments for Eurasian geopolitics with a focus on Central Asia. Ekşi argues that Türkiye exercises its soft power for the Turkic world based on a strategy developed in line with “unity in language, thought, and business” coined by İsmail Gaspıralı (Ekşi 11). Türkiye founded the Yunus Emre Institute (YEI) in 2007, the

Presidency for Turks Abroad and Related Communities (YTB) in 2010 and the Turkish Maarif Foundation in 2016 in an effort, among others, to improve the ties with the Eurasian countries based on shared language, history and culture.

Founded in 2007 in an effort to strengthen Türkiye's ties with Eurasia, the YEI aims at promoting Türkiye's history and cultural elements, providing courses on Turkish language and culture, and improving cultural interaction with other countries and developing international relations (YEI). The YTB, on the other hand, was founded in 2010 to take actions for related communities abroad and international students based in Türkiye (YTB). The Türkiye Maarif Foundation was also established as an international instrument of education introduced by Türkiye with a focus on cultural interaction (Türkiye Maarif Foundation). The framework of the soft power and public diplomacy drawn up by Türkiye within the body of the aforementioned organizations are built on the ancient history of Türkiye, its unique culture, and the Turkish language. In the same vein, Ahmad Yasawi International Turkish-Kazakh University and Kyrgyzstan-Türkiye Manas University were founded to improve the friendship and solidarity between Türkiye and the Turkic Republics.

Operating in Central Asia, these organizations strengthen the ties between Türkiye and Central Asian countries, forge new ones, and add to the political and strategic influence of Türkiye over the region. Türkiye has been building cultural and humanitarian aspects of its Eurasian geopolitics based on shared heritage and values.

Impact of the Organization of Turkic States on Eurasian Geopolitics

The Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States was launched by Türkiye, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan under the Nakhchivan Agreement of October 3, 2009 and the İstanbul Declaration of September 16, 2010. The organization has been joined by Uzbekistan as a full member and by Hungary, Turkmenistan, and the TRNC as observers (Organization of Turkic States). Also known as the Turkic Council, the organization was renamed as the Organization of Turkic States at the İstanbul Summit held in 2021. Yüce argues that the renaming also points to a shift in paradigm. This is because the phrases Turkic states and Turkic world were mentioned in OTS'

official documents for the first time (Yüce 13). In his address delivered at the 8th Summit of the Turkic Council held in 2021, President Erdoğan laid out the change in question: “We renamed the Council as the Organization of Turkic States, which has made progress in institutionalization and improved its reputation across the region and beyond. It goes without saying that the renaming needs to be put into effect, and not remain only on paper. We need to make better use of our organization to engage consultations over the issues and opportunities that concern our countries and region.”

The good relations and cooperation among the member states have played a major role in helping the Organization grow into an influential regional actor in nearly 13 years. Purtaş argues that the most evident traits of OTS, which was founded by the states that share the idea of the Turkic world, are transparent diplomacy and multilateral foreign policy and OTS predicates the national interests of the member states on cooperation and rolls out mechanisms of dialogue with regional and global actors, growing into a self-improving body (Purtaş 9). Additionally, OTS, which includes TÜRKSOY, TURKPA, the Turkic Academy and the Turkic Culture and Heritage Foundation as its affiliates, contributes to the improvement of cooperation in the Turkic world on a vertical axis while spreading it to a vast realm on a horizontal axis, through actions in many aspects, especially culture and science.

The capacity to exert shared political will is also developing within the institutionalization of the OTS. In this sense, the will laid out by the member states in the development of the “Turkic World Vision – 2040” and “2022-2026 Strategic Road Map of the Organization of Turkic States” constitutes the key essence of developing a shared policy. Developing a vision and a strategy in line with certain objectives points to the fact that, in political terms, the member states have built a common ground (Topsakal and Zengin 20). Similarly, Yüce argues that the shared political will of the Turkic states is a rising geopolitical power in Eurasia (Yüce 13). It is safe to say that cooperation and partnership to be developed by the OTS in years to come in political, commercial, and cultural forms, will expedite the transformation of the Eurasian geopolitics.

From a geographical point of view, the Turkic world covers a territory with shared history, culture, and language, going beyond physical borders.

Ranging from Hungary to the depths of Asia, the Organization of Turkic States is a major actor of Eurasian geopolitics. Inaugurated among the member states based on culture and Turkic language, cooperation, and friendly relations have grown in size and strength to cover politics, security, and economy under the umbrella of the OTS. In this sense, the OTS is considered a joint survival effort of the member states against uncertainties such as migration, food crisis, and climate change that make up the new aspects of conventional and hybrid wars and security concerns that have arisen in the near abroad (Purtaş 28). The OTS is viewed as a solution developed to counter the challenges facing the Turkic world against the efforts of external interference in Central Asia.

As a result, the more influence OTS has in regional and global politics, the more geopolitically important it will be. As an organization that lies in a heartland coined by Mackinder, the OTS has the potential to grow into one of the decisive actors for global politics. The OTS has become a crucial mechanism for actors in Central Asia and neighboring territories in terms of stability and prosperity. The rupture in Eurasian geopolitics arose as a consequence of the partnership cautiously built by the OTS based on mutual interests and in line with a realistic understanding (Purtaş 30). Rising over this historical and robust groundwork, the OTS displays its ambition to carve out an important foothold in geopolitical equilibrium over a vast geographical area through its vision for the future and the joint will demonstrated at the time of the Karabakh War and the Cyprus issue.

Conclusion

Named as a heartland by Mackinder, Eurasia is geopolitically viewed as a key region for global dominance. Spykman highlights the territory between Eurasia and marginal seas, placing the focus on the rimland for geopolitical dominance. The Soviet Union, which was equipped with major underground resources on the vast territory of Eurasia, and the U.S., which adopted a containment policy developed by Kennan with inspiration from Spykman's rimland theory, entered into a geopolitical battle during the Cold War. The bipolar global system came to an end following the Cold War while major powers maintained their interest in Eurasian geopolitics. The U.S. took actions with economic and commercial interests in mind starting in the 1990s and brought its physical presence along with its military and

political might to the region in the aftermath of September 11 with the Afghan War. On the other hand, China has grown into a major actor for Eurasian geopolitics through the Belt and Road Initiative and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in terms of economic well-being and security.

Türkiye designs its geopolitical perspective on Eurasia based on the theory of heartland coined by Mackinder. It has managed to grow into a major actor in Central Asia, amplifying the economic, cultural, and military relations with the countries in the region based on its multilateral foreign policy. It is safe to argue that Türkiye will strike a balance among other powers in Eurasia through its growing efficacy and influence and forge its own position in the global system. Türkiye intends to maintain its presence in Eurasia within an institutional framework and grow into a permanent actor in maintaining geopolitical equilibrium of the region.

In addition, the influence of the geopolitical perspective of Türkiye on Eurasia is clear to see in the regional presence of the Organization of Turkic States. Founded on shared historical and cultural ties, the Organization displays substantial harmony with the geopolitical perspective of Türkiye. Over the landmass of Eurasia, the OTS will further boost its geopolitical influence across the region in line with the capabilities of the member states to build common political, economic, and military structures. From this point of view, one can argue that the achievement of the geopolitical objectives by Türkiye and the Eurasian vision of the OTS members will feed one another.

Conflict of Interest Statement

There is no conflict of interest with any institution or person within the scope of this study.

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