

## THE US AND RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL ASIA IN THE FRAMEWORK OF THE GEOPOLITICAL THEORY

Zhuldyz KANAPIYANOVA <sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Uludag University, 16059 Bursa, Turkey; e-mail: juldyz777@hotmail.com; ORCID: 0000-0002-2992-7390

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### ABSTRACT

Central Asia (CA) has a large geostrategic and geopolitical importance due to its central location in Eurasia and its rich energy resources in the Caspian region. After the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), establishment of new independent states in the region increased the interest of great powers in the region. The influence of the Russian Federation (RF) in the region has continued after the collapse of the USSR as it was during the time of the USSR. After the collapse of the USSR, superpowers like United States of America (USA) and the People's Republic of China (PRC) began to establish their presence in the region in order to balance the Russian policy in the region. The interest of the USA in CA countries in early years of independence was seen in areas of economic aid and energy, while the influence of Russia has continued intensively in the political, economic, energy, and military fields. In this context, the USA and the Russia have entered into a competition to gain more military influence and space in the region. This study analyzes the effectiveness of the strategies applied by the US and Russia towards Central Asia within the framework of geopolitical theory.

**Key Words:** Geopolitical theory, the US policy toward Central Asia, Russia's Central Asia policy, energy policy, military bases.

## INTRODUCTION

Central Asia is located at the center of Eurasia and has a large geopolitical importance due to the rich natural gas and oil reserves in the Caspian region and geostrategic importance due to its geographic proximity to countries like China, Iran, Afghanistan and Russia. Newly independent states emerging after the disintegration of the USSR increased the interest of great powers in the region. The Central Asian countries are largely under the influence of the Moscow, defined as the “back garden” or “near abroad” of Russia, which is the predecessor of the USSR. The regions started to attract the attention of powers like USA and China that wished to balance the influence of Russia in the region.

The aim of the study is to examine and compare the policies of the USA and Russia towards the region. The main thesis of the paper is that leaders of the international system, the USA and Russia are entering a rivalry for the influence in the region in various ways. There are efforts of strengthening political influence by creating organizations, supporting or not supporting current political regimes. The economic presence of the powers in the regions is done through developing energy projects and implementation of economic aid programs. The two powers also enter a competition in a military sphere by obtaining military bases in the Central Asian region, which has a huge geopolitical and geostrategic importance due to its location and energy potentials. The success of the two powers in establishing their influence in the regions varies from time to time and from country to country.

Geopolitical theory is used to understand the intentions of powers in Central Asia. According to geopolitical theory, the concept of “geopolitics” forms the foreign policy of the administrations of Moscow and Washington. However, geography and environmental factors, which are seen as the usual solution to international politics, have an impact on human and state behavior (Ari, 2013). In other words, geography and environmental factors influence the behavior of people and the state.

The interest and rivalry of states in relation to the newly formed states in Central Asia is due to the huge geopolitical and geostrategic importance of the region. Central Asian countries also border countries such as China, Iran, Afghanistan and Russia, which are important participants in the international system. For this reason, geopolitical theory was adopted to understand the title of the article “US and Russian Politics with respect to Central Asia in the Framework of Geopolitical Theory”. In this context, the study was examined from the point of view of the approaches of geopolitical theorists such as Harold and Sprout (1965), Mackinder (2018) and Spykman (1938), as well as the relationships between such concepts as geography, environmental factors, and international politics.

## THE CONCEPTUAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACH: GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF CENTRAL ASIA

Environmental theories, including geopolitics, began to dominate international relations in the 1960s under the influence of factors such as geography, demography, natural resources, and technology (Dougherty and Pfatzgraff, 1990). Due to the recent development of technology and the consequences of changes

in international politics, the concept of “geography” has remained outside the scope of these problems and has not yet been sufficiently emphasized, but it has existed in international relations for a long time. After the collapse of the USSR, with the discovery of Eurasia by world powers, the concept of “geopolitics” began to come to life (Ari, 2013). In geopolitics, geography and environmental factors influence human behavior; geography and environmental conditions affect international or foreign policy. Environmental theorists such as Harold and Sprout have argued that international politics are difficult to understand without considering environmental factors (Dougherty and Pfatzgraff, 1990). For example, a state with distinctive geographical features and natural resources can influence other entities with differentiation and wealth. This influence can be reflected in the foreign policy and behavior of states, and geopolitical theory suggests a struggle between states for advantageous geographical features (Fettewis, 2006).

Since Russia and the United States began to realize the geopolitical significance of Central Asia, they have tended to strengthen their influence and politics in the region. In other words, Central Asia began to shape the foreign policy agenda of the world powers. Consequently, the geopolitical term can be used to understand the foreign policy strategy and behavior of states in the international arena. Geopolitical thinkers such as Halford John Mackinder (2018) and Nicholas John Spykman (1938) believe that geopolitics is one of the main factors determining foreign policy (Kusznir, 2015; Venier, 2010). Spykman (1938) at that time played an influential role in reorienting American foreign policy from isolationism to “interventionist globalism,” here, with the development of geopolitical theory, Spykman (1938) showed that the United States should be involved in more distant global events such as Central Asia.

Geopolitical theory accepts the concept of national power, such as realistic thought, as an important fact underlying international politics. States, given their national capacities, can be divided into small, medium and large or super-states (Ari, 2013: 183). In this context, the main states are Russia and the United States, and medium or small states can be considered as the five states of Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Another geopolitical thinker Alfred Thayer Mahan sorts the same elements of national power as the realistic thinker Hans J. Morgenthau. For example, in his document entitled “The Impact of Sea Power on History: 1660-1783”, when Mahan talks about the elements of sea power, he mentions the geographical position, topographic features, size of the country, population, and military power. (Ari, 2013; Dougherty and Pfatzgraff, 1990). Central Asia is a bridge between the Middle East and the West due to its location in the center of Eurasia and gaining importance in terms of geographical location. This importance has increased since the events of September 11, 2001 in the context of the United States counter-terrorism in Afghanistan.

The Caspian Sea is the third richest region in the world with its natural gas and oil resources after the Persian Gulf and Western Siberia (Russia). This topographic feature of Central Asia underlines the importance of the region (Perez Martin, 2017). The basins of the Caspian Sea and its environs contain 48 billion barrels of proven oil and 292 trillion cubic feet of natural gas reserves (Energy Information Administration, 2016). Natural resources are stored not only in the

Caspian Sea, but also natural gas and oil reserves are located outside the Caspian Sea regions of Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan (Grau, 2001). For example, Kazakhstan's hydrocarbon reserves are located in Aktobe, Atyrau, Karaganda, Kyzylorda and Mangistau regions, Turkmenistan in Galkinish, Dautletabad and Shatlik, Uzbekistan in Ustyurt, Bukhara-Khivi, South-West Hisar, Surkhandarya and Ferghana regions. In addition, countries such as Kazakhstan, which is the ninth largest in the world, and Uzbekistan, where about 30 million people live, with a population of about 30 million, attract the attention of great powers.

Geopolitical theory, as in realism, considers national power as an instrument of the expansionist and imperialist policies of the state. In this context, Gray believes that "geopolitics is a variant of classical realism" (Gray, 2005). The rivalry and expansionist policies of great powers such as the United States and Russia in Central Asia can be described as military interaction between the two powers in the region. In other words, according to geopolitical theory, international relations are in the process of struggle, and in this context, Central Asia can be considered as a zone of struggle between the United States and Russia.

According to Mackinder (2018), the "heart" is the center of global geopolitical processes and forms the north and center of Eurasia (from the Arctic to the desert of Central Asia, including Eastern Europe). For him, who dominates the "heart", dominates the island of the world (Eurasia and Africa), who dominates the island of the world, dominates the world (Mackinder, 2018). Also, the Power of the Earth, which is defined as the "heart", "geographical core" or "axis" of history, and the whole history moves around this core (this axis, this "core"). History is a dynamic process, and there is a point "without dynamics", a static point (support) around which the wheel moves. This is the power of the earth (Mackinder, 2018). In addition, Gray noted that "long-term control of the World-Island of Eurasia-Africa by one power will mean control of the world" (Gray, 2005). In this context, the struggle, rivalry, politics and the steps of the great powers towards Central Asia are more understandable.

## **THE US AND RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL ASIA: 1991-2000 YEARS**

After the collapse of the USSR, Russia turned into a very weak country, which was losing its vast lands. Boris Yeltsin, the president of Russia, had to deal with the economic crisis and poverty in the country. Yeltsin began to pursue a pro-Western policy, adopting the Western model of improving the country's economy. During this period, a nuclear disarmament agreement was signed between the United States and Russia, and relations between NATO and Russia were developed. Russia took steps to join the World Trade Organization (WTO) (full membership in 2001) and retained its permanent membership in the UN Security Council (UN Security Council). All these criticisms and Russia's participation in international mechanisms, such as the G-8 in 1997, have been criticized by many politicians for being close to the West. This criticism revolved around the idea that Russia's foreign policy should be aimed at new independent states and take an anti-American position (Kamalov, 2011). After these events, Yeltsin's Russia began to move away from NATO and the United States,

criticize NATO's eastern expansion and Balkan intervention, and deal with the Caucasus and Central Asia.

In this context, Russia created the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) on December 8, 1991 in order to defend its position in Central Asia. On December 21, 1991, all the former Soviet countries, except for the Baltic countries (Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania), Ukraine and Georgia signed this agreement. Georgia signed an agreement in 1993, but after the war in South Ossetia in 2008 decided to leave this community. After the annexation of Crimea in 2014, Ukraine also decided to leave the community. Five countries of Central Asia (including Turkmenistan, which pursued a policy of neutrality, are separated from full membership in 2005 and are still semi-state members), Azerbaijan, Belarus and Armenia are also included as members of the CIS (Vorobyov, 2011).

US policy in the region was initiated by the NATO Partnership for Peace (PFP) program at the Brussels Summit on January 10-11, 1994. PFP is a trust building program between NATO and non-NATO countries. In 1994, with the participation of Central Asian countries (Tajikistan in 2002), the program numbered a total of 22 Member States. Under the PFP program, in 1996 a military alliance was created between the United States, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in the field of security cooperation called the Central Asian Battalion (CENTRAS-BAT). The headquarters of the military unit is located in the city of Jambil, Kazakhstan. In 1999, the program was included in the PFP program. In 2000, the program stopped after it was not possible to achieve efficiency, and continued its activities under the name KAZBAT as a union of Kazakhstan (Lamulin, 2006). Thus, at the first stage, the PFP program brought together all the countries of Central Asia under one roof on the US axis, but could not continue to the end.

Alarmed by the US presence in the region, Russia decided to balance the power of the United States and, together with China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, established the Shanghai Five in 1996, and later created the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2001 with the participation of Uzbekistan. The purpose of the organization was to ensure military security in the border regions of a member state. The union was perceived by the international community, especially the United States, as an effective pole against the United States. Russian President Vladimir Putin clearly outlined the Union's mission, saying: "A unipolar world is unacceptable" at the Bishkek summit on August 16, 2007. In this context, the first serious step against the United States was taken at the 2005 SCO summit. This was done with a call to end the US military presence in Central Asia. After that, the United States decided to cease its military presence in the region by withdrawing troops in Uzbekistan (Danilovich, 2011). But this is more due to the US reaction to the Andijan events, and not to the summit. The decision was made only at the summit on the withdrawal of American troops.

Polarization rivalry in the region continued with US support and the creation of anti-Russian GUUAM in 1997. It was established by Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan and Moldova to protect sovereignty, territorial integrity, inviolability of borders, democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights. Uzbekistan, which participated in various blocs, became a member of this institute from 1999 to 2005. Uzbekistan decided to withdraw from the union after he thought that the US supported anti-government protests in the country in 2005, and turned its direction back. to the dominant Russian collective security treaty organization

(CSTO) (Rassokhin, 2013). To limit China's influence in Central Asia within the framework of the SCO, Russia created the Collective Security Treaty Organization with the participation of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia in 2002. Uzbekistan was a member from 1994 to 1999 and after leaving GUUAM in 2006-2012 (Ria, 2012). Uzbekistan is the only country in Central Asia that has been a member of both GUAM, based in the United States, and in the Russian CSTO. But later, the Tashkent government chose to remain alone and left the CSTO in 2012.

It can be argued that between 1991 and 2000, US policy in Central Asia was weaker than politics after 2001. During this period, the US regional policy was mainly based on economic and military assistance. Washington's economic assistance to the region was financed by loans and guarantees from commercial financial and insurance companies, such as the United States Import and Export Bank (Eximbank), Foreign Private Investment Companies (OPIC), the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID). Assistance was guaranteed by various US ministries and departments as part of direct assistance (Freedom Support Act, then Obama Administration Assistance in Europe, Eurasia and Central Asia) (Cagri, 2004).

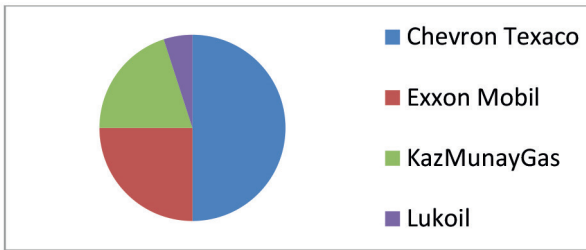
**Table 1.** 1992-1999 Commercial Finance and Insurance Assistance (in million dollars)

Investment Type	Kazakhstan	Kyrgyzstan	Uzbekistan	Tajikistan	Turkmenistan
Eximbank	188,90	-	1243,8	-	503,8
OPIC	132,63	303,5	314,45	3,7	5
USDA	3,80	-	49,3	-	4,9
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>325,33</b>	<b>303,5</b>	<b>1607,55</b>	<b>3,7</b>	<b>513,7</b>

Source: Office of the Coordinator of the US Assistance to NIS, US Foreign Assistance to and Cooperative Activities with the New Independent States of the Former Soviet Union - FY 1999 Annual Report, Washington, 2000

The amount of US's economic aid to the Central Asian region between 1991 and 2000 was much less than its aid to the Middle Eastern countries. The aid to the Middle East amounted to billions of dollars, while assistance to Central Asia was limited to millions of dollars. After the United States and Russia began to realize the geostrategic importance of the region, they began to invest in the energy field. The Russian companies Lukoil, Rosneft, Gazprom and the American companies Chevron, Exxon Mobil and Conoco Phillips began working in Central Asia. These activities were carried out on the territory of Kazakhstan, which contains 30 billion barrels of proven oil reserves (BP Statistical Review, 2017). The Tengiz oil base, which contains more than half of Kazakhstan's oil reserves, was operated by Tengiz Chevroil (50% Chevron Texaco, 25% Exxon Mobil, 20% KazMunayGas and 5% Lukoil) with an agreement concluded in 1993 (Figure 1).

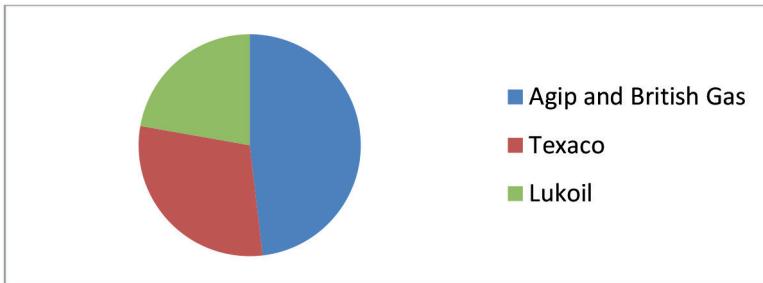
**Graph 1.** *The Shareholders of the Tengiz Petroleum Basis*



Source: Chevron.com

The Kazakh Karashiganak field has an estimated 2.4 billion barrels of oil reserves. The base was managed by the Karashiganak Consortium (32.5% Agip and British Gas, 20% Texaco and 15% Lukoil, Chart 2).

**Graph 2.** *The Shareholders of the Karashiganak Consortium*



Source: astanatimes.com

Other recently opened Kashagan oil bases were operated by ENI (Italy), BP (UK), Exxon Mobile (USA), Royal Dutch Shell (UK / Netherlands), Total (France), Phillips Petroleum (USA), Statoil (Norway) and Inpex (Japan) (Nuraliev, 2016). As you can see, the United States and Russia dominated all energy projects in Central Asia. In this context, the United States implemented the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline project, as a result of the US policy in Central Asia, we see whose construction began in 1999 and ended in 2006. We can say that the US energy policy has achieved a kind of success. Since 2008, Kazakhstani oil, and after 2010, Turkmen oil began to flow through tankers to the BTC pipeline.

The Central Asian policy of the United States and Russia continued with rivalry and polarization in the region from 1991 to 2000. During the rivalry, Russia and the CIS, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have developed successfully since the day was established. Although the PFP program created in the USA was successful at first, but could not continue, the GUUAM project was not able to work efficiently in the same way. The fact that Russia was closer to the region and shared the same story with these countries in the past made it more profitable. But although the United States was far from the region, they sought to pursue an active policy in both the economic and energy spheres.

## THE US AND RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD CENTRAL ASIA: FROM 2001 AND BEYOND

Vladimir Putin, who came to power in Russia in 2000, began to emphasize that he would deal with the “near abroad” policy through a new foreign policy concept. Putin also said that the CIS and Russian minorities living in the region are the priority area of the new foreign policy. The policy of the “near abroad” became more apparent in 2014 with the creation of the EAEU. Together with the EAEU, Russia was able to spread its influence in the region, improving economic relations with the countries of Central Asia. Thus, Russia is still active, taking leadership in the region. After the events of September 11, 2001, the geopolitical and geostrategic importance of Central Asia began to increase as a result of the “US war on terror.” During the US intervention in Afghanistan, all Central Asian countries granted the United States the right to fly. In the context of the US fight against terrorism, the Karshi Khanabad military base in Uzbekistan and the Manas military base in Kyrgyzstan were opened (Beehner, 2005). In addition to this, the Turkmen air supply station and Kazakhstani railways were used as material and technical support. The Karimov administration decided to close the US airbase of Karshi Khanabad after the Andijan incident in Uzbekistan in 2005. In October 2005, the US government decided to move its base from Uzbekistan to the Manas base in Kyrgyzstan. The last U.S. military plane left the border of Uzbekistan on November 21, 2005. After 2006, when Uzbekistan returned to the CSTO, this base was used by Russia as part of the CSTO, but when Uzbekistan decided to cease its membership in the CSTO. On June 28, 2012, the base was used only by Uzbekistan. In 2015, there was a lot of news that the United States would like to return its base in Uzbekistan and, in this regard, are ready to transfer 300 units of armored vehicles to Uzbekistan (Crisisgroup.org, 2015). The United States is implementing it because Uzbekistan is of great importance for the Washington administration in terms of regional security. In addition to this, other states, except Uzbekistan in Central Asia, pursue a closer policy towards Russia. For example, Kazakhstan is considered Russia’s closest partner in the CSTO. Kyrgyzstan, having closed the US base and becoming a member of the EAEU, showed that they are closer to Russia. The presence of Russia’s largest military base in Tajikistan indicates that this country is under Russian control. Finally, given that Turkmenistan pursues a neutral policy, only Uzbekistan in the region is a suitable country for the United States. However, if we take into account the fact that the region is close to Afghanistan, and there is the possibility of resuming problems on this border at any time, it is not difficult to guess that the country that comes to the aid first will be Russia. Therefore, it is not expected that Uzbekistan will open its doors to the United States (Ria, 2015).

The US military base Manas, located in Kyrgyzstan, has both economic benefits and security concerns for the Bishkek administration. But the case of the murder of a citizen of Kyrgyzstan by an American fighter in 2006 led to the closure of the base. In 2009, President of Kyrgyzstan Kurmanbek Bakiyev announced his government’s decision to close the Manas Air Force Base. However, without closing and only changing its name to the “Transit Center,” the base continued to work, increasing rates (Meta, 2011). After Almazbek Atambayev came to power after the overthrow of Bakiyev in April 2010 and with the advent of the new President Atambayev, the last U.S. military base in Central Asia was closed in June 2014. Despite the lack of natural resources in Kyrgyzstan, there is a huge



geopolitical meaning of this country due to its geographical location between Russia and China. In addition, we can say that Russia, which is a strategic partner of Kyrgyzstan, played an important role in closing the American base. Four Russian military bases operate in Kyrgyzstan: the Kant air base, the Karakol submarine testing base, the Kara-Balta military communications base, and the Maylyu-Suu military radio-seismic laboratory (Kozyulin, 2007).

The first president of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akayev, after the collapse of the USSR, captured a weak country from an economic point of view. But due to his policies in the country, corruption increased and the country's economy began to deteriorate. In addition, his third request for presidential election was not met by the Kyrgyz people. As a result, on March 24, 2005, riots broke out against Kyrgyz President Askar Akayev because of corruption, bringing family members to power, and presidential elections by fraud (Knyazev, 2007). It is believed that the riots were organized by opposition forces and Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Akayev's regime, which reacted harshly to the riots, was overthrown, and Bakiyev came to power. As mentioned above, the geopolitical position of Kyrgyzstan is of great importance for the United States to influence the policies of Russia and China in the region. In this context, the United States wanted to acquire a new base in Osh and Batken regions, in addition to the base in Manas. Negotiations and negotiations between the United States and Kyrgyzstan on this issue continued until November-December 2004. During the negotiations, it was discussed that the United States deployed E-3A aircraft in Manas and periodically sent them to the Chinese border. The Kyrgyz government rejected a request from the US administration, despite all the difficulties (Mukhamedzhanov, 2011).

After 2005, the country's economic situation worsened. Issues such as corruption and unemployment that existed in the past continued to grow. In other words, the riots of 2005 did not bring the desired result. In early 2010, the Bakiyev administration doubled the price of electricity and heating, and the price of hot water - five times. In this context, rallies were organized in some regions of the country in February-March. People who participated in the rallies tried to express their opinion on the current situation in the country. On April 7, 2010, opposition forces organized regional congresses in various cities of the country. The opposing forces organizing the congress were arrested by the Bakiyev administration. This situation led to a riot, and people demanded that Bakiyev resign as president. On May 19, 2010, Roza Otunbayeva was elected President of the interim government until December 31, 2011 (Stepin, 2015). As a result of the second riot, which took place in Kyrgyzstan on April 7, 2010, the Kyrgyz elected Almazbek Atambayev as president instead of Kurmanbek Bakiyev. Public opinion (especially Russian) suggested that the West, which tried to transfer pro-Western power to the government, influenced various colorful revolutions in the region (Ukraine, Georgia, Kyrgyzstan). As a result, a pro-Russian politician came to power and showed that he was closer to Russia, closing the American base.

Due to its neutrality policy, Turkmenistan has stayed away from the strategic engagement of both Russia and the United States. As the world's fourth largest natural gas energy source of Turkmenistan is involved in different alternative projects to export its energy resources. One of this was TAPI project planned to transport natural gas from Turkmenistan's the world's second largest natural

gas field Galkynysh to Afghanistan (Gerata, Kandagar region), then to Pakistan (Kvetta, Multan), after to India (Fazilka) which was supported by the US disabling Russia (Kurtov, 2015). The line is expected to enter service in 2020 and the annual capacity will be 33 billion cubic meters.

In fact, the TAPI project can be seen as the desire of the United States to remain in the region due to the energy that was exported from Central Asia. In this context, TAPI is a strategic project for the United States to maintain its military presence in Central Asia (Saidi, 2013). The opening ceremony of the TAPI project took place in Mary, Turkmenistan, in December 2015, and its commissioning is planned in three years. But the construction of the pipeline because of the continuing instability in Afghanistan continued only in the Turkmen regions. Pakistan has only signed a pipeline agreement with the International American Oil Company (IOC). The Government of Afghanistan is still thinking about what needs to be done to ensure the safety of the pipeline. Another obstacle to the implementation of the TAPI project is the tension between Pakistan and India. Despite this, regional leaders announced that the Afghan section of the TAPI project, which continued to advance upon completion of this section in Turkmenistan in February 2018, would begin immediately. In addition to Pakistan and Afghanistan, the United States plays an important role in the implementation of this project. The United States is interested not only in the TAPI project, but also in the implementation of a common Central Asian energy network or the Great Central Asian Project, which includes Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

Disapproving these positive developments, as an expert on Central Asia and the Middle East, Alexander Knyazev said that Qatar wants to prevent the implementation of the TAPI project in order to avoid the emergence of competitors for it (Knyazev, 2013). In addition to Qatar, China is not satisfied with the implementation of the project, or Beijing wants to buy Turkmen gas alone and supply it to the international market. As United States influence in the region begins to increase with the introduction of TAPI, China is concerned. According to Knyazev, the TAPI project is considered a competing project of the Iranian Mir project (Knyazev, 2013). It is planned that Iranian oil coming from the South Fars field will go to the Pakistan region in Balochistan, and then to China to the Xinjiang region. The US is concerned about the agreement on the supply of 1 million cubic meters of Iranian gas to Pakistan, which was signed between Iran and Pakistan in 2010. In this context, the US began to develop and support alternative projects, such as TAPI, to counter the Mir Project (Panfilova, 2016).

In 2015, former US Secretary of State George Kerry launched the new C5 + 1 geopolitical project, which includes dialogue at the level of foreign ministers of the five countries of Central Asia and Washington. As indicated in the strategy, the United States “will stimulate the economic integration of Central and South Asia to foster prosperity and economic ties that will facilitate networking and trade”. The second direction is the interception of NATO and US structures of control over the training of military specialists in opposition to the CSTO. The United States invests heavily in training highly mobile units of the armed forces of the countries of the region, special forces and the protection of senior state officials (Sukhareva, 2018). The “C5 + 1” format was created in order to increase the weakening influence of the United States, despite the growing influence of Russia and China in the region. It should be added that the Trump administration

supported the idea of “C5 + 1” by Barack Obama. According to political scientist Dosim Satpayev, the Central Asian region will continue to maintain its geostrategic and geopolitical importance as a chessboard mentioned by Zbigniew Brzezinski, where great powers play their game (Satpayev, 2016).

## CONCLUSION

Geopolitical theory has proven effective for the purpose of this study because it focuses on Central Asia as the “heart” and the competition between the great powers for control of this “heart”. The location of Central Asia, energy wealth, natural resources and land size have always attracted great powers. Since Russia and the United States began to realize the geopolitical significance of this region, this has led to increased influence and politics in the region. In other words, Central Asia began to shape the foreign policy agenda of the world powers. Consequently, geopolitics is one of the main factors determining the foreign policy of countries. Since Eurasia is the Power of the Earth, which is defined as the “heart”, “geographical core” or “axis” of history, and the whole history moves around this core (this axis, this “core”). History is a dynamic process, and there is a point “without dynamics”, a static point (support) around which the wheel moves. Therefore, the great powers are interested and want to create a zone of influence in this region.

The policy of the United States and Russia regarding Central Asia was studied in two time periods (1991-2000; 2001 and subsequent years). In the first period, the polarization policy of the United States and Russia was analyzed on the political issue from the point of view of organizations. The analysis showed that organizations created by Russia (for example, the SCO, CSOs and the EAEU) dominated the region because of their activity in those days. American projects such as PSP, CENTRASBAT and GUUAM were actively launched, but over time they lost their effectiveness and became completely ineffective. Therefore, it can be argued that Russia’s policy in relation to Central Asia in the political sphere is more effective than US policy.

In the second period, the US military bases in Central Asia in the context of the fight against terrorism with the incidents of September 11, 2001 could be seen as a great success of the US military policy towards Central Asia. Thanks to the Central Asian military bases, the United States was able to easily reach Afghanistan and gain influence in Central Asia. But the United States again lost its influence after the closure of the bases, first in Uzbekistan in 2005, and then in Kyrgyzstan in 2014. On the other hand, Russia created the EAEU to further develop its economic and political relations with the countries of Central Asia, and continued its military presence in Kazakhstan with the Baikonur cosmodrome, in Kyrgyzstan with the Kant, Kara-Balta air bases and underwater bases “Karakol”, as well as in Tajikistan with 201 ground forces and the Nurek space control base. After the closure of US military bases in Central Asia, Russia completely assumed military control over the region and creates its own sphere of influence. After 2014, it can be noted that Russia, while maintaining its military presence in Central Asia, has become more active in the military field than the United States.

Having lost its military bases in the region, the United States decided to defend its influence by supporting the energy policy of Turkmenistan, especially the TAPI project, which disconnects Russia from this energy project. The United States continues to support this and similar energy projects in which Russia is not involved. In addition, in 2015, the United States put forward the “C5 + 1” format on the agenda, developing new relations with the countries of Central Asia. With these events, the US says it will continue to develop political and economic relations with Central Asia and try to have more areas of influence, but will not leave the region of Russia. In this context, it is clear that Russia is more active and successful in the region than the United States, and the United States pursues a bumpy policy with success and failure due to its remoteness from the region. But despite the fact that far from the region, the United States will find new formulas to compete with Russia. Because, as Zbigniew Brzezinski said, “the United States is too far to dominate Central Asia, but strong enough to stay on the street” (Brzezinski, 1997).

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