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Changes in the Geopolitics of Central Asia in the Post-Cold War Era

Soğuk Savaş Sonrası Dönemde Orta Asya'da Jeopolitik Değişimler

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Abstract

Eurasia has been regarded as the most important region that must be controlled by any power that aims to dominate the world, according to the geostrategists who shaped Eurasian policies for their countries. The UK and Germany have developed their policies for the region based on the views of their geostrategists before the Cold War. The US focused on containing Soviet Union shaping its policy based on the principles of these theories during the Cold War. In the early post-Cold war era, the US intensified its engagement with Central Asian states mainly with economic motivation. September 11 attacks provided an opportunity for the US to increase its influence as well as bolstering military deployment in the Central Asia. Russia led by Putin, especially after the consolidation of its power, however, has changed the balance of power in the region, especially in former Soviet Union territories, and did not lose the control of "Hearthland". This paper analyses changes in the geopolitics of Central Asia in the post-Cold War era and, argues that theories such as "Hearthland" still keep their importance in Eurasia politics.

Keywords: Eurasia, Heartland, Rimland, Central Asia, 9/11 Attacks.

Öz

Kendi devletlerinin politikalarını şekillendiren jeostratejistlere göre, dünyaya hâkim olunması için Avrasya, kontrol edilmesi gereken en önemli bölge olarak tanımlanmıştır. Soğuk Savaş öncesi dönemde Birleşik Krallık ve Almanya, bölgeye yönelik politikalarını kendi vatandaşı olan jeostratejistlerin görüşleri doğrultusunda geliştirmişlerdir. Soğuk Savaş döneminde ABD, bölgeye yönelik politikasını bu prensipler ışığında belirleyerek Sovyetler Birliği'ni çevreleme politikası gütmüştür. Soğuk

Savaş sonrası dönemin ilk bölümünde ise daha çok ekonomik faktörleri göz önüne alarak Orta Asya devletleri ile ilişkilerini artırmıştır. 11 Eylül saldırıları ABD'ye bölgede etkisini artırma ve Orta Asya devletlerine askeri üsler kurarak askeri varlığını artırma imkanı vermiştir. Ancak Putin liderliğindeki Rusya, Putin'in siyasi gücünü pekiştirmesinden sonra bölgede özellikle de eski Sovyetler Birliği topraklarındaki güç dengesini değiştirmiş ve Kalpgah'ın kontrolünü kaybetmemiştir. Bu çalışmada Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde Orta Asya jeopolitiğindeki değişimleri incelemekte ve Kalpgah gibi teorilerin hala Avrasya politikasında önemini koruduğunu öne sürmektedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Avrasya, Kalpgah, Kenar Kuşak, Orta Asya, 11 Eylül Saldırıları.

Introduction

Eurasia has formed the main area for power struggles in world history since ancient times. As Brzezinski (1997), pointed out, "Ever since the continents started interacting politically, some five hundred years ago, Eurasia has been the center of world power." (p.xiii) The importance of Eurasia encouraged the theorists among the world powers to study Eurasian geopolitics, proposing that their countries seize and control the region and thus bolster their hegemony.

The policy of containment, which shaped US policy during the Cold War to encircle the Soviet Union, was mainly based on geopolitical theories devised by US scholars or officials such as Spykman and Kennan. The containment policy aimed mainly to contain the Soviet Union to prevent it from dominating and expanding its influence in Eurasia.

The dissolution of the Soviet Union changed the balance of power in Eurasia, and the US declared its hegemony in the world while clarifying its priorities in Eurasia. Post-Cold War Central Asia, consisting of newly independent states with the legacy of the Soviet Union and unprepared for democracy, was regarded politically and militarily as a low priority for the US at the beginning of the new world order. The Caspian region, with recent discoveries of huge gas and oil reserves, and transportation routes to carry energy resources to the West, became strategically important for the US while the rest of Central Asia ranked as secondary in importance. (Kanapionova, 2020: p.60)

The September 11 attacks changed the security perception of the West

and Afghanistan became an area of the war on terrorism. For the first time the US directly engaged militarily in Central Asia, stationing US troops on military bases in the states that openly supported US efforts against terrorism. Russia's tacit support also enabled the US to physically influence in the region for the first time in what had been regarded as an integral part of the Soviet Union.

With the recovery of its power, Russia changed its attitude after the US expanded its engagement in the region, and with support from China urged the US to leave Central Asia, declaring its objection to the US hegemony and monopoly. The Russian officials regarded in particular the Color Revolutions in the region as a new form of warfare, and hardened Russia's stance against the US, while Russia intensified its efforts in the region through regional organizations. The US finally left all military bases in the region and Russia declared Central Asian states to be their sphere of influence. The location of the competition has recently centered around Ukraine and Georgia.

Geopolitical Theories and Central Asia in the 20th Century

Eurasia became a focus of interest for Western geopolitics theorists especially in the 20th century. Halford Mackinder's Heartland Theory, introduced in 1904, shaped the Eurasian politics of the world's hegemonic power, Britain, for the region and vis a vis Russia until the end of WWII. Mackinder (1904, p. 436) defined Russia and Central Asia as "heartland" and argued that whichever state controls this pivot area with its vast and inaccessible resources will dominate the world. He pioneered the theory of land power at the beginning of the 20th century.

However, in his next publication in 1919, he revised his theory by invoking the term "heartland" instead of pivot area, in his famous dictum "Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island: Who rules the World-Island commands the World." (Mackinder, 1919, p. 150) In Mackinder's theory the Heartland consisted mainly of Central Asia plus vast Russian territories. Mackinder developed the theory for the imperial vision of the British Empire, but as the balance of power changed after WWII and the US canceled the Monroe Doctrine, the US replaced the British Empire in the struggle for world hegemony.

Karl Ernst Haushofer, a distinguished geopolitical theorist in Nazi Germany, played an important role in Nazi politics before WWII. He held that Germany could become a world power by reaching an accommodation

with the Soviet Union, then launching into overseas expansion at the expense of the great imperialist powers, Britain and France. (Blouet, 2005, p. 3) Haushofer was greatly influenced by Mackinder's Heartland theory and his views has mainly shaped the "Lebensraum" policy of Germany.

The American geostrategist Nicholas John Spykman (1944, p. 43) introduced his Rimland theory during WW2, building on Mackinder's Heartland views, and arguing that the key region is Rimland (called inner/marginal crescent in Mackinder's theory), changing the dictum of Mackinder to "Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia; who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world." Spykman argued that the powers of the Rimland have historically been the most dominant, and they always sought to expand their influence towards the Heartland and the Outer Crescent. He advised the US not to allow any other powerful state to dominate the Rimland, regarding the Soviet Union as the biggest threat against US interests in Eurasia and highlighted that containment and prevention of Soviet expansion in Eurasia will be the key to hegemony in the region, if cooperation with the Soviet Union became impossible after the war.

Spykman shaped the basis of US containment policy, which aimed to prevent the Soviet and communist expansion in Eurasia, which became the main American policy after World War II. Spykman did not develop the policy of containment, but his book that further developed the theory of "Heartland" prepared the US policymakers and its population for the idea of containment policy. (Blouet, 2005, p. 5)

Outlined by George Kennan in his famous paper "Long Telegram" and his article "The Sources of Soviet Conduct", the containment theory recommended the US to adopt a policy of long term and gradual containment of Russian expansionism (Kennan, 1947, p. 575) He advised the US government to apply the containment policy until the Soviets withdrew their support of Stalinist policies. The ultimate objective of Kennan's strategy was to provide required tools for the states that might be target of Soviet expansionist politics. (Gaddis, 2005, p. 56) Kennan especially expected Central Asian states to challenge and defy Stalinist policies of repercussion, deportation, and mass murder.

In contrast to Kennan's soft power recommendations, such as economic assistance or psychological warfare, Deputy Secretary of Defense Paul Nitze advocated military measures to counter Soviet influence (US Department of State). He advised dismantling the military defense spending ceiling and urged the Truman administration to focus on

military methods. As described by Adams (2006, p. 22), “Nitze militarized the containment policy of Kennan.” Thus, containment became official US policy with endorsement of the National Security Council (NSC-68, written by a group under Nitze’s lead) by the Truman administration in 1948, with Spykman’s and Kennan’s views forming the backbone of the containment policy.

The “New Look Strategy” approved by the Eisenhower administration changed the hard power-oriented containment strategy of NSC-68, with the US focusing on non-military measures to neutralize Soviet influence in the region. Eisenhower and his Secretary of State J. Foster Dulles emphasized more the deterrent power of alliances to contain Soviet Union and China with regional allies. (Gaddis, 2005, p. 153) However, Russia launched defiant steps against the new policy, with the Korean War forming the first military confrontation between West and East in the region because of the containment policy.

The US intensified its efforts to contain the Soviet Union through diplomatic efforts. The Baghdad Pact was replaced with the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO), then the Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO) and US bilateral security pacts with Asian countries such as Korea and Taiwan emerged as new tools of the American containment policy to limit and hinder Soviet expansionism. This new policy and the area of American focus was largely consistent with Spykman’s Rimland theory. However, none of these organizations and pacts were sufficient to stop Russia from intervening in the Middle East or eastern Asia. (Holmila, 2020, p. 960)

The invasion of Afghanistan by the Soviet Union in 1979 resulted in the revision of the US containment policy. On one hand, the US supported the mujahedeen in Afghanistan covertly, pressuring the Soviet Union to fail and leave the country. On the other hand, the US expanded its containment policy to include the Persian Gulf, as highlighted by Carter Doctrine, that “an attempt by any outside force to gain control of the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the US, and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force.” (Carter) Then Central Command (CENTCOM), established based on the Carter Doctrine, emerged as one of the key military tools to contain Soviet Union. (Hartman, 2002, p. 474)

Already controlling the pivot area of Mackinder’s theory, the Soviet Union aimed regularly to expand its area of influence towards the “inner crescent” of Spykman’s theory, primarily to reach warm water ports.

China was regarded as the third player in the region, with close relations to the Soviet Union, however, the US succeeded to control most of the Eurasian shores. (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 6)

In sum, during the Cold War, the superpowers struggled to control Eurasia, the region which, according to geopolitical theories, states that aim to be world powers must control. While the US and Soviet Union shaped the global policy in the region, regional powers, ideologically divided in each camp, played secondary roles in the course and results of this contest. The US focused mainly on the area surrounding Central Asian countries, regarding that region as an integral part of the Soviet Union. As Erhan (2003) pointed out, the main American reason for overlooking Central Asia was that it was the hardest region to take away from Soviet control. (p. 3)

Post-Cold War Politics in Central Asia

The collapse of the Soviet Union resulted in a vacuum of power in the heartland region, along with fear of chaos and insecurity for the future. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union and emergence of new states in Central Asia that had been under Soviet control for more than 80 years, the US focused on hegemonic policies in prioritized regions that it defines as areas of interest. As Mearshimer (2001: p.46) pointed out, the main target of the US has been to control the west while not permitting other powers to influence Europe or Northeast Asia which also continued after the Cold War. The US regarded Russia, Europe, and Asia along with the Middle East as prioritized areas for post-Cold War US politics.

The international community focused on the First Gulf War and Bosnian War right after the Cold War. The intervention by the international coalition and NATO, under the leadership of the US, in Iraq and Bosnia, despite objection by Russia, bolstered the idea of US hegemony but increased resentment among Russian elites and increased anti-Western feeling among the Russian population. Domestic uncertainties in Russia, especially political and economic weakness, and the Russian endeavor to be seen as part of Western civilization prevented Russia from strongly opposing US politics in the region, instead encouraging Russian politicians to cooperate with Western countries for regional security.

For Brzezinski, the future of Azerbaijan and Central Asian states was also crucial for the future of Russia (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 47) Aware of the strategic value, Russia promoted the “near abroad” policy which regarded former Soviet regions as the periphery of Russia and declared

that any attack against its “near abroad” will trigger a harsh reaction from Russia, including nuclear retaliation. The “near abroad” policy became a turning point for Russian-Central Asia relations, and the latter preferred to be part of the Russian back yard instead of integrating with the west. (Lepingwell, 2008)

Two conflicting school of thoughts for Central Asia politics emerged in the US at the beginning of the post-Cold War era. The first group supported the idea of focusing on Russia and urging Russia to become part of Western society; this is the “Russia first” policy. Engagement of Russia in Western organizations and economic incentives in return for political concessions were envisaged as encouraging Russia to westernize. On the other hand, some political theorists promoted the idea that the US could fill the vacuum emerged by the dissolution of the Soviet Union by increasing US influence in Central Asia. (Patnaik, 2016, p. 44) They advised the US government to pursue policies to directly influence and control the southern part of Mackinder’s pivot area.

Secretary of State Nelson S. Talbott outlined America’s new Central Asian policy in his address in 1997, stating that the main job of the US should be conflict resolution in the region that has 200 billion barrels oil. (Talbott, 1997) Rumer(2016, p. 3) argue that Talbott’s message was clear: the US with sole economic interest for the Central Asia, which regarded it as secondary important, aimed to prevent other powers to dominate in the region rather than having political influence in the region.

This approach was reflected in the US National Security Report in 1999, stating that “*the US is focusing particular attention on investment in Caspian energy resources and their export from the Caucasus region to world markets, thereby expanding and diversifying world energy supplies and promoting prosperity in the region.*” (A National Security Strategy) Azerbaijan with rich energy resources and Georgia as the main supply route were regarded as of key importance.

The Silk Road Strategy Act of 1999, which amended America’s Foreign Assistance Act (1961) to support the independence of states in Caucasia and Central Asia economically and politically and particular interest on the acceleration Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline project, highlighted the economic and geopolitical importance of Central Asia rather than the political and security perspective of the US. This strategy toward Central Asia continued until the September 11 attacks.

The September 11 Attacks and US Policy in Central Asia

The 9/11 attacks against the US changed not only the post Cold War perception of security, but also resulted in the restructuring of geopolitics. Having focused on its hegemonic policies since the end of the Cold War, the US focused on security policies, especially after September 11 attacks under the slogan “the war on terror”.. Central Asia, previously of low priority to the US since the end of the Cold War, became a major player for the US. The attacks and subsequent US war on terrorism has changed the politics in the region.

First of all, the interest of international community for Central Asia has changed in favor of the region. The geographical location of the region, especially its neighborhood with Russia and South Asia, and the possibility of global and regional crisis, including rise of terrorism, in case of failure of former Soviet Union states attracted western interest for the region. (Rumer, 2002, p. 2)

The policy shift was reflected in the speeches of American officials right after the attacks. B. Lynn Pascoe, Deputy Assistant Secretary for European and Eurasian Affairs, stressed the importance of Central Asian countries for the US after the September 11 attacks, which clearly highlighted the US needed assistance from the regional states such as providing military base for the success of Operation Enduring Freedom. He also stated that some states in Central Asia could become the heaven for terror organizations, and it was critical to American national interests to have closer relations with regional states. (Pascoe 2002)

The war against terrorism started first in Afghanistan, but US intensified its diplomatic efforts with Central Asian states, including economic and military relations. To facilitate the military operation in Afghanistan, the US opened for the first time military bases in these states, marking a new area in the history military existence. The establishment of a Subcommittee on Central Asia and the Caucasus and doubling of US aid to the Central Asian states in 2003 compared to 2001 underlined US' interest into the region. (Clark-Sestak, p. 3)

Russia's stance has been decisive for the US-Central Asia cooperation against terrorism. Russia implicitly supported US military existence in Central Asia. (Aris 2001) Vladimir Putin openly declared that Russia will support the US in the fight against terrorism, highlighting that Russia will open its airspace for humanitarian aid planes if action against terrorist will be carried out, and that Central Asian states also accepted

that. (President Vladimir Putin's address) Russian tacit support at the beginning of the campaign against terrorism allowed the US to militarily engage in Central Asia at a previously unimagined level. As Secretary of State Colin Powell stated, "America will have a continuing interest and presence in Central Asia of a kind that we could not have dreamed of before." (Secretary of State Colin Powell's Statement)

The Bush administration urged Central Asian states to open bases for US troops and sign military cooperation with the US in return for economic incentives, called "positive engagement". (Pascoe 2002) The US signed agreements with Uzbekistan in October 2001 (Termiz and Karshi-Khanabad bases) and Kyrgyzstan in December 2001 (Manas and Kant) for air bases for US troops used primarily to station soldiers and refuel jets and cargo planes, while Tajikistan in November 2001 (Kulyab and Kurgan-Tyube) agreed only to use for refueling. Additionally, the US gained the right for overflight of these countries. Each base in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan hosted more than 1000 troops. (Schmitt and Dao, 2002) In March 2002, Uzbekistan and the US signed the Declaration on Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework that envisaged cooperation in the political, economic, security, humanitarian and legal fields.

Other Central Asian states who have been regarded as politically close to Russia also declared support for the US. Kazakhstan, Russia's staunch ally, stated in September 2001 that they were ready "to support an action against terrorism with all the means at its disposal" and to provide bases for the US. (Radio Free Europe, 2001) But the Kazakh government only allowed for landing for refuel or in emergency cases while politically neutral Turkmenistan allowed use of its airspace and landing for refuel only for humanitarian operations. (Clark-Sestak, 2003, p. 4)

In addition to the military engagement, the US increased its activities in the region with new methods such as changing pro-Russian governments through mass street protests, later called Color Revolutions. The Color Revolutions began in Georgia in January 2003, the Rose Revolution that brought pro-Western Saakashvili into the Georgian presidency. The Colored Revolutions in Ukraine (2004) and in Kyrgyzstan (2005) also were major revolutions that attempted to overthrow pro-Russian governments in these countries. Color Revolutions are regarded a continue of containment of Russia by the US, (Mittchell, 2012, p. 92) such as Spykman and Kennan had advised during the Cold War.

The second generation of Color Revolutions, between 2005-2009 states in Central Asian such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Uzbekistan, along

with Russia and Belarus, were less successful than the first-generation revolutions. Many were effectively thwarted before they occurred, and others were sweepingly suppressed, with a minimal use of force. (Korosteleva, 2013, p. 38) Krastev and Leonard (2014) described the Color Revolutions, especially in Georgia and Ukraine, as Putin's September 11.

One of the most important reasons for failure of these revolutions was the alarm in Russia after the success of the Colored Revolutions in these three states. As Mitchell (2012, p. 40) pointed out, with Putin's ascension to power Russia began to reclaim its position as the hegemonic state in Central Asia and Caucasia, and had this process started a few years earlier, the Color Revolutions in these countries would have been less likely. After 2004, Russia has toughened its foreign policy against the US and its neighbor to undermine US hegemonic efforts in Central Asia, Caucasia and in eastern Europe.

Russia's policy shift and its stiff stance against West was reflected in the tone used in National Strategies written in this period, and in speeches of Russian leaders, especially Putin. His 2007 speech at the Munich Security Conference, at which he criticized the US for having monopolistic policies and accused the US of overstepping its national borders economically, politically, culturally, and educationally, clearly stated Russia's objections to US policies.

As Sleivyte (2010, p. 35) pointed out, Putin's quest for multi-polarity epitomizes a desire for elevating Russia as a force to be reckoned with in practically all matters in world affairs - not necessarily as a moderator playing a balancing role in international disputes but rather as a great power asserting its own international interests in all global issues. His speech and tone were regarded as signal of reversion to Cold War policies and was harshly criticized by Western countries. Jaap de Hoop Scheffer, former Secretary-General of NATO, described President Putin's speech as "disappointing and not helpful". (Watson, 2007)

The Color Revolutions changed Russia's previous stance of supporting the US war on terror and especially US engagement in Central Asia. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established in 2001, has proven one of the main tools for Russia to counter US engagement in the region, especially with support of regional power China. Russia and China used all opportunities to resort to their veto capability in the UN against US hegemonic policies in the region. (Kocamaz, 2019, p. 128)

During the 2005 Astana summit the SCO urged the US to leave military

bases in Central Asia and stated that “considering the completion of the active military stage of antiterrorist operation in Afghanistan, the member states of the SCO consider it necessary that respective members of the antiterrorist coalition set a final timeline for their temporary use of the above-mentioned objects of infrastructure and stay of their military contingents on the territories of the SCO member states.” (Declaration of Heads of Member States, 2005) During the SCO summit in Bishkek in 2007, Putin defied US hegemony and stated that like other countries of the SCO, his state supports to strengthen a multi polar international order which provides security for all states in the world.

At the end of July, Uzbekistan gave the US 180 days’ notice to evacuate Karshi-Khanabad air base (Wright and Tyson, 2005), one of two remaining US military bases in Central Asian states, and the US left the base in November 2005. Russia’s pressure against Kyrgyzstan urged the Kyrgyz government to evict the US from Manas air base in 2009. Russia’s offer of \$2 billion of emergency aid and scrapping of Kyrgyzstan’s debt in return of controlling of a torpedo facility that equips Russian navy played a crucial role in the decision of the Kyrgyz president. (Gorst, 2009) Although the US accepted paying \$60 million dollars annually in 2009, the Kyrgyz Parliament voted in 2013 for closure of the base and urged the US to vacate by July 2014. The US finally vacated the base in June 2014 and handed it over to the Kyrgyz government. Thus, the last US military base in Central Asia was closed, heralding Russian domination in the region. (Dzyubenko, 2014)

On the other hand, Russia and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement in 2012 that extended the lease of the Russian Kant military bases that was opened in 2003 for 15 years. Additionally, Russia has bases for the use of Russian Armed Forces in Kazakhstan and Tajikistan. Russia increased its influence in the area with help of its leadership in SCO and Collective Security Treaty Organization.. As Rumer (2016, p.9) pointed out, Central Asia underwent fundamental geopolitics shift that resulted in changing relations with global actors of international policy and, that moved geopolitical orientation of Central Asia toward Russia departing from the west, calling it a shift from “Eurasia” to “Aseuria”.

September 11 attacks provided opportunity to militarily engage in Central Asia through military bases and deployment of US troops in the region. However, Russia’s new position especially after the Color Revolutions, with support of China, forced the US to leave Central Asia. The US policies were not coherent with Brzezinski’s dictum that

America is too distant to be dominant in Central Asia but too powerful not to be engaged. (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 148)

As it turned out, despite occasional moments of high drama such as the US invasion of Afghanistan and the so-called “Tulip revolution” in Kyrgyzstan, the trajectory of Central Asia in the 21st century has not been radically different from the late 20th century as many observers had predicted. (Roy, 2007, p. IX) The US tried to dominate the pivot area after the September 11 attack and was forced by Russia and China to return to the containment policy without dominating Central Asia. Geopolitics theories call for the balance of power in Eurasia and especially in Central Asia, but the Heartland/Pivot Area became predominantly a Russian sphere of influence once again, after the temporary US engagement.

The US containment policy however has been continuing with special focus on Ukraine and Georgia rather than Central Asia, in addition to contain China in Asia Pacific intensified with “Pivot to China” policy. Russia however, prevented further enlargement of NATO with military actions in Georgia in 2008, and with occupation and annexation of Crimea in 2014. Enlargement of SCO, with membership of India, Pakistan and Iran, on the other hand, diminished the influence of the US to the great extent. Thus, Russian policies and US mistakes has re-shaped the borders of containment policy urging the US geostrategist to restudy existing strategies.

Conclusion

US' hegemonic and monopolist policies in Central Asia after the September 11 attacks have changed the policies of Russia as well as the balance of power in the region. Russia, which was alarmed by the expansion of the US towards its border, especially with the Color Revolutions, defined its red lines in the region by declaring former Soviet states as its “sphere of influence”. With China's support through the SCO, Russia urged states in Central Asian to cancel cooperation with the US and request the US to leave Central Asia. Having for the first time crossed the borders of Spykman and Kennan's containment policy with military bases after the September 11 attacks, the US had to retreat from its military bases in the region. Thus, Central Asia was again declared Russia sphere of influence, and the Cold War containment policy borders were restored.

The present situation, with high Russian influence in Central Asia and the western domination around this area proves the accuracy and validity of Spykman and Kennan's containment policy. Having declared the

shift of its pivot area to the Pacific and ignoring its classic containment of Russia in the region, the US is expected to focus again on Asia Pacific to prevent Russian domination of the region. However, that seems not easy in present political conjecture, and Russia, having thwarted Western attempts to integrate Georgia and Ukraine into the Western system through the Color Revolutions, is enhancing its influence in the region via the policies of the SCO, CSTO or the Eurasian Economic Union.

After the enlargement of SCO, with membership of India, Pakistan and finally Iran, Russia extended its area of influence further than Central Asia in cooperation and in competition with China. Although it was an initiative and decision of the US, the withdrawal of NATO and US soldiers from Afghanistan ended the military existence of the US military. Deployment of CSTO soldiers in Kazakhstan heralded the way of Russian influence in former Soviet Union states. Georgian membership into the NATO has not been a topic of discussion anymore. Russia, along with Turkey, played a crucial role for the triumph of Azerbaijan in Nagorno-Karabagh. It looks that Russia has changed the superiority in the chess game in Central and in wider region, and US' containment policy based on Mackinder, Spykman and Kennan's advises could not be realized. The new geopolitics and realities on the ground may provide a crucial opportunity for Turkey in Central Asian politics as a game changer rather than being a passive player of Rimland.

Declaration

In all processes of the article, TESAM's research and publication ethics principles were followed.

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