

Russia and the Caucasus Regions

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Abstract

According to Russian leaders, the traditional sphere of influence of the Soviet Union, mainly Central Asia and the Caucasus, is the first defensive bulwark to protect Russia's national security; Moscow's behavior in the context of Tsarist Russia and the former Soviet Union should seek to dominate the region.

However, Russia has taken different approaches to Central Asia and the Caucasus over the past two decades. A closer look at the reason for such techniques reveals that these approaches were purely tactical and aimed at realizing Russia's grand strategy in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

Current trends indicate that the Russian governing body has always sought to portray Russia as an oil emperor in formulating its long-term strategy. An actor who, by promoting his position, can play a geopolitical and critical role in the field of energy and exploit Russia's energy resources and the monopoly of energy transmission pipelines as a political and economic tool to secure its geopolitical interests in the Eurasian region, particularly in relations with the European Union.

This study will examine Russia's obstacles in achieving its goals in the Central Asian region and the Caucasus after the Cold War.

Keywords: Russian politics, Central Asia and the Caucasus, Iran, Ukraine, Cold War, Geopolitics

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Introduction

The axis of diplomacy focuses not only on political and military issues but also on economic relations (Luttwak, 1998, pp 125 – 128). An examination of the trends in the new structure of the international political system shows that in this structure, energy is one of the essential pillars of hegemony and plays a strategic role in the approaches of the world's great powers in this regard. Accordingly, the main actors and superior forces, such as Russia, know that the foundation of power has been transferred from the military to the economic and technological aspects.

Many seek to consolidate the material pillars of their hegemony over the world economy by exploiting energy to exercise power and the goal of management and gaining wealth by preventing a pattern of realistic political behavior (Kircher, 1998, p. 67).

At the beginning of the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Central Asian republics were neglected in the light of the Euro-Atlantic view of Russia's foreign policy. For Boris Yeltsin and Andrei Kozyrev, then-president and foreign minister of Russia, relations with the Central Asian republics were unimportant, leading to Russia's relative absence in Central Asia and the Caucasus. This power vacuum coincided with the entry of other powers into the region. With the arrival of other regional and supra-regional forces in Central Asia, rivalries between these powers continued. After handing over Eastern Europe to the West, Russians insisted on maintaining Central Asia and the Caucasus region as their sphere of influence and backyard (Ataei, Shibani, 2011, p.133). Since then, foreign affairs have become increasingly crucial in Russian foreign policy. But the replacement of Eurasianism with Westernism in Russian foreign policy has led Russia to turn its attention back to Central Asia and the Caucasus.

In this study, Russia's foreign policy, as well as Russia's energy policy in the Central Asian region and the Caucasus region, are examined to find a suitable answer to the following question:

What opportunities and obstacles does Russia face in achieving its strategic foreign policy and energy diplomacy goals in Central Asia and the Caucasus? Accordingly, this study hypothesizes that Russia faces barriers such as the influence of supra-regional powers to achieve its goals in Central Asia and the Caucasus.

The Theoretical Framework of Research

Some analysts have assessed Russia's changing political

attitudes toward Central Asia due to a shift in power between supporters of the three parties. According to the Slavs (extremist nationalists), Russia should strive to act as an independent pole of power in a multipolar world, distinct from East and West (Braithwaite, 1994, p13). Westerners (Atlanticists) attribute Russia's growing credibility and economic recovery to the integration of the Russian economy into the world economy and the choice of a Western model of democracy (Tsygankov, 2005, p 154).

Nationalists see Westerners' focus on NATO membership as the end of the Russian siege. Eurasianists emphasize Russia's role as a bridge between East and West (Freeman, 1997, p.95). Of course, Russia's policy towards Central Asia and the Caucasus cannot be interpreted solely in this context. According to Kenneth N. Waltz's systems approach theory, understanding global politics is not possible simply by looking inward.

The theory of structural realism, which provides an excellent theoretical framework for studying the impact of the international system on the foreign policy of governments, can be used to analyze Russia's policy towards Central Asia and the Caucasus and the challenges facing it.

After World War II, new developments influenced structural realism theory scientific and technological advances in other disciplines. The inefficiency of classical realist theory in analyzing politics and international relations after World War II, non-governmental actors' emergence, and increasing complexities and ambiguities arose in international relations (Williams, 1999, p. 43). U.S. officials see the end of the Cold War as proof of theories that underpin world order and peace in the presence of a dominant power whose security and public welfare depend on the continuation of the existing international order (Ezati, 2007, p.52).

From the 1980s onwards, theorists such as Cohen and Gilpen, citing theories such as "Hegemonic Stability," believed that one of the fundamental indicators of a hegemonic power in any age is control over the sources, lines, and pathways of energy transmission. Given that oil is energy and energy can be converted into money, which creates control, and control is considered power.

Thus, the hegemony of the hegemonic state depends on the control of four categories of resources:

- 1- Control over the world's raw materials, including energy;
- 2- Control over the world's capital resources;
- 3- Control over world markets;
- 4- Control over the production of high value-added goods (Keohan, 2002, p. 32)

Given these assumptions, these theorists state that the roots of the formation of international conflicts in the post-Cold War era have undergone a fundamental shift from ideology to competition to conquer natural resources (Nevins, 2004, pp 255 – 256).

This research is based on “structural realism and stability theory based on hegemony,” which will be explained further within this paper.

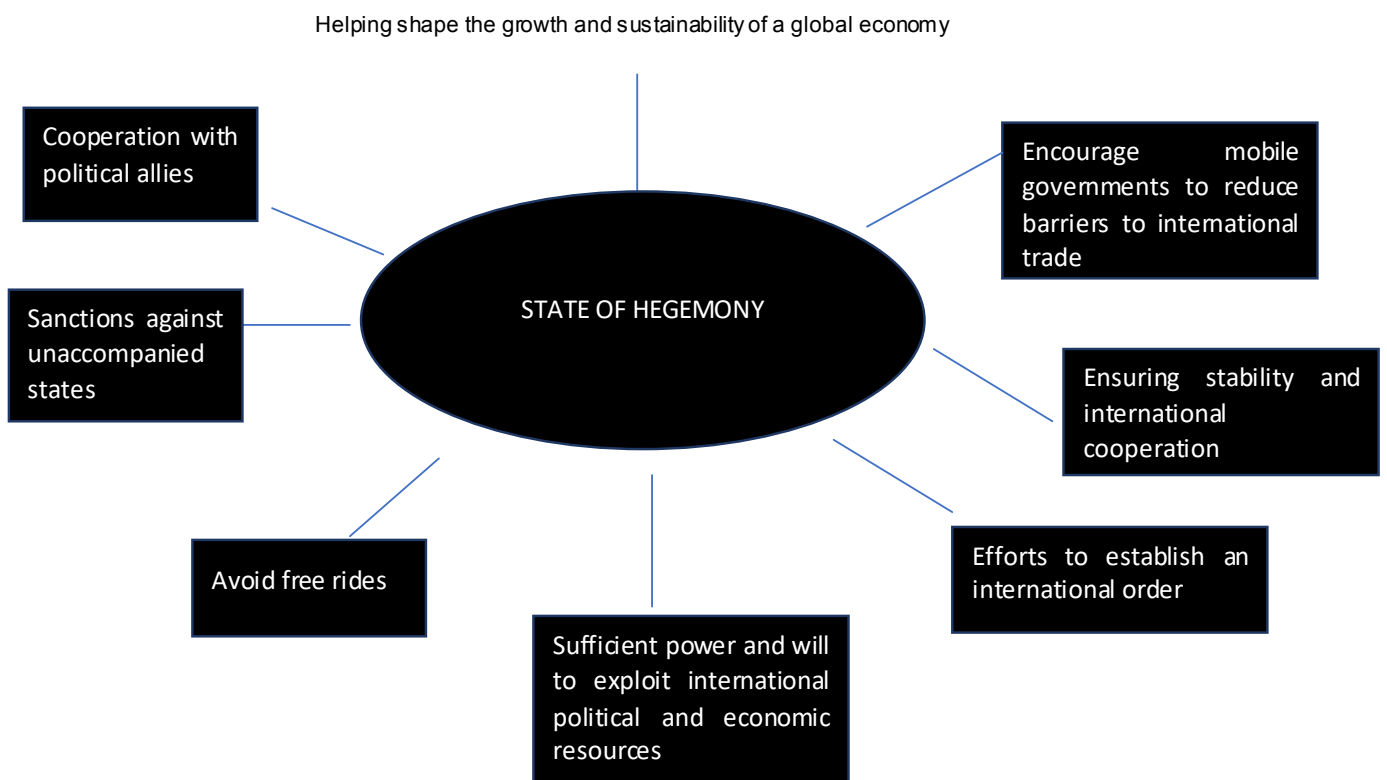


Figure 1: The role of the hegemonic state in the new structure of the international system from Robert Gilpin's point of view

New Russia

New Russia and NATO established the North Atlantic Cooperation Council in 1991. In 1994 Russia joined the Partnership for Peace program and was formally invited to join the NATO Council in 2002. Although Russia suspended its mission to NATO and ordered the closure of NATO's office in Moscow after NATO expelled eight Russian officials from its Brussels headquarters in October 2021, it may be encouraged to support Europe in its

covert, long-term plan to rebuild its empire.

Formal membership in the G7 and the improvement of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) could encourage Russia's structural agreement on political and military cooperation with the Europeans. But Russia's long-term role in Eurasia depends heavily on Russia's self-knowledge. In this situation, Russia's priority should be to modernize itself instead of trying in vain to establish itself as a world power (Ezati, 2011, pp. 168-169).

Changes in Russian Foreign Policy

In the post-Cold War era, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, the illusion arose that a fundamental change had taken place in Russian history and politics. Under Yeltsin's rule, Russia seemed to be on the verge of rapidly becoming a democratic member of Western norms.

But soon, in 1994, the rift between Western and Russian leaders widened, the alliance with the West in Russia faced significant obstacles, and divisions widened. There are two views on Russian foreign policy regarding the role of political culture and individuals: Euro-Atlanticists and Eurasianists.

A) Euro-Atlanticists

There is a limited but influential group of Russian government officials and intellectuals who favor pro-Western strategies; Andrei Kozyrev, the first foreign minister of the Russian Federation, was one of the essential elements of this way of thinking.

This view prevailed in the first half of Boris Yeltsin's eight-year presidency in the 1990s. They believe that the essential task of Russia's foreign policy is to facilitate its accession to "the Club of Democracies" with a market economy. Indeed, this process should have been done on an equal footing and without any discriminatory pressure on Russia to join NATO.

Russia began this path by joining the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe in 1990. Westerners believed that the organization could ensure the security of Europe and Asia from Vancouver to Vladivostok.

During this period, Russia strengthened its ties with the European Union, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), and the G7. Andrey Vladimirovich Kozyrev saw cooperation as an irreplaceable necessity for Russia and the United States (Kozyrev, 1994, p. 4). On the other hand, the Euro-Atlanticists believe that Russia must reduce its presence and activities in the former satellite states of the USSR (near abroad).

B) Eurasianists

This view was divided into several groups as it spread among Russian thinkers. This group believes Russia is an Asian-European country. This attitude developed in the face of the Westernist views of Yeltsin and Kozyrev, and its influence intensified among intellectuals.

B. 1) This group, which includes communists and nationalists, incorporates a range of attitudes that rely on the glory of Russia in the past.

They are generally dissatisfied with the West's treatment of Russia and the failure of Western organizations to open their

doors to it. They believe that the main area for maneuvering Russia's foreign policy in Eurasia and the rest of the world is considered the surrounding world. The group has a particular view of Russia's national interests and believes that Russia's national interests are pre-determined by Russian geography, history, culture, and ethics. Sergey Stankevich, one of the theorists of Eurasianism, believes that the concept of security is at the heart of national interests (Olcott, 1995, pp. 353 – 367). According to the group, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Eastern European countries have priority in Russia's foreign policy.

B.2) This group pays more attention to the role of Russian civilization and culture, which was manifested as an empire in the past, and shows less interest in geopolitics. They believe that Russia is better off accepting Western aid. Rely on its vast human and mineral resources. They oppose Russia's accession to Western institutions and see it as weakening the sovereignty of the Russian Federation. From this point of view, Asia's neighbors in the South and East of Russia should have a special place in Russia's foreign policy.

B.3) This group consists of a coalition of different forces in the military industry, the army, and various ministries. They want an assertive Russia that can curb any instability and chaos in Russian society through the rule of law (Fuman, 2006, p. 74). In their opinion, Russia is a country with a Russian identity, and the best way is to pursue Russian values. Russia's priority is foreign policy (Duffy, 2008).

In the concept of the foreign policy announced in November 1993 by Boris Yeltsin, no country was recognized as an enemy of Russia (Staar, 1993).

Russia's foreign policy concepts included:

- Strengthening ties with neighboring republics.
- Opposing NATO expansion eastward.
- Reviewing privatization policy and its implications.
- Preventing the West from infiltrating the Caspian Sea.

The document emphasized expanding relations with Iran and other Islamic countries to secure Russia's interests.

Russian Geopolitical Factors and Cogitation in the Region:

A) Geopolitical factors and considerations affecting Russia's policy in Central Asia are divided into four periods:

First Period (1991-1993)

During this period, Russia focused its foreign policy on the two axes of "near and far," which is reflected in the "Foreign Policy of

the Russian Federation,” which was adopted in late 1992.

Among the goals of Russia’s foreign policy, in which Central Asia is also defined, the following axes are emphasized:

1. Deepen political-military and economic cooperation with newly independent countries within the framework CIS of bilateral relations
2. Development and strengthening of CIS
3. Conclusion of agreements to protect the rights of Russian citizens vis à vis each of the newly independent states
4. Collective protection and protection of borders of CIS
5. Formation of peacekeeping forces of CIS

It is important to note that one of the reasons for Russia’s lack of attention to the region during this period was the West’s inattention to the area (Sokolsky & Charlick – Paley, 1999, p. 285)

Of course, after discovering oil and gas resources and the focus of the West on this region, the Russians took severe deterrent measures.

Second Period: 1993-2001

Russia’s policy towards Central Asia can be assessed on two levels in this period. The first level is related to Russia’s Central Asian security situation and power developments. The second level is associated with the beginning of a new big game with the presence of supra-regional powers and large oil and gas companies, which increased their efforts in the region after September 2001 (Kulaei, 2005, p.354).

Central Asia and the Caspian region have a special place in U.S. global strategy. During this period, Russia was worried about losing its influence in the region due to supra-regional powers. In 1997, the U.S. government announced its new plan for the area, which included resolute support for countries in the region to free themselves from traditional Russian influence—preventing the influence of Iran, Russia, and China in the region and placing the Caspian region in the U.S. strategic area (Kaliyeva, 2004, p. 2).

The situation created by NATO expansion and its actions in the Balkans from 1997 to 1999 led to a new stage in Russia in 2000, which was reminiscent of the competitive atmosphere of the Cold War (Karami, 2004, p. 11). During this period, a prominent feature of Russia’s geopolitical strategy was the apparent competition and tension with the West, especially over control of energy transmission routes and the prevention of the development of economic independence of the countries in the region.

Third Period 2001-2005

Russia, aware of its limited resources after 9/11, chose to overcome these problems with the help of the West; Russia provided intelligence and weapons support to the Northern Alliance during the Counter-Terrorism War and agreed to use U.S. military bases in Central Asia as part of a rewarding cooperation approach (Blank, 2008). During this period, Russia-NATO relations also improved, and in June 2002, the NATO-Russia Council was formed, which gave Moscow the right to participate equally in decision-making (Karami, 2004, p. 12). Other requirements and considerations also led to a fundamental shift in Russia’s policy towards the Central Asian region during this period, the most important of which are:

1. Obtaining a hardware license to deal with separatist groups such as Chechnya (Maleki, 2003, p. 188)
2. Improving Russia’s economic situation: A new partnership with the United States (Umansky, 2002, p. 12)

One of the most important goals of Russia in agreeing to the U.S. presence in the region is to use the benefits offered by the West to countries in the fight against terrorism, such as membership in the World Trade Organization, the use of grants, the use of Jewish lobbying and influence (Melki, 2005, pp. 124-125), membership in the economic organization of eight industrialized countries, modernization of existing technologies in Russia, determination of a new position for Russia in the global production and sale of oil and gas (Shirazi, Majidi, 2003, p. 310).

3. Stabilization of the transit position: Russia began new energy cooperation with the United States after 9/11 (Bahgat, 2003, p. 3).

Russia agreed to build the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in 2003 (Nichol, 2003, p. 6), (Opened in 2005). In addition, the Russian company Lukoil joined the consortium to construct the crucial Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan export pipeline with a 7.5% stake (Kaliyeva, 2004, p. 3).

The United States agreed to transfer energy from the northern routes, including the oil pipeline known as the Caspian Pipeline Consortium and the Blue Stream (Maleki, 2003, pp. 19-118).



Figure 2: Russian pipelines

4. Countering the Influence of Regional Powers, Especially China: One of Russia's significant challenges during the twentieth century was the growing power imbalance in Asia (Menon, 2002, p. 593).

Thus, Russia began a new tactical partnership with the West to avoid lagging behind its Asian rivals, especially China.

5. Utilization of geopolitical and geographical tools as a restraint for countries in the region and trans-regional actors;

Russia can easily limit the geopolitical borders of NATO and Europe by using energy leverage. President Putin has said once that: "a long time ago, the Tsar was invading and capturing the West with soldiers; today, we will conquer them through our gas and pipelines." Russia is the second-largest exporter of crude oil and has the highest security of energy supply in the world. Such a situation could make Russia the center of protection for the world's energy supply (Nuttall and Manz, 2008).

In fact, Russia is trying to take control of Russian oil and gas companies, especially B.P., with a deep understanding of the special geopolitical interests of energy (Locatelli, 2006, p. 1079). On the other hand, the development of natural gas as a clean fuel in the future is the biggest problem for E.U. member states (Umbach, 2009, p. 2).

Fourth Period (2005-2009)

Another reason that marked a new stage in Russia's policy in the region was the one-sided and dubious behavior of the United States and NATO. According to Richard Norton-Taylor, the biggest threat to Russia is the United States and NATO. Zbigniew Kazimierz Brzeziński believes that the United States is skeptical of Russian domination of Eurasia. According to some analysts, over the past two decades, Washington has always dreamed of dividing Russia into at least three republics (European Russia, Siberia, and the Far East) to dismantle Russia's political and economic power and disrupt its unity (Erone, 2009, p. 2).

B) Factors and geopolitical considerations influencing Russia's policy in the Caucasus region:

"The Caucasus is a traditional area of Russian resources, and we do not intend to give it up." Former Russian Foreign Minister Andrey Vladimirovich Kozyrev. (September 1992). "Russia's foreign policy must be based on a doctrine that declares the "complete geostrategic space of the former Soviet Union" as a beacon of vital interests." Russia must play the role of political and military guarantor of stability throughout the former Soviet Union. From the very beginning, it is clear that the Caucasus has occupied a high position in Russia's security policy as an important and strategic region. The Caucasus is of great

importance among the territories of the former Soviet Union and the periphery of present-day Russia. Especially the North Caucasus, which is the significant weakness or the Achilles heel of Russia. The Caucasus region connects the Black Sea to the Caspian Sea and Russia to the Middle East. The existence of oil resources (Azerbaijan) has attracted the attention of countries around the world. The North and South Caucasus are important to Russia (Mehdizadeh, 2010, pp.102-103).

Russia is more involved in security issues than Central Asia in the Caucasus. Of course, some of Russia's actions in the Caucasus, including giving Russian passports to Abkhaz and Ossetian citizens present in Georgia, can only have one interpretation: Russia's attempt to maintain its influence in the region and keep some tools of pressure on the republic.

In various ways, primarily through the military presence in these two regions (South Ossetia and Abkhazia), it has damaged the sovereignty and integrity of the territory of Georgia.

According to the Russian military convention (November, 1993), one of the threats to Russia's security is the occurrence of regional wars (Kolaei, 1996, p. 318). Russian strategists and politicians paid particular attention to regional conflicts in the Caucasus during the post-Cold War period. As B.M Barinksen also points out, among the threats to Russia's interests are new threats arising from increasing internal incompatibilities and problems, ethnic issues in the surrounding countries and certain regions. Undoubtedly, among all the areas around Russia, the Caucasus attracts the most attention of this kind for Russia (Mehdizadeh, 2010, p. 106). Over the past two decades, numerous unrests in the Caucasus (over the past two decades) have also posed some significant problems for Russia. These problems have been exacerbated by the conflict in Chechnya and the continuing unrest in the region. The Chechen war has created substantial economic costs for Russia, which has suffered severely from internal problems during its recovery period and has inflicted severe financial and human losses on that country. According to the official statements of the Russian government, from October 1999 to June 2001, 3096, and from 1994 to 1996, 3800 Russian soldiers were killed during the war in Chechnya (Quinn, 1997, p. 3). The existence of some independence movements and claims of secession from Russia is dangerous for the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation. Separatist efforts in the Caucasus's Russia are considered significant threats to the country. Chechnya's efforts over the past decade to secede from Russia and gain independence, similar secessionist efforts in Dagestan, and the potential for secession in other republics have posed severe risks to Russia. Chechnya has been the most critical challenge to the territorial integrity of the Russian Federation since independence. In fact,

Chechnya's independence has been suppressed by Russia for several reasons over the past decade: First, these efforts constitute a severe threat to Russia's territorial integrity, and Russia has therefore strongly opposed the endangerment of one of its essential values. Second, if the efforts for independence in Chechnya were successful, other Caucasian nations would also strive for freedom and secession (Kolaei, 1995, p. 86).

In general, it can be said that Russia is facing separatist threats in its Caucasian territories, both potentially and actually. If the Chechen Republic gains independence, the Muslim territories of southern Russia, with a population of about 20 million, will turn to independence (Vahidi 2002, p. 28). And it is not without reason that this region is considered a turning point for Russia. Russia's relationship with the Caucasus is unique, and no additional power is in such a position. According to the same systemic relationship, any change at the regional level will undoubtedly lead to unrest and conflict and possibly to a change in territorial boundaries and consequently to other parts of the region.

On the one hand, the country itself is part of the Caucasus due to its considerable interests in the North Caucasus. On the other hand, due to its significant interests in the South Caucasus and its great potential for influence, it stands out as the most important regional power. If Russia sees itself in close connection and solidarity with the Caucasus, any change in the South Caucasus can be drastically extended to its borders.

For example, suppose Russia reacts strongly and reciprocally to the democratic developments in the South Caucasus (and Eurasia), undoubtedly, among the various motives. In that case, it can be pointed out that Russia itself, as an authoritarian state, has constantly been exposed to such developments and therefore seeks to control it or direct it towards what it wants. Such a situation is also observed concerning the actions related to ethnic separatism in the South Caucasus. Russia is undoubtedly aware that any change in the borders in the South Caucasus can provoke separatist forces in its territory to pursue their demands seriously. Perhaps this is why Russia has always been involved in conflicts in the South Caucasus (such as in Karabakh, South Ossetia, and Abkhazia). Indirectly and not explicitly supports the continuation of the current situation (neither war nor peace) and always accepts a kind of balance between rival forces.

Russia in the Caucasus also feels threatened by the escalation of the crisis and the escalation of the conflict. And it is nothing but the same sense of danger from the more expansive entry of the West into the region, which can be done under the pretext of maintaining regional peace and stability, mediating in conflicts, stabilizing the situation, or providing humanitarian aid. From the Russian point of view, the Caucasus (in a classical

theory) is a region located around or near Russia. [Russia has significant vital resources in the Caucasus and views it as its traditional territory].

From Russia's point of view, the Caucasus is around its security zone, and in fact, the use of these terms seeks to emphasize that the Caucasus has been Russia's private sphere. And he will not tolerate the influence of foreign powers in the region (which endanger his interests and influence) and is strongly opposed to their entry into his security zone and perimeter. A perimeter is a line outside which other powers are or should be (Cooper, 2000, p.169).

One of the important tools that have encouraged Russia to maintain its traditional sphere of influence is its military presence in the Caucasus. The presence of significant troops and military bases in the Caucasus over the past decade and efforts to maintain them in the region confirm that Russia has no intention of leaving the area in favor of foreign (mainly Western) forces. Although the outbreak of conflicts such as Nagorno-Karabakh, Abkhazia, and Ossetia have strengthened Russia's military presence in the region, on the other hand, it has opened the door to foreign actors in the region. Indeed, the emergence of ethnic-geographical conflicts in the Caucasus has been one of the important factors in the entry of Russian rivals into the region. The involvement of Western countries and organizations in resolving regional conflicts has been significant. These peaceful efforts have paved the way for the expansion of Western influence in the region (which has been facilitated by the desire of some countries in the region for the presence of the West). Aware of this, Russia has vehemently opposed the intervention of foreign powers in the area, which would weaken its influence in the Caucasus, and agrees only with peaceful efforts in which, firstly, Russia has a leading role. Secondly, these peace efforts do not lead to strengthening Western influence and presence in the region.

Russia will never tolerate the Central Asian and Caucasus states joining NATO and interprets any NATO presence in the region as against its interests. Their accession to NATO will have only one result: marginalizing Russia (Romer, 2002, p. 19).

Energy, Russia and the Countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus

As the largest gas producer and the second-largest oil producer globally, Russia is one of the influential actors who has well understood the role and importance of energy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea.

The world's major industrial economies, including China, Japan, and the European Union, are highly dependent on Russian and Caspian energy sources. They try to increase long-

term investment in the upstream and downstream sectors of the oil and gas industry in the region, increase production capacity and utilize abundant hydrocarbon energy reserves, and dominate the highways of energy transmission lines in the Caspian Sea as energy resources (Correlge & Vanderlinde, 2006, p. 533).

Acquire the total volume of foreign investment in the field of energy in this region. To achieve this goal, Russian governments have continued to expand their influence abroad over the past two decades, trying to consolidate their dominance over the region's oil and gas pipelines and deprive other regional rivals of about 25 percent.

In 2003, Gazprom signed a 25-year agreement to purchase Turkmen gas and then re-export it to European markets via the northern route. It has also tried to consolidate its influence among the region's countries by exerting influence in determining the legal regime of the Caspian Sea and through the use of energy diplomacy. Which can include the following:

1. Encourage the region's countries to transfer their energy through Russia and the port of Novorossiysk to the Black Sea and warn them of the dangers of transferring energy from Georgia to Azerbaijan and Turkey.
2. Transfer of energy from Central Asian countries via Russia with the completion of 720 km of the new pipeline since 2001.
3. Concluding a 15-year agreement with Kazakhstan in June 2002 to export 350,000 barrels of oil per day through Russia. Also, transferring the bulk of Kazakhstan's oil exports through the Atyrau – Sarama pipeline (ASP) to target markets in Europe.
4. Investment in Turkmenistan's oil and gas industry to transfer the country's fossil fuels through its pipelines to target markets in Europe (Dorian, 2002, pp. 20 –27).

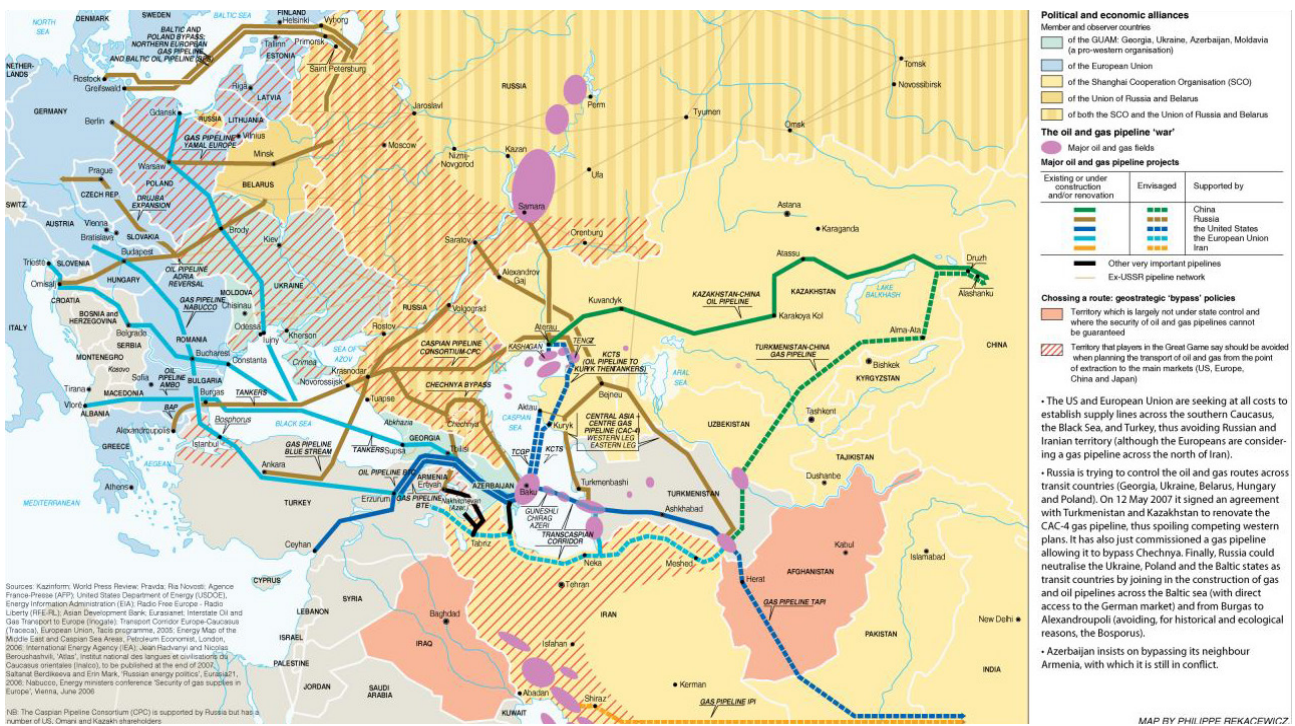


Figure 3: Central Asia and Caucasus pipelines
PHILIPPE REKACWICZ, 2007

External Challenges and Obstacles to Russia's Progress in the region:

1) China

By entering the competition for Central Asian energy resources, China has begun a fierce rivalry between major powers over control of energy resources as soft power. In this picture, everything that China has achieved in this great competition and game is considered equal to the other side's loss, and the opposite is also true (U.S. Department of Defense, 2007, p. 22).

With a 3,700-kilometer border with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan, the country has invested hundreds of millions of dollars in energy exploration and expansion. In this regard, Chinese officials have proposed concrete plans to transfer oil and gas from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to China to participate in major energy projects. However, Russian-Japanese rivalry in this area has limited the Chinese presence in the region (Truscot, 2009, p. 6).

China faces difficult geopolitical and political obstacles to conquering Central Asia's energy resources and markets, including the United States and Russia. For example, to exploit Russia's gas resources in the Siberian region, it wants to pass the gas pipeline directly to China; Russia, on the other hand, prefers to cross the Mongol route; however, the country has entered into various contracts with other major producers in the region. China's national oil companies have invested about \$ 5.9 billion in exploiting Kazakhstan's oil resources in the North and West of the country and have built 3,000 kilometers of energy pipelines to China. It also signed a \$ 12 billion contract with China in 1997 to exploit Russia's gas resources around Lake Baikal and to transport 20 to 30 billion cubic meters of gas a year through a 3,400-kilometer-long gas pipeline to China (Cornelius & Story, 2007: 16 & Chang, 2001, pp. 234-238).

In its regional strategy in the Central Asian region, China pursues several strategic goals, including the following:

1. Strengthen multilateralism in the region by establishing and strengthening regional arrangements such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in June 2001 and playing a central role in the treaty.
2. Expand political influence and engage regional countries in the fight against terrorism, extremism, and separatism, especially in Xinjiang and Islamic fundamentalism in Central Asia.
3. Efforts to master the region's strategic environment and energy resources through the development of trade cooperation and infrastructure investments to provide a suitable platform for transferring of energy pipelines from Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan to China.
4. Countering Russia's extravagance in Central Asia

and its domination of the region's energy resources by offering more lucrative proposals

5. Challenging U.S. Dominance (Chang, 2001: 237 & Bilgin, 2009, p. 6).

2) The United States of America

The United States, as a global hegemonic power and influential in the international political economy and regional power equations, assumes that the world in the 21st century will see a struggle for access to energy resources. To establish its hegemony in this part of the world, it has started a wide-ranging effort to ensure energy security and dominate the energy resources of this region. In its regional strategy in Eurasia and to safeguard its vital interests in this region, it pursues a multilateral system around the following axes:

1. Preventing the formation and influence of political Islam among the newly independent Muslim republics.
2. NATO's expansion to the East in the form of a Partnership for Peace program as a factor in completing the Eurasian links.
3. Dominate the region's security axes to control Russia, restrain Iran, and prevent Chinese influence by increasing the military presence in this area, institutionalizing, persuading, gaining agreement, and strengthening the region's relations with Western institutions such as NATO, the Organization for Security and Cooperation, and the WTO.
4. Supporting democracy and the free market economy among the countries of this region by attracting the support of international financial institutions and organizations, including the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank, and playing a role in the economic growth of the region by attracting the support of multinational companies to invest in Regional energy resources.
5. Direct military presence in the region through the establishment of a military base and the deployment of U.S. military forces in the area (Shakoor, 1995, pp. 14 – 25)

In this regard, the United States accounts for about 40% of the region's total volume of foreign investment. And by breaking the traditional rules of regional power equations has considerable influence on the countries of Central Asia and the Caucasus, including Azerbaijan and Georgia.

It also strives to pursue two goals simultaneously in its energy strategy in this part of the world:

1. Utilization of Central Asian energy resources for economic development and security and stability of the countries in the region.
2. Creating a rift in the region's relations with powers such as China and Iran and preventing Russian domination and influence over the oil and gas industry and the region's energy transmission pipelines by diversifying energy centers.

The United States of America has pursued a dual policy to consolidate its hegemony in this Caucasus area. On the one hand, exerting influence on the countries of the region and using the tools of international sanctions hinders investment in the oil and gas industry sector, the passage of non-aligned energy transmission pipelines, and the joining of regional energy transmission pipelines. On the other hand, it directly invests in developing the infrastructure of oil and gas industries in the region; Among them is the \$ 20 billion investment in Kazakhstan's oil industry (Rywkan, 2005; Kaiser & Pulsipher, 2007, pp. 1300-1313).

Although, since 2001, Russia has tried to control most of Central Asia's energy exports through its territory by completing a 720-kilometer pipeline, it did not take long for U.S. pressure to counter the growing influence and dominance of Russia over the region's energy resources, and to contain Iran as much as possible.

In 2005, the 1,700-kilometer Baku – Tbilisi – Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) transferred part of the energy of Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan from the East of the Caspian Sea to target markets in Europe. The route from Baku to Azerbaijan to Tbilisi and Ceyhan in Turkey was completed at about \$ 4 billion and operated by transferring 1 million barrels of oil per day from the Caspian Sea region to the Mediterranean Sea.

3) European Union

The European Union, a major consumer of fossil fuels, has also seen Chinese competition in Central Asia and concerns about Russia's monopoly policies in the region and preventing a repeat of the experience of cutting off Russian gas exports to Ukraine through policy interaction. The United States, in line with its strategies in the region, has designed and implemented a dual policy around the following axes:

1. Support the United States' unilateralist policies toward Iran and the Security Council resolution, including the 1929 Resolution.

2. Imposition of unilateral sanctions in Iran's oil and gas industry, including banning the sale of any equipment and technology used in the refining, exploration, and production of Iranian oil and gas. Prohibition of any commercial services, including refusal to guarantee export credit and insurance services (Philips, 2010).

3. Countering Russia's monopoly by persuading Central Asian countries to work with the oil companies of the member union to invest in the oil and gas industry infrastructure in the region.

4. Supporting international oil companies for cooperation with Central Asian countries and monopolizing 32% of the total

volume of foreign investment in the oil and gas industry of the region by the countries of the European Union.

5. Interacting with Russia and trying to gain Russian support to exploit its influence among Central Asian countries to encourage them to export their gas to Europe.

6. Efforts to ensure the Union's energy security by diversifying the energy transmission routes of Central Asian countries to Europe from the East to the West of the Caspian Sea; Including the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline and the Trans – Caspian Gas Pipeline (TCGP), to transport a significant portion of oil and gas from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and the Republic of Azerbaijan via Turkey to Europe (Collum (et al.), 2004, 69 – 75; Campaner & Yenikeeff 2008, p. 14).

Conclusion

Given the changing post-Cold War international context, Russia has worked hard to consolidate its geopolitical dominance over the region and its tools of power (soft, hard, and smart). Russia sought to oppose rebellious regional powers of extreme power (economic sanctions, blocking transit routes, and even military aggression) against obedient governments of soft power (the attractions of financial and security aid) and leverage. Use energy to threaten the influence of supra-regional forces, especially the European Union.

After 9/11, Russia's foreign policy was designed using the views of both Atlanticists (liberals) and extremist nationalists. Russia and NATO issued a joint statement condemning the terrorist attacks. The Russians had high expectations of closer cooperation with the United States. Central Asian countries were also interested in cooperating with the United States.

Russia and its allies in Central Asia allow the United States and its allies to use their air corridors and airports. Russia took a new approach to the U.S. presence in the region after 9/11. In general, Russia's main goals in Central Asia and the Caucasus were formed after 9/11 in interaction with the United States. Russia believed that the region's realities would teach the United States that it could not remain in the area for long because of its ethnic-cultural and political structures with sufficient grounds and potential for conflict. But the situation in the region has proved to be contrary to Russia's views, and the United States and its allies have increasingly entered the area and enjoyed political-economic and security stability. We are now witnessing this in the Ukraine war.

When launching the attack on Ukraine, Russian President Vladimir Putin called NATO a threat that is becoming more dangerous for Russia every year. Russia has previously warned it would focus its military operations on "liberating" eastern Ukraine. It has used its old tactics by offering Russian

Passport to Ukrainians before the invasion. Under the pressure of war and having more than four million people fleeing from Ukraine, Ukrainian negotiators in Istanbul delivered their specific proposals on neutrality and other essential issues to Russia (March, 2022):

- Ukraine will adopt a “non-bloc and non-nuclear” position so that no foreign military bases will be established on its territory. This will be accompanied by strict and legally binding guarantees from third countries, including Britain, China, the United States, Turkey, France, Canada, Italy, Poland, and Israel, who will promise to protect a neutral Ukraine in the event of an attack.
- Ukraine will not enter into any political-military alliance.
- The future of the Crimean situation that Russia seized in 2014 will be determined within 15 years of consultations.
- The future of the eastern regions, which Russian-backed separatists’ control, will be discussed between the Presidents Zelensky and President Putin.

The proposals also allow Ukraine to join the European Union but not join NATO.

In 2016, during a television program hosted by the Russian Geographical Society, President Putin said: “Russia’s borders end nowhere.” Thus, the future of Ukraine and the other states sharing borders with Russia remains to be seen.

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