

Geopolitical Facets of Russia's Foreign Policy with Emphasis on the Caspian Sea

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Abstract: *The aim of this paper is investigating and studying of geopolitical dimensions of Russia in the Caspian Sea. Russian post-Soviet geopolitics invokes euroasianism as its inner rationale and meaning, as a greater good that imbues pragmatic, interest based politics with a sense of mission. Eurasianism as a particular tradition of theorizing Russia's identity and place in the world has a momentum of its own that transcends the pragmatics of Russian post-Soviet foreign policy. Although Russia remains a strong regional power with firm position on international level it is still hard for Moscow to accept loss of the position of great power. Therefore, Russia makes a swirl in its foreign policy in the Caspian area to create new strategies and stimulates Russian government to get back on the region and Once again take their sovereignty back through the use of military, political and economic power according to the priorities of the Eurasian and geo-economy policy integration in the countries of the Caspian region. The methodology of the paper is descriptive- analytical and it attempt to demonstrate this hypothesize that in Russian Eurasianism foreign policy, the Caspian Sea and Caspian region have a significant value at the perspective of geopolitical potentialities.*

Keywords: *Caspian Sea, geopolitics, Russia, Eurasianism.*

Introduction

Commitment to geopolitics understood as a balanced, non-ideological assessment of Russia's national interests was first officially articulated by Russia's first Foreign Minister Andrei Kozyrev in 1992. Defined as a "normal view of national interests" in contrast to the ideologized foreign policy of the Soviet era, this understanding of geopolitics had very little to do with 'politics as territorial control' or with a need to 'carve out' geopolitical spheres of influence (Morozova, 2009: 668). During the lifetime of the Soviet Union, the great powers were limited in the Caspian region. Caspian was only under the influence of Soviet, due to Soviet dominance to the large part of the Caspian Sea and unwillingness of United States of America to conflicts With Soviet and in the other side, the recognition of superpowers spheres of influence by each other. Hence, there was relative stability in the region. But after the collapsing of Soviet, several powers attended in the region. Thus, while before the collapsing of the Soviet, a dominant power makes integrity and stability in the region, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, provided the tendency for Competitions and challenges in the region (Smith, 2005).

In such a circumstance, the major powers were acting as a destabilizing factor in the region. With collapsing of the Soviet Union, the Caspian coast became four countries (Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) instead of one, While in Soviet period, there were only two countries in the Caspian region. With this change, the domination of a superpower that will not allow others to intervene and penetration in the region, eliminated. The consequences were the emergence of a power vacuum in the region that tempted the powers to intervene in the region. Replacing the weak states was another consequence of this change. Power vacuum in the region, the region leader's weakness in the managing of their governments and their need to support from others yet enriched energy resources, were among factors that increased the importance of the region and more compete for dominance in the region (Hashemi: 2001, 97).

Currently, the most influential powers in the Caspian region are: America, Russia, Europe Union and China. Each of these countries pursues their own interests in the region which sometimes are in competition and conflict with the interests of other powers. In this conflict, economic potential, military, politics will play a greater role (Dugin, 2004: 4). Today, Russia has more prosperity, stability and authority than in the early 1990s (International Institute for Caspian Studies: 2007, 4). With a little accuracy to actions, potentials and characteristics of Russia, this theory

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forms that Russian by using capacities, political, military and economic, has the necessitous tools to re-sovereignty of its power in the Caspian and trans-Caspian region.

Research Methodology

Methodology of this study is descriptive- analytical and required information has been collected through library research. The information gathered from sources such as books, magazines, online articles, newspapers, etc.

Literature Review: Politics of Russia

The General Principles of the Russian foreign policy concept also contain visions of other geopolitical thinking schools. The intentions to uphold the rights and interests of Russian speaking minorities can be seen in the pan-Slavinism vision of Zyuganov. Cooperation with UN, development of economy, and further cooperation with other states all underlies the Democratic statist's vision of geopolitics (Dmitri, 2006). Generally, when the national authority is relied on national authority, foreign policy can be successful. Any actor, who wants to have more influence in the international transactions, Should also corroborate its national power and authority. Russia as a great power, separates from America through the Bering Strait, On the other hand extended to Baltic coasts of is adjacent to Poland. Hence and in accordance with international and domestic environment, Russia changes and modifications its foreign policy every few years (Andrianopoluos, 2004). Specification in geographic, ethnic and religious characteristics of Russia Made to the foreign policy ideas and different approaches pursued at different periods in the country. In general, the post-Soviet Russian foreign policy can be divided into three categories:

- 1- Westernism
- 2- Eurasianism
- 3- Centralism

1- Westernism: Tendency to West in Russian foreign policy has a long history. According to this idea, Russian needs the West for the development in the economy, culture and democracy and this gives a special place to Russia in the international system. This thought dominated on politics Russian from 1991 to 1996. In these years, West was considered as a friend and Islam as an enemy (Sharaf Alzia: 2008, 88). This approach, after the Soviet collapse and in the Boris Yeltsin period performed as an uncontrollable process. During this period, Russia's strategy based on two principles:

- a) Complete trust to the international economic institutions for economic development
- b) Optimism to cooperation with the West in foreign policy

This politics continued from the Cold War to the end of the Yeltsin period. They hoped with setting aside Marxist ideology, have entered a new stage of the strategy With West particularly the United States. But With economic crisis of 1988 Kosovo, crisis and most importantly NATO enlargement to the East Exacerbate suspicions towards the West and led to the end of the period (Vaezi:2010, 4).

2- Eurasianism: Based on the Eurasianism, Russia is an Asian and European country and according to the West has been ignored the interests of Russia in Asia. Therefore, interaction and relationship with Middle Eastern countries should be considered. According to this perspective, Russia is a great power and has perpetual benefits not perpetual friends. Opposition to mono-polarity in international system and America's unilateralism is a version of this perspective (Sharaf Alzia: 2008, 2). Eurasianism theory is not only anti-Western or anti-democratic, but also According to Sergei Stankovic, member of Council of Russian foreign policy emerged in order to make a balance between the extreme eastern and western trends And has not errors of the Gorbachev period that considered extreme Westernism and radicalism theory like "common European home" (Beygi and Motaharnia: 2009, 262).

3- Centralism: This perspective has evolved form of nationalism (opposition against Westernism minded, willing to Eurasianism) that invigorated at the period of President Putin. The main characteristics of this cohort is the realism and pragmatism, who believe that Russia has no permanent friends and enemies and they do anything (even negotiating with the enemy) for interests of Russia. The priority of economy is logic of centralism and they try by absorbing investments and transfer of technology to increase the power of the Russian economy due to the Russia's economic problems (Forsberg, 2004).

Foreign Policy of Russia

The opinions and theories expressed by the New Right School of geopolitical thinking are widely held in the Russian foreign policy establishment. However, these visions are futuristic and assumed to be achievable under much more powerful Russia than it is now. The Russian leaders have to deal with and accommodate to the world and try to use vision based on rational thinking. Russian foreign policy always has two aspects: near abroad and far abroad. After the Soviet collapse, Regional was the most important strategic policy in Russian foreign policy. In other words, Russia's Eurasian policy is priority of Russia's foreign policy. Graham Smith, Izo Curatis and Tofienr have been written about Russia's foreign policy, the articles that include five aspects:

1. Culture
2. International Identity
3. performance Typology and perspective
4. general approach for maintaining of internal stability
5. The general approach for maintaining stability of Geopolitical borders (Prozorov, 2008: 208).

In fact, we can consider Russia as a Eurasian power that playing a role in Asia and in Europe simultaneously. Meanwhile, the Middle East as the priorities of Russian foreign policy should not be neglect. Russian Eurasianism includes Key concepts about Russia as a coherent and separate civilization of the West. Russia, by creating geopolitical position between Europe and Asia arises as a power of the Eurasia that its role is regional stability. Russia has particular categories in geopolitical and cultural values. Main focus of Russia is on the restoration and the impact its functions on the trends, particularly trans-boundary regions. Based on this general approach, justification and emphasizing of the military and economic power integration in this region considered as a main part of improvement and regularization (Hatefi: 2011, 38).

Russian President, Vladimir Putin stated in his message to the Federal Assembly: Collaboration with the CIS countries are the priorities in Russia's foreign policy. These countries have a lot the preferences for Russian major infrastructure projects, energy and transport (Tsygankov, 2003). But after the Guam Association That formed with the encouragement of America in 1977 and by presenting of "Ukraine, Georgia, Azerbaijan and Moldova" to replace the CIS and undermine the Russian position, Russia tended towards the other preferences to access to its goals (such as the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SCO).

Politics of Russia in Caspian Sea

The Caspian Sea is innately affected by surrounding areas. But, the role of the region determined according to the interactions of the five countries that surround in the Sea and intervention of major powers. The Russian foreign policy in Caspian Sea can be divided into five periods:

1- The first period (1992-1992)

Russia after the Soviet collapse did not follow a determined policy in the newly independent countries at of the Caspian basin. This was mostly due to a power vacuum in which created after the fall of communism. However, Russia on year later founds that being inactivation has created a Geopolitical vacuum and the field has been prepared for regional and trans-regional powers and interventionist in the region.

2- The second period (1997-1993)

Discovery of energy resources has provided America and the West investment in this region. This action was a serious alarm for Russia. Because, Western countries and their investment in the Caspian Sea provided changes in these countries, particularly in economy that undermines Russian strategic depth. Consequently, Russia tried to undermine Western countries influence with foreign policy by near abroad countries such as the countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Caspian Basin. In this regard and in 1994, Russia announced the Caspian Sea as a closed to avoid of the Western oil companies investment. This opposition continued to 1996. But the project fails due to supporting of West oil companies from the Azerbaijan and utilization of Azerbaijan from the Caspian resources. As a result, the Russians offered an exclusive 45 nautical mile zone and the establishment of a joint company to the exploitation of resources - Considering that the Caspian Basin countries were in low-level- for using the technology of pursuing "the Politics of the Soviet single product"-. This proposal provides a share of energy resources for Russia, but it encountered with the opposition of the countries, particularly Azerbaijan. The priorities of The Russian foreign policy in this period:

- 1- Cooperation with the countries such as China, India and Iran to prevent of progression of the West
- 2- Pressure on coastal states to spread relations with Moscow
- 3- Preventing of energy resources transfer to outside of Moscow

In this regard, Russia could provide their interests partly with military contracts, deploy military bases and oil contracts (Shuri: 2003, 5).

3- The third period (1999-1998)

After the electing of Putin and stabilizing the political and economic situation and ideological deadlock in the domestic scene, attention to Eurasia, especially the Caspian Basin increased. The main goals The Russian foreign policy in this period includes:

- 1- Providing the strategic interests: by increasing political and ethnic problems in the seven southern republics (Dagestan, Chechnya, Ingush, Balkarya, and Nagorno) and progressively increasing of Wahhabism influence, added the importance of the Caspian Basin in comparison with other parts of Russia.
- 2- Preparing Geopolitical resources: Moreover Russia with controlling of energy resources and pathways of oil transport can access a major portion of oil and gas market, also would make depends the Caspian republics more and more.
- 3- Supplying Economic sources: Russia attempts to control flow of energy corridors and the process of transferring the capital from the West to the Caspian Basin; Meanwhile Be able to solve their economic problems (Ibid, 8).

4- The fourth period (2001-2000) the Putin era

Putin tries to create a regime in the Caspian Sea facilitating resource utilization; meanwhile expands productive collaboration reciprocally. One of the Geopolitical goals of Russia is attempting to develop this system rapidly. Because, according to the Kremlin “any delay in determining the legal regime of the Caspian Sea will provide the West further presence in the region”.

5- The fifth period (after the September 2001)

After the 11th September attacks in New York and its consequences, Moscow temporarily adopted the presence of U.S. troops in the Central Asia during a classified agreement. As Russia was the only government that had military bases in the Caspian Sea, a complex situation outcropped. Because, they come with the approval of the Kremlin, but they go not with him order. While, four rest countries accepted this approval without any objection as an obstacle against the America. In April 2002, and disagreements about the separation of the sea, whether oil or gas resources, Putin said during a speech that in the absence of a comprehensive agreement in Caspian Sea, Russia will enter into bilateral negotiations (Shuri: 2003, 9).

Research Findings: Geopolitical Interests of Russia in the Caspian Sea

In 1991 the Soviet Union collapsed, But Russia influencing on the world, especially in Central Asia and the Caucasus did not disappear. Russia as the widest and most advanced industrial country in the Caspian Sea has a special position. Russia through the Black Sea and the Baltic accesses to the Pacific and Siberia and according to oil and gas resources in Siberia and the export pipeline system, are less dependent on Caspian Sea basically (Lo, 2002, 18-24).

While the newly independent republics from the Soviet Union, depend on the Russia, The leaders of the Caspian Basin countries consider the development of its hydrocarbon resources as a foundation for economic prosperity. But these countries are surrounded by land and they have to transport their oil and natural gas through a pipeline which crosses several international boundaries. The pipeline pathways in the Caspian region, was designed to link the internal regions of the former Soviet Union. Russia has tried with the preserve the traditional pathways of energy transferring from its territory, prevented the Caspian basin countries, influence of the West and particularly America as well as (Dabiri: 1999, 87). Of course, Russia do not intended to conflict with the West in no way, rather is trying to cooperation with the West to achieve the interests. In fact, Russia regarded the West as an opportunity and through Sovereignty over the Central Asia and the Caucasus as leverage, uses from Western

countries to obtain further interests and advantages (Karami: 2005, 64). Russia has aligned its interests with the West after the Soviet collapse in various reasons which most common reasons are:

- 1- Russian weakness in economy against the economic power of West
- 2- Require investment from Western companies in the region
- 3- Having similar European cultural background and intellectual history
- 4- Confronting with terrorism and attempting to avoid the influence of Islamic fundamentalists in the region

But, some issues caused a problem in making the alignment with West:

- Supporting the European governments from governments which tended to Western democracy in this region
- The emergence of numerous regional crises, such as the crisis in Chechnya, Georgia and Europe posturing against the Russia
- NATO expansion to the East and joining of East European countries to the EU which Russia regards it as a security threat
- Enlargement of oil companies operations and domination over the economy by American and European investors in the region (Heydari and Mohammadi: 2006, 3).

From a Russian point of view, the Caspian Sea area is of particular concern due to a host of interests that must be protected. Among the most important are (Timothy, 2000: 75):

- Geo-strategic interests: Russia wants to remain strong in the area and wield power within and control over the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), thereby ensuring the security of its southern flank. States of concern here are those CIS members noted above plus Georgia and Armenia. Russia sees as its greatest danger the potential expansion of Chechen authority into Dagestan at Russia's expense, thereby severely restricting Russia's direct access to the Sea (only Astrakhan remains).
- Geo-political interests: the retention of Russian influence within the space of the former Soviet Union directly determines the future of Russian statehood, according to many analysts. Caspian oil, despite all its economic significance, is merely the external manifestation of the global political task of the present day-the restoration of Russia's might. Evolving problems in the North Caucasus among the autonomous Russian republics (not only Chechnya, but also Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, etc.) and growing religious pressures (from the Wahhabis, among other groups) make this area as or perhaps more important to Russia than the CIS in terms of interests and stability.
- Economic interests: Russia wants to ensure that cash flows in the form of Western capital will continue from Central Asian and Siberian oil fields, and that cash flows are not be redirected out of Russia and into the Caspian region. Russia can compete on a level playing field with Kazakhstan and other Caspian oil investors with the proper Production Sharing Agreement (PSA) legislation in place. Another economic concern (which is also a geo-strategic, geo-political and ecological concern) is sovereignty rights to the body of water itself. The bottom and outer edges of the Caspian is divided one way, the column of water over these divisions in another.
- Ecological interests: developing safe ecological norms for the exploitation of both hydrocarbons and fishing resources (especially the protection of the Caspian sturgeon stock that produces 80-90 per cent of the world's finest caviar) are paramount concerns. This feeling is especially acute due to the severe meteorological conditions (extremely strong and unpredictable storms) that occur in the North Caspian Sea region.

Finally, we can summarize the goals and interests of Russia like this:

- 1- Maintaining the countries in the region depended on Russia
- 2- Constant dominance over energy resources
- 3- Preventing from the intrusion of the Western powers
- 4- Dominating over the region to enhance the credibility of bargaining in order to get advantages from the Western powers
- 5- Prohibiting of the militarization of the region (due to the presence of NATO and America in the region)
- 6- Spreading of Russian culture
- 7- Avoiding from the dominance of competing powers (America, China, Japan, Europe Union)
- 8- Confronting with radical Islamism

- 9- Countering to terroristic threats
- 10- Coping with stress and instability that determined the Security of the Russian

Conclusion

Russian post-Soviet geopolitics invokes Eurasianism as its inner rationale and meaning, as a greater good that imbues pragmatic, interest based politics with a sense of mission. Eurasianism as a particular tradition of theorizing Russia's identity and place in the world has a momentum of its own that transcends the pragmatics of Russian post-Soviet foreign policy. Having emerged in the 1980s and 1990s as a political opposition to Gorbachev's New Thinking and to the pro-American shift in Russian foreign policy in the first few years of Boris Yeltsin's tenure, neo-Eurasianism has been gaining increasing influence in Russia, especially since the 1993 parliamentary elections (Ersen, 2004: 135). Geographic location and having major resources of oil and gas is some of the characteristics that created the strategic importance of the region and the environmental and geographic factors as well as political and economic factors have made the region to one of the competition place for international and regional powers. On the other hand, existence of energy rich sources in the region results to formation of political competitions and games that have been immersed the political, economic and environmental future in an aura of ambiguity. On that account, Russia has been successfully implementing his vision of multi-polarism although its close relations with the Atlantic bloc within the framework of its multi-polaristic vision. Therefore, Russia, led by Eurasianism, considers itself as a pivot area, heartland, global power, which unites a unique civilization with its own identity, culture, history. Geopolitical thinking was and remains a key stone in Russian foreign policy. Realities suppress emotions, but at the same time give a push towards fast development, economic growth, and regaining of power. Hence, with Russia's growth, geopolitical thinking will be playing an even higher role in the foreign policy of Russia, the country which has faced many declines and wars, and which has always managed to regain and even explore its geopolitical influence on the global arena.

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