

## THE CAUCASUS IN THE POST-COLD WAR ERA: FROM THE SOVIET REPUBLICS TO A CRUCIAL BUFFER ZONE

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### ABSTRACT

**T**he Caucasus has attracted the interest of the neighboring powers in the post-Cold War era due to its geopolitical and geo-economic significance, as well as these powers' deep-rooted affiliations with the peoples of the Caucasus. The current paper focuses on Russia's and Turkey's historical objectives in the region, how these objectives were met during the last 25 years and the debate behind the use of historical narratives as instruments of soft power.

Both Moscow and Ankara felt the need for legitimizing their presence in the Southern Caucasus, where three new independent states were established after the Cold War. On the one hand, already since 1994, Moscow has been regarding the ex-Soviet republics as its "near abroad" protected by its "nuclear umbrella." On the other hand, Turkey has never stopped to be a presence in the region under the cloak of soft power means. These means are based on the exploitation of Turkish or Islamic identity and the result-

ing relationships, being vigorously cultivated both by Ankara itself and various nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)—such as Fethullah Gülen's Organization, which has been active until recently. The purpose of this kind of ideological construct is to strengthen Islamic and Turkish influence in the countries that are involved in the search for a new post-Soviet identity, free from the protectorate of Moscow.

The correlation and blending of hard and soft power are analyzed; a number of findings are made at different levels in the context of long-term historical narratives and the desire of the participants to assert their respective geopolitical roles. The efforts of Russia and Turkey resulted in "ideological battle" around

the issue of historical ties of each of the countries with the newly created states.

For this reason, the core of the research is aimed at examining Russia's and Turkey's grand strategies with regard to the Southern Caucasus, as well as whether and how they are influenced by historical narratives. Accordingly, we are trying to examine how the rhetoric of both countries is transformed into one of the components of their power or, in other words, how it is included in the set of their strategic instruments. To this end, the author applies the multi-level theoretical analysis to the situation in the region and tries to clarify the relevant typology of historical narratives and strategic objectives of the two countries.

**KEYWORDS:** *the Caucasus, Russia, Turkey, international relations theory, geopolitics, geo-economics, strategic studies, Azerbaijan, Georgia, Armenia.*

## *Introduction*

This paper attempts to identify and analyze the significance of important phenomena, able to reinforce or undermine the grand strategies of Russia and Turkey in Central Asia and the Southern Caucasus. The analysis is based on bibliographical research, primarily relying on the records of historically documented policies, as well as on the comparison of data on the balance of hard power of the two countries and the description of corresponding threats to each other. Following the method of process tracing,<sup>1</sup> the cause-effect link will be presented, allowing to reach a set of conclusions regarding the connection of contemporary grand strategies to discourses of the past. This process will be aided by clarifying the historical role of the main actors, their traditional geopolitical positioning and how this relates to their present tactics. In other words, history will serve as a guide for an analysis based on international relations precepts and strategic theory and aimed at arriving at specific conclusions concerning great powers' actions and small states' security dilemmas. In addition, post-Cold War comprehensive research regarding the Caucasus and Central Asia makes the paper a data-rich case study, since the ready availability of primary and secondary sources is crucial for analyzing cause-and-effect relationships.

To this end, the author is first attempting to answer the question of how contemporary grand strategies invite new versions of the narrative of the past. The other question, closely related to the first, is how history influences current strategies in light of Russian and Turkish past strategic objectives, i.e. of Russia's efforts to reach warm seas vs. its containment by Turkey.

<sup>1</sup> See: St. Van Evera, *Guide to Methods for Students of Political Science*, Cornell University Press, New York, 1997, p. 64.

At this point it would be appropriate to ask questions about how and to what extent new renditions of a historical narrative are able to legitimize current strategic decisions; how important is a historical narrative in addressing internal problems of a state; how a start of the review of a historical narrative is determined by the available systemic opportunities; in which circumstances does the adoption of revised versions of a historical narrative develops into the formation of a substantive political objective and its integration into a corresponding strategy.

The paper does not provide comprehensive answers to these questions. The analysis is macro-historical and focuses on the overall tendencies of strategic behavior. This is due to the underlying impossibility of precisely predicting human behavior and, respectively, the limited usefulness of the analysis of specific events—in contrast to the analysis of general trends in the development of a political situation. Within the framework of the positivist understanding of science, it is considered that human behavior does not yield to quantitative measurement and, although the generalized description of behavior helps to understand and to conceptually comprehend relations inside polity and among polities, the behavioral constituent cannot be mechanically summarized with the remaining components of power and elements of strategic behavior by expressing it mathematically according to the standards of methodology and epistemology.

At this point, some remarks should be made concerning the historical significance of the Caucasus placed at the epicenter of irreconcilable tensions and conflicts of Central Eurasia. Zbigniew Brzezinski called this supercontinent “the grand chessboard,”<sup>2</sup> while Sir Halford Mackinder summarized its importance as follows: “Who controls Eastern Europe commands the Heartland; who controls the Heartland commands the World-Island (Eurasia and Africa.—*Ed.*); who controls the World-Island commands the world.”<sup>3</sup> Statements of this kind emphasize the geopolitical importance of the Caucasus and demonstrate the link between the geopolitical position of the Caucasus and the apparent role of the countries of this region. Hence the objective significance of the Caucasus across time and space.<sup>4</sup>

The region is highly important geopolitically and geo-economically mainly due to the enormous amounts of oil and gas reserves in the Caspian Sea and the real or potential importance of Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia as transition countries.

Another observation concerns the dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (U.S.S.R.) and the end of the bipolar system, which is an extremely vivid example of the major redistribution of power and large systemic changes. On the one hand, this factor is closely related to the rise of hegemonic aspirations of several entities of international policy, seeking to increase their power and expand the sphere of influence. On the other, due to this factor, the strategic behavior of Turkey deserves an analysis: from 1991 on, its strategy obviously becomes aligned with the previously mentioned new systemic opportunities. In addition, distinct fragments of the analytical chain of cause-and-effect relationships demonstrate a wide dispersion of values within the given situation: the behavior of the entities in the study period varies very widely. So, a few months before the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey had avoided entering into any diplomatic relations whatsoever with the republics of the Soviet Union. Turgut Özal, when asked in 1990 about the instability in Soviet Azerbaijan, argued that this was an internal problem of the U.S.S.R. and that Turkey “was concerned solely with its own internal problems.”<sup>5</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Zb. Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives*, Basic Books, New York, 1998.

<sup>3</sup> H. Mackinder, *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*, Henry Holt and Company, New York, 1919, p. 104.

<sup>4</sup> For a detailed reasoning of the current case study choice, see: St. Van Evera, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-88.

<sup>5</sup> M. Aydın, “Foucault’s Pendulum: Turkey in Central Asia and the Caucasus,” *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2004, pp. 3.

However, in the aftermath of the coup against Mikhail Gorbachev, Turkey was the first country to recognize the new states establishing, at the same time, international institutions, asserting itself in the role of a mediator between the republics of the former U.S.S.R. and the rest of the world. And last but not least, the context and background of this case study largely coincide with acute political problems of our time. Due to the existence of the same structural framework, the permanence of the balance of power in the region and similar vital interests of the entities, particularly their interest in the production and transport of hydrocarbons, the political and strategic interests of the parties remain constant. In addition, both Russia and Turkey are faced with internal problems and conflicts, and the country's strength and power rhetoric can help to break out of their domestic political deadlocks.

## The Strategic Transition

The situation described above explains the importance of analyzing the state of affairs in the Caucasus, its states' transition from the Soviet regime to Westernization and the changing interests of the neighboring Russia and Turkey. In the post-Cold War era, the Southern Caucasus has been transformed into a buffer zone of major significance. The end of the Soviet-era republics has been followed by instability and claims by neighboring powers, such as Russia and Turkey.

What is important in the case of the Southern Caucasus is that, in the post-Cold War era, there was a transition from Moscow's dominance to a new reality of self-determination and state independence. Thus, the Caucasian landmass ceased to be regarded in terms of "republics" ruled by Moscow. The establishment of the independent states of Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan replaced this situation.

At least in the very beginning, these states were extremely weak and eager to be integrated into the international community nearly ready for any quid pro quo arrangement. This was exactly the basis and the starting point for Turkey to get more vigorously involved and for Russia to get essentially re-involved in order to keep its Soviet-era strategic position. On the one hand, Turkey saw it as a strategic opportunity or an "opportunity window" for expanding its influence in a region considered to be affiliated with it historically and in some cases, either religiously or ethnically. In addition, in a broader sense, the Caucasus could represent the bridge toward Central Asia, where another systemic transition was taking place in the meantime. On the other hand, Russia enjoyed a long tradition of its presence in the Greater Caspian region.

The questions of Moscow's strategic leverage in the Black Sea; the Caspian energy resources; the geographic proximity to the Mediterranean Sea and the presence of influential actors such as Iran; a specific position of the Caucasian states, situated at the crossroads between Islam and Christianity have further demonstrated the significance of the Caucasus not only for the leadership of Russia and Turkey, but also for the stability in the wider region. The role of the Southern Caucasus, its recognition as the region of major geo-economic importance and its status as the geographical axis, coupled with the desire to exercise sufficient strategic control, have also been reflected in the U.S. global and regional priorities.

Due to these two countries' grand strategies, the Southern Caucasus falls under Martin Wight's definition of a buffer zone or a power vacuum in the sense that it is "occupied by one or more weaker powers between two or more stronger powers."<sup>6</sup> In this sense, in the post-Cold War Southern

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<sup>6</sup> M. Wight, *Power Politics*, Leicester University Press and the Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1978, p. 160.

Caucasus, a specific balance of power was established among international and regional actors and surely, between Russia and Turkey, which were directly involved in the region. Accordingly, the definition of Wight was expanded in such a way as to reflect the potential role of these weaker countries naming them “trimmers,” “neutrals” or “satellites” with a strong likelihood of becoming protectorates. Therefore, these states are doomed to adopt and follow passive foreign policy wholly dependent on the results of the stronger powers’ competition. Pragmatically, this balance of power meant that a potential predominance of either of them was nearly unthinkable without paying an exorbitant price. However, this does not mean that the interested powers would give up this “opportunity window.”

Wight amplifies his definition, emphasizing that in the case of a buffer zone where a power vacuum has been established, “Each strong power will generally have a vital interest in preventing the other from controlling the buffer zone, and will pursue this interest in one of two ways, according to its strength. It will seek either to maintain the buffer zone as neutral and independent, or to establish its own control, which may lead in the long run to its annexing the buffer zone and converting it into a frontier province. Buffer states may therefore be roughly divided into ‘trimmers,’ ‘neutrals’ and ‘satellites.’ Trimmers are states whose policy is prudently to play off their mighty neighbors against one another; the most famous of European trimmers was the Duchy of Savoy, which earned thereby first a kingdom and then the hegemony of United Italy... Neutrals are the states without an active foreign policy at all; their hope is to lie low and escape notice. Satellites are states whose foreign policy is controlled by another power. If the weaker state has formally conceded this control by a treaty, so that in law as well as in fact it has surrendered a measure of its sovereignty, it is known as a protectorate.”<sup>7</sup>

Defining the region as a buffer zone leads to the question of Russia’s and Turkey’s interests, claims, aims, and objectives. On the one hand, already since 1994, Moscow has declared the ex-Soviet republics’ status as its “near abroad” (*blizhneye zarubezhye*) protected by its “nuclear umbrella.” Russia considers the balance of power in the post-Soviet area as vital for its survival and its status as one of the centers of the international system. Without a solid option for the projection of power and influence in the Southern Caucasus, Central Asia, Belarus, and Ukraine—keeping in mind that the Baltic States (i.e. Lithuania, Latvia and Estonia) had already distanced themselves from their Soviet past—the Russian Federation would succumb to the status of a middle power.

In the aftermath of the U.S.S.R.’s demise, two schools of thought came into being in Russia with regard to its future orientation.<sup>8</sup>

- The first favored the country’s pro-Atlantic orientation and the adoption of the Western model of governance. This was favored by Europeanized elites dedicated to the Western rule of law and the overall tenets of a market economy. Often perceiving Russia as a European (Western) country, such elites supported Moscow’s integration into relevant institutions and international organizations.
- The second school identified Russia’s future with maintaining its predominance in the ex-Soviet geographical zone and it was summarized as “Eurasianism.”

Essentially, Eurasianism refers to the four inter-linked strategic aims:

- “1) to underscore Russia’s “physical” identity as the country that has the borders and interests in both Europe and Asia;
- (2) to justify the necessity of conducting a balanced foreign policy that does not privilege the relationship with the West at the expense of the Eastern dimension;

<sup>7</sup> M. Wight, op. cit.

<sup>8</sup> See: N. Nassibli, “Azerbaijan: Policy Priorities towards the Caspian Sea,” in: *The Caspian: Politics, Energy and Security*, ed. by Sh. Akiner, Routledge Curzon, London, 2004, p. 141.

- (3) to interpret the multicultural and multiethnic nature of Russia's "Eurasian" identity to justify the country's membership in various international organizations (such as the Organization of Islamic Conference);
- (4) and, most important, to rationalize Russia's right to be a Great Power (*velikaya derzhava*) with the corresponding geopolitical role in global and regional affairs."<sup>9</sup>

Inside the Russian bureaucracy, this intra-elite conflict culminated in a kind of convergence of positions: conflicting elites agreed on a common understanding of the national interest of Russia and the objectives of its policy. Despite the differences among the elite, the bureaucracy is still functioning relatively conflict-free, as all parties agree to recognize the priority of preserving the status of Russia as the great power. Therefore, although the members of the two schools of thought simultaneously participated in Yeltsin's government, the Russian grand strategy was implemented consistently and continuously. It is quite remarkable that none other than Andrei Kozyrev, Russia's pro-Atlantic foreign minister of the beginning of the 1990s, during the Stockholm meeting of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) spoke in favor of establishing the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and he was the first to use the term "near abroad."<sup>10</sup> Thus, Russia's prerogatives in the Caucasus were not questioned, and the Russian leadership continued regarding the region as its own backyard.

In Turkey, there also existed two approaches to assessing the role of the country in the post-Soviet space.<sup>11</sup> Some analysts saw the strategic imperative for Turkey in establishing close ties with the post-Soviet states as an alternative to its former pro-Western orientation.<sup>12</sup> They saw this politically nascent region as a "shelter" for Turkey in case of Western pressure against it, as well as a reliable and valuable alternative provided Turkish national interests were no longer served by its identification with the West. In that case, even with the change in orientation, the country's role and significance would increase due to its entrance into the Caucasian sub-system. However, other analysts saw the post-Cold War redistribution of power as an opportunity for an additional and not mutually exclusive strategic choice for Turkey. In this regard, Turkey could become a linchpin between the East and the West and it is exactly this role that could increase its strategic leverage in the eyes of its Western allies and especially the U.S. and simultaneously provide a boost for its efforts to access the European Union. Paul Henze eloquently referred to the opportunities opening before Turkey on the "big" post-Soviet space not as "contradictory or competitive," but as "complementary."<sup>13</sup> Consequently, Turkey's capability, as well as its identity, history and the character of religious orientation would readily allow a "two-pronged" strategic orientation.

## Post-Transitional Initiatives and Historical Legacies

As already noted, in 1994 Moscow finally responded to ambitious actions by Turkey in the Caucasus with resistance from a position of hard power, proclaiming the doctrine of "near abroad"

<sup>9</sup> I. Torbakov, "Making Sense of the Current Phase of Turkish-Russian Relations," *The Jamestown Foundation*, Occasional Paper, October, 2007, p. 12.

<sup>10</sup> See: N. Nassibli, *op. cit.*

<sup>11</sup> See: W. Hale, *Turkish Foreign Policy: 1774-2000*, Frank Cass, London, 2003, pp. 193-194.

<sup>12</sup> See: G. Fuller, I. Lesser, *Turkey's New Geopolitics: From the Balkans to Western China*, Westview Press, Oxford, 1993, pp. 73-74.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted from: W. Hale, *op. cit.*, p. 194.

and declaring the existence of a “nuclear umbrella.” However, Turkey did not leave the region, using the means of soft power. These means had their basis identified with common affiliations to both the Turkic and Islamic world. The cultivation of these perceptions was employed directly by Ankara or by nongovernmental organizations, such as the network of Fethullah Gülen. Fethullah Gülen’s efforts focused on educational programs and institutions. During the renaissance of the Turkish-Azeri relations in the 1990s, for instance, added to the one school and two universities of the Turkish World Research Institute in Azerbaijan, eleven schools and one university were built by the Community of Fethullah Gülen.<sup>14</sup> These conceptual ideological constructs were designed to reinforce Islamic-Turkish influence in the countries, which were eager to look for a post-Soviet self-identification far from Moscow’s patronage. In addition, a major Turkish interest was to keep Russia as far as possible from the Caucasus. This was not reasoned only by the post-Cold War “opportunity window” but, also, by Turkey’s concern about its own survival.

During the past Cold War decades, the Caucasus was Russia’s frontier province, allowing it to question the status of the Turkish provinces of Kars and Ardahan, and that of the Bosphorus itself. In the post-Cold War environment, the Turkish territorial integrity was never questioned. However, the change in the balance of power in the greater region, as a consequence of the U.S.S.R.’s demise, changed the Turkish interests and priorities and, consequently, the country’s initiatives. Russia’s successful deterrence strategy of 1994 was insufficient to keep Turkey out of the region, which it considered “Turkic” and included it into its own net of the Pan-Turkic discourse. Having established the “Turkic Summits,” Turkey tried to integrate the region under its aegis as a regional hegemon. The Turkic Summits did not become an official international organization until October 2009, when Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Azerbaijan established the “Turkic Council” (Türk Keneşi) or Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States (Türk Dili Konuşan Ülkeler İşbirliği Konseyi).

Turgut Özal was the first to conceive of such a cooperative scheme, hosting the first one in Ankara in 1992, while his successor, Süleyman Demirel, continued the same policy, participating in relevant meetings in 1994, 1995 and 1996. The next Turkish President, Ahmet Necdet Sezer, also participated in the Summit of 2001.<sup>15</sup> However, the importance of these summits steadily declined. Recep Tayyip Erdoğan stated revealingly the following: “The residents of this particular region do not have the luxury of just sitting back and being spectators of the world stage... Either we will be the subject of world politics, or the object... A Turkish Commonwealth would enable us to play a more active and efficient role in international forums, protect the interests of our people and contribute to peace and stability in our region.”<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, in 1992, Turkey established the Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (Türk İşbirliği ve Koordinasyon Ajansı—TİKA). Affiliated with the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, TİKA focused on issues of educational, intercultural and technical cooperation, mediating between private funds and state bureaucracy. Essentially, TİKA was the means toward the creation of links between the national identities of the newly established states and “mother Turkey’s” identity. In line with this, there were several initiatives, such as the abolition of the Cyrillic alphabet and the adoption of the Latin one in June 1992.<sup>17</sup> One year earlier, in 1991, Turkey and the U.S.S.R. signed

<sup>14</sup> See: B. Aras, “Turkey’s Policy in the Former Soviet South: Assets and Options,” *Turkish Studies*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000, p. 50.

<sup>15</sup> See: M.B. Olcott, *Central Asia’s Second Chance*, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, Washington, 2005, p. 73.

<sup>16</sup> M. Katik, “Turkic Summit to Explore Commonwealth Possibility,” *Eurasianet*, 16 March, 2016, available at [<http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav111506.shtml>].

<sup>17</sup> See: K. Kirişçi, “New Patterns of Turkish Foreign Policy Behavior,” in: *Turkey: Political, Social and Economic Challenges in the 1990s*, ed. by Ç. Bahm *et al.*, Brill, New York, 1995, p. 16.

the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation, which “became the model for similar arrangements with the Central Asian republics of the former Soviet Union.”<sup>18</sup> These treaties supported a practice in line with the determination of maximizing Turkey’s economic leverage within the post-Soviet territory. The Turkish presence in the region was evidenced by investments in construction and banking sectors, and augmented by its expansion into the spheres of culture and education. With regard to Azerbaijan, for instance, “in addition to the influx of Turkish press and books,” television and radio programs began to rebroadcast after the country’s independence “on a scale that began to affect colloquial Azeri.”<sup>19</sup> Turkish universities persistently continued to award scholarships to students from the former U.S.S.R. and donate equipment to the relatively newly established republics.

The same view of the cultivation of cultural affiliations guided the creation in 1994 of the International Organization of Turkic Culture (TURKSOY), aimed at strengthening relations with former Soviet republics at various levels. The Organization institutionalized regular meetings of the ministers of culture of these countries aimed at further integration in the field of education and culture.<sup>20</sup> This integration was to facilitate the liberation of the Caucasian states from Moscow’s control and the influence of the Russian national identity, reinforced by the presence in the territory of these countries of a significant ratio of the Russian population.

In 1990, one year before the Caucasian states’ declaration of independence, six percent of Azerbaijan’s population was of Russian origin.<sup>21</sup> In contrast with the Central Asian states, this percentage should not have caused serious concerns and was manageable, but still important. In Kazakhstan, the Russian minority represented thirty-eight percent of the total population, in Kyrgyzstan twenty-two percent, in Turkmenistan ten percent and in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan eight percent each.<sup>22</sup>

For its part, Russia declared its long historical ties to the peoples of Transcaucasia and beyond. The Caucasus is considered its strategic backyard but, also, a region where Russian people and culture occupy a privileged position. For instance, in Georgia, Moscow funded an extensive program of mass media influence, creating Sputnik—a news agency affiliated with the media group Russia Today (RT)—in November 2014, which is indicative in and of itself.<sup>23</sup> Russian soft power policies included the promotion of Russia and its labor market as the “land of opportunity” for the poor unemployed citizens of the Caucasian states. Russo-Turkish policies in the Caucasus—and the soft policies are surely included—are conceptualized in terms of the centuries-long friction between the two peripheral powers. In these terms, any rhetoric relating to pan-theories is constrained by the scope of national interest. In Fouad Ajami’s words: “Civilizations do not control states, states control civilizations. States avert their gaze from blood ties when they need to; they see brotherhood and faith and kin when it is in their interest to do so. We remain in a world of self-help. The solitude of states continues... The phenomenon we have dubbed Islamic Fundamentalism is less a sign of resurgence than of panic, bewilderment, and guilt that the border with ‘the other’ has been crossed.”<sup>24</sup>

<sup>18</sup> T. Swietochowski, “Azerbaijan’s Triangular Relationship: The Land between Russia, Turkey and Iran,” in: *The New Geopolitics of Central Asia and its Borderlands*, ed. by A. Banuazizi, M. Weiner, Indiana University Press, Bloomington and Indianapolis, 1994, p. 127.

<sup>19</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>20</sup> See: G. Turan, İ. Turan, İ. Bal, “Turkey’s Relations with the Turkic Republics,” in: *Turkish Foreign Policy in Post-Cold War Era*, ed. by İ. Bal, Brown Walker Press, Boca Raton, 2004, p. 306.

<sup>21</sup> See: H. Malik, “New Relationships between Central and Southwest Asia and Pakistan’s Regional Politics,” in: *Central Asia: Its Strategic Importance and Future Prospects*, ed. by H. Malik, Macmillan Press, London, 1994, p. 268.

<sup>22</sup> See: Ibidem.

<sup>23</sup> See: S. Kapanadze, “Russia’s Soft Power in Georgia—A Carnivorous Plant in Action,” *The Different Faces of “Soft Power”*: *The Baltic States and Eastern Neighborhood between Russia and the EU*, ed. by T. Rostoks, A. Spruds, Latvian Institute of International Affairs, Riga, 2015, p. 175.

<sup>24</sup> Quoted from: A. Balci, “The Alliance of Civilizations: The Poverty of the Clash/Alliance Dichotomy?” *Insight Turkey*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2009, p. 98.



Joseph Nye, referring to soft power, says: “An important way to gain international support is to have cultural and political values and foreign policies that other countries see as legitimate and having moral authority.”<sup>25</sup> Thus, in the modern world, soft power strategies represent the amalgam of aims and objectives identified with power politics and long-term pursuits. In the case of Russia, it is about its historical desire to reach the “warm waters” of the Mediterranean. That could connect Russia with international trade routes and, specifically, the transfer of oil, raw materials and any other goods from the East to the West. Accordingly, Turkey’s geopolitical positioning has been identified with Russia’s historical inclination and the Western powers’ need to deter it and balance Moscow’s influence in South Balkans, Eastern Mediterranean, Minor Asia, the Middle East and beyond. Thus, the Ottoman Empire and then Turkey always formed patron-client relationships with Western powers—and mainly the United Kingdom and the United States—in the sense that these were basically informal relationships between unequal partners and from such relationships, mutual gains were derived.<sup>26</sup>

Therefore, post-transitional initiatives of Russia and Turkey are best explained if we consider them in the long-term strategic perspective (and retrospect) and take into account the desire for justification of claims based on the old narratives. On the one hand, “Pan-Slavism, developed in Russia by Nicholas Danilevsky and Rostislav Fadeyev, involved the application of Slavophil philosophy to foreign affairs calling for the expansion of a kingdom to unite Orthodox Christian Slavs under a single empire.”<sup>27</sup> Let us note, however, that this viewpoint does not apply to the Caucasus.

Obviously, such a viewpoint could not survive during the communist regime in Soviet Russia and the U.S.S.R. Such a concept as “world revolution” was ignored by Joseph Stalin, but not because of his accepting the older czarist Pan-Slavic concepts. Stalin and his successors followed an interventionist grand strategy but without legitimizing it by Marxist “class conflict.”

With the beginning of the transition from the elimination of collectivism to return, throughout the former Soviet Union, to the legacy of the New Times in the form of emerging Nations-States, established after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Moscow’s protection of its traditional interests took the form of a return to the discourse based on the idea of concern for the protection of its national interests in its own—as it seemed then—periphery. The Caucasian region was no exception; it has historically been considered by Russia as a frontier outpost within a province and a path to “warm seas” and, consequently, as the springboard in its efforts to expand Russia’s role in the world.

On the other hand, Pan-Turkism had similar aspirations in its historical mission to counter-balance the Russian influence. Pan-Turkism, being an irredentist ideology, calls for the unification of populations as one indivisible entity, “with evident signs of both cultural ties (language, history, and customs) and material bonds (blood, race). The term ‘Turk’ referred to all those of Turkic origin, i.e. the Tatars, Azeris, Kirghiz, Yakuts and others.”<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, either concretely or hypothetically, Pan-Turkism includes all the people living in or out of the former Ottoman borders and consequently, in or out of the borders of the modern Turkish state. In the same framework, it is worth mentioning that another pan-theory, i.e. Pan-Turanism, has aimed to the unification of populations in the broader Central Eurasia on the basis of mythological roots and thus undefined borders. For this reason, it is not a coincidence that Pan-

<sup>25</sup> Quoted from: W. Yanushi, D. L. McConnell, “Introduction,” in: *Soft Power Superpowers: Cultural and National Assets of Japan and the United States*, ed. by W. Yanushi, D. L. McConnell, M.E. Sharpe, New York, 2008, p. xvii.

<sup>26</sup> For a definition of patron-client relations, see: M. Handel, *Weak States in the International System*, Frank Cass, London, 1990, pp. 132-133.

<sup>27</sup> Sh. Cross, “Russia and NATO toward the 21st Century: Conflicts and Peacekeeping in Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo,” *NATO Academic Affairs 1999-2001*, NATO-EAPC Research Fellowship Award Final Report, August, 2001, pp. 10-11.

<sup>28</sup> J.M. Landau, *Pan-Turkism: From Irredentism to Cooperation*, Hurst & Company, London, 1981, p. 43.

Turanism has been identified with peoples and states beyond the Caucasus, such as Finland, Hungary, and Estonia.<sup>29</sup>

Soft power policies have offered, in Nye's words, a cultural and political framework for legitimizing and giving "moral authority" to Russia's and Turkey's grand strategies. This is crucial because the two countries need to justify their strategic decisions in the eyes of the public, their allies and the peoples of the Caucasian states. Thus, they would use soft power in their efforts to impose their strategies on their voters and bureaucracies, attract—economic or diplomatic—aid from their allies and limit the cost of their efforts to maximize power. This last point is the core of the soft power logic. As far as coercion and imposition characterize the use of power in international politics, soft power comes to moderate the consequences of using power "to apply one's capabilities in an attempt to change someone else's behavior in certain ways."<sup>30</sup>

The use of power presupposes cost, and soft power balances the excessive military expenditures and possible material and human losses. Most importantly, soft power cultivates the conditions for achieving specific strategic aims without destabilizing own alliances and provoking counter-balancing reflections.

### *Conclusion*

The article describes and analyzes the conditions in which the Southern Caucasus experienced a transitional period in the era following the end of the Cold War. The main research question is how the modern "Grand Strategies" of Russia and Turkey are linked to the past in light of a historic debate, references, and associations. Further, the general context of the clash of the strategic objectives is looked at, which Russia and Turkey have found themselves confronting: such as Russia's efforts to reach the warm sea and Turkey's containment role. Conceptually, the analysis of such objectives is dated back to Sir Halford Mackinder's assumptions on Heartland<sup>31</sup> and Nicholas Spykman's respective analyses of the Rimland,<sup>32</sup> as well as their influence on Great Powers' grand strategies and especially, the United Kingdom's naval strategy. A broader analysis of this chain of thought from Mackinder to Spykman and the empirical evidence results in a conclusion that the Western Powers aim at preventing any monopolization of power in Central Eurasia. However, if this is not feasible as it happened in the case of the U.S.S.R., then the peripheral powers, circumventing the Heartland, have to contain and deter that power to access the trade routes between the East and the West in the name of their Western allies-partners-patrons. This was exactly the correlation of interests before, during and after the Cold War and this has explained Turkey's geopolitical role in all these periods even from the Ottoman era.

Historically, the Caucasus has been the geographical axis of Russo-Turkish conflict. In this framework, the Cold War era stability, secured by the U.S.S.R.'s predominance, was followed by geopolitical fluidity seen, for instance, in Nagorno-Karabakh. The direct reach of Moscow ceased and this has been an ideal "opportunity window" for the neighboring country of Turkey, inclined to use its own strong historical, linguistic, religious and ethnic affiliations with the peoples and states of the region. Through specific policies and the bipolar strategic partnerships between Russia and Armenia, as well as Turkey and Azerbaijan, both Moscow and Ankara have rendered the Southern Caucasus into a core area of power politics. This transition from the Soviet republics, meaning the inclusion of the Southern Caucasus in the Soviet sovereignty, to the status of a buffer zone of major importance,

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<sup>29</sup> See: *Ibid.*, p. 1.

<sup>30</sup> K. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, Addison-Wesley, Reading MA, 1979, p. 191.

<sup>31</sup> See: H. Mackinder, *op. cit.*

<sup>32</sup> See: N.J. Spykman, *The Geography of Peace*, Brace & Company, Harcourt, 1944.

has defined the distribution of power between the two geostrategic players, as well as their aims, objectives, and interests. Finally, it is absolutely in line with historical narratives related to Russian and Turkish strategies, since these were built on the basis of balancing each other's influence mainly in the Caucasus and beyond.

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