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CLASH OF RUSSIAN-AMERICAN NATIONAL INTERESTS IN THE SOUTH CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA

Abstract

The central question asked in the paper is that; what are the motivations behind the United States and Russia's clash with each other in the South Caucasus and Central Asian regions? Why as external great power the U.S. intervene into regions where Russia sees its sphere of influence. I try to give an answer to the question what are the major determinants of the great power behavior in the SC and CA regions. It is argued that weakened Russia has used mostly indirect measures in the post-Cold war period to balance the American unilateralist hegemony, first in its neighborhood and then in the international affairs. I explain the causal determinants of the great powers clash-in this case Russia and the U.S. – in the post-Soviet space.

Keywords: Russia, United States, South Caucasus, Foreign Policy, neo-imperialism.

Introduction

One of the turning points in international politics of the last century obviously was the end of the Cold War. The unexpected collapse of the Soviet Union and communist regimes in the eastern part of Europe and the disintegration of the Warsaw Pact had led to the birth of new international system. The starting point of the new system, which is frequently called *the new world order*, was the thaw in the post-Cold War relations between the two superpowers. Hopes for international cooperation, new era peace and respect for human rights were on the rise. The U.S. President George Bush described the new world order, in his speech to the General Assembly of the United Nations in 1991, as

an order in which no nation must surrender one iota of its own sovereignty; an order characterized by the rule of law rather than the resort to force; the cooperative settlement of disputes, rather than anarchy and bloodshed, and an unstinting belief in human rights.¹

But soon post-Cold War period events, during the last decade of the twentieth century and in the beginning of the twenty-first century, dampened the optimistic expectations. An epoch of universal concord, which was idealistically prophesied by the political analysts,² no longer portrays existent realities or the immediate future. By the collapse of the Soviet Union, a bipolar international system was abruptly transformed to a system dominated by the only superpower USA or it was called as *unipolar system*³ by the neo-realists of international relations. In the early 1990s, the West was free to prosecute its traditional values such as democracy, human rights, justice and freedom unhampered by East-West rivalry. But realists of International Relations (IR) theory have warned that “in granting idealism a near exclusive hold on the foreign policy, the West might harm its interests”.⁴

Struggle between two superpowers for control over the world was replaced by the de-facto global hegemony of the USA. The first Gulf War was ended with the victory of the United States. No one was in a situation to interrogate American intervention to the war against Iraq. All over it was Pax Americana, despite the President George Bush had refused in his UN GA speech that U.S has no intention of striving for a Pax Americana.⁵ It is true that there are scholars like Mearsheimer who argues that the USA is only a regional hegemon, and in order to become a global hegemon, the White House should be the only power in Asia and Europe, and in that case the U.S. does not possess that power.

The notion of strategic rivalry between the USA and the SU, popular during the cold war, has made a comeback in recent years in a new form, namely between Soviet Union’s successor state Russia and the U.S., especially since the Russia’s resurgence under Vladimir Putin. In comparison to the last decade of the twentieth century, the Kremlin came again on the world scene as a power, since the 2000s. For Russian President Vladimir Putin the collapse of the Soviet Empire was “the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century”.⁶ The former Soviet republics became a battleground for regional supremacy between the White House and the Kremlin. The Kremlin remains still mistrustful to the U.S. motives and sees White House as the main foreign threat to its

great power status. For Kremlin it was extremely hard to give-in the fact that Russia cannot be anymore the only major power in the post-Soviet area. The post-Soviet sphere is seen from Moscow as its own backyard. Russia strives to reestablish itself as a regional and global superpower and to re-enunciate its interests in the international arena.

By the day, relations between Russia and the USA have been worsening. Political elites in the White House and in the Kremlin look at each other through the old Cold War prism. Continuing tensions in security relations between the two former enemies constitute a disaster in the international politics. It is incontestable fact that the White House's attitude toward the Kremlin is not different than the U.S. behavior was toward the Soviet Union during the Cold War years. Moreover, White House criticizes Russia because of the Kremlin's anti-American rhetoric. For Washington, Putin's efforts to promote greater economic integration mainly in the post-Soviet area are deemed as "a move to re-Sovietize the region".⁷ Russia was called the "number one geopolitical foe"⁸ for the United States.

Further expansion of NATO to the east, American strategic plans toward Syria and Iran, and the alliance itself are considered as a threat to the Kremlin's ambitions. For the Kremlin these attempts have a clear explanation: The United States tries to regain a clear strategic advantage over Russia, as it was in the last decade of the 20th century. With the last presidential elections in Russia in March 2012, which ended with the victory of Vladimir Putin to a new term, the new geopolitical game started between the global powers. Russian inconclusive behavior, during the American interventions in Afghanistan and Iraq in the beginning of the 21st century, was changed dramatically since the second term presidency of Vladimir Putin. Russia's re-involvement in Middle East politics and clear strategic gains in its post-Soviet neighborhood evinced that the Kremlin is not going anymore to follow pacifist or non-effective policy, which could paralyze its superior status in its relations with the United States. Polar opposite positions of the U.S. and Russia on the major international problems, which examples are abound, prognosticate that since the end of the first decade of the 21st century the world entered to the new Cold War confrontation. Continuation of the confrontation appears in the placement of the missile defense in Europe and in divided positions regarding Iran's nuclear program, NATO's expansion toward the Russian borders, confrontation in the Middle East or currently in Syria, and Ukraine crisis are only few examples of the clash of Russian and American global interests.

The central question asked in the paper is that; *what* are the motivations behind the United States and Russia's clash with each other in the South Caucasus and Central Asian regions? In the case of the U.S. it should be clarified, why as external great power the U.S. intervene into regions where Russia sees its sphere of influence. I try to give an answer to the question what are the major determinants of the great power behavior in the SC and CA regions. It is argued that weakened Russia has used mostly indirect measures in the post-Cold war period to balance the American unilateralist hegemony, first in its neighborhood and then in the international affairs. I explain the causal determinants of the great powers clash-in this case Russia and the U.S. – in the post-Soviet space. The period after 2000 is the characteristic of this research. Because since the beginning of the 21st century Russia under Vladimir Putin clearly has described its ambitions of regaining its super power status as it was during the Cold war period.

This paper's stated hypothesis is that both the United States and Russia pursue neo-imperialist political strategy in their foreign policies towards the Central Asian and South Caucasus regions. The paper explores the main strategies of the U.S. and Russia by explaining their interference to the post-Soviet geographies. By analyzing the Kremlin's and the White House's strategic goals and their tactical measures, it would be possible to set several propositions about the instruments and character of neo-imperialist politics. As Mann argues, states exercise different power logics in the international system. These power logics are military, economic, political and ideological.⁹ Both powers use different sources of social power and in this study the sources will be analyzed from the military, political and economic prism.

Russia and the United States provide the best opportunity to examine great power politics and specifically the concept of neo-imperialism in great power foreign policy strategies. Both of these states are considered as great powers in traditional meaning, because of their military power, territory, and influence possibilities in the international affairs. Thereto, in global politics great powers behavior, and explaining their clash over regions are still important for contemporary International Relations (IR). By analyzing American and Russian political, economic and military power in the post-Soviet regions, the research thesis will evaluate how great powers relations with the region states vary.

Theoretical Overview

The collapse of the Soviet Union and transformation of the bipolar world system into one polarity reopened a new discussion among the International Relations scholars on the character of the new world order. There were scholars who argued that with the ending the ideological and military confrontation between the two systems, the post-Cold war era would become more stable. At the same time some scholars like John Mearsheimer defended the thesis that compared to the previous bipolarity, new world order will become more imbalanced.¹⁰ Mearsheimer argued that the main reason of the international stability during the cold war period could be explained only with the bipolar distribution of the military power and military equality between the West and East blocs. So, by the disappearance of the one poles and emergence of the others the international system will become less stable and ultimately more inclined to instability.¹¹ Questions like, which countries will become major players, how will the White House and the Kremlin act as a result of the global polarity changes also made the international relations scholar think on the new political environment. Not only stability issue but also the character of the new international system was one of the main discussion points between scholars and politicians.

Henry Kissinger described the new world order as “the European system of the 18th and 19th centuries than the rigid patterns of the Cold War”, by arguing that it will be multipolar.¹² For Samuel Huntington, a uni-multipolar system should be evolved into multipolar world as a result of regionals’ power challenges to American hegemony.¹³ Glenn Snyder argued that with the fall of the Soviet Union, the character of the international system appears to be unipolar, though incipiently multipolar.¹⁴ Kenneth Waltz predicted that great powers, which are not ally with the White House, would form coalitions to balance their power against the United States with the aim to design the new multipolar world order.¹⁵ Despite of its collapse, Russia still was the second nuclear power after the United States. As Kissinger in his *Diplomacy* noted, the Kremlin will always be essential to the new world order.¹⁶

Analysis of the foreign policy of any country is a complex phenomenon in the international politics. As Cox argues, there are a lot of complexities and ambiguities in the foreign policy process that many influences are likely to be found in any explanation of any particular shift.¹⁷ To answer the question how Russia as a great power reacted to the American

hegemony following the fall years of the Soviet Union and explaining it from the theoretical point of view would help to analyze the motives of the research question. The IR scholars for analysis states' security behavior use the concept of ontological security.¹⁸ The concept means the formation of relationships between states in sustainable and consistent ways that provide a sense of continuity. Which aims to realize state's identity and a sense of agency in relation to surroundings.¹⁹ Steele argues that, states are not dependent on material ends, but also on ideational incentives.²⁰

Despite some scholars, like Vasquez and Moravcsik until recently criticize realist school in a meeting with failure to predict relations between great powers,²¹ realist theory still remains one of the main international relations theories, which explains more clearly the foreign policy behavior of the two super global powers in this research thesis. In each stream of the realist theory there are some general assumptions, which could be applied to the Russian and American foreign policy analyses. Most of the realist theory scholars predict that great powers, with the aim to seek balance against the hegemony of the other super power, follow retaliation policies, especially if a hegemonic power poaches on great powers territory or its sphere of influence.²² For a long period the classical realism, neoclassical and neo-realistic theoretical approaches were applied into foreign policy analyses. The analysis of the foreign policy activities in the neorealist school will be discussed from two perspectives: Kenneth Waltz's structural realist theory and Robert Gilpin's hegemonic war theory, as well as hegemonic rivalry theory.

The concept of the state's central role in the international politics, the goal of its power and importance of its national interests as well as the nature of the foreign policy are the main characteristic points of the classical realism.²³ To understand state's motivation in its foreign policy, the comprehensive way is to analyze state's national interests in relation with others. The nature of the international relations is still explained with richness of conflicts, in which great powers shape the world politics by focusing on the zero-sum games and the clash over the sphere of influences. Another fundamental thesis of the classical realism is about the anarchic nature of the international order, which negates any existence of a world central power that could enforce other sovereign states for accepting its rules. Importance of the national interests is a fundamental criterion for effectiveness of the foreign policy of the any state. The priority of national interests for the U.S. and Russia are reflected in their state's documents such as the Foreign Policy, Military and National Security doctrines. Rationally

thinking, neither the White House nor the Kremlin could be interested in any cooperation in the world affairs, which are against their national interests. Concerning to the anarchic nature of the international world order, the lack of mutual confidence among the international players, where it is described mainly as an external threat to its own national interests or political intervention in its national interests, forces the states to confide only in their own power and security guaranty. In this regard, NATO's enlargement policy towards the post-Soviet countries or the United States' policy of deployment missile shields in the territories of the East European states are the best examples for the explanation above mentioned thesis from the Russian foreign policy prism.

In classical realism theory, power politics is explained as a law of human nature, as Thucydides argues in his famous book the Peloponnesian War. In the real world principles are subordinated to policies of the state, as Machiavelli had argued in the 16th century.

According to classical realists the effectiveness of the state's foreign policy is measured mainly with its military power. The state tries to increase its capability in the military sphere. Russian foreign policy strategies in some steps could be analyzed from its military might paradigm or military threat policies. For example, Russian foreign policy intention to deploy its nuclear missiles in its Kaliningrad enclave was a simple example of the Kremlin's military threat against the NATO's enlargement and missile shield deployment plans.²⁴ Russian military intervention to Georgia during the August war could also be explained as a threat message to the other pro-Western governments in its neighborhood. The Kremlin's military muscle show was not only restricted towards its neighborhood; also as it was during the Cold War years, Moscow demonstrated its power with flights of its strategic bombers close to the United States and Canadian territorial waters over the Atlantic ocean,²⁵ as well as visit of its fleet of warships, headed by the nuclear powered Peter the Great cruiser to Venezuela.²⁶

Kenneth Waltz's structural realist theory, also known as defensive realism, primarily focuses on the analysis of the structure international relations system, and state's foreign policy behavior in the international affairs is the main determinant of this system. Waltz argues that the anarchy defines the international system, not the "lust for power", as Morgenthau claims. The reason of aggressiveness of great powers is because of their need to survive in the international system, but not because of their lust for power. Waltz claims also that the structure of the international system

pushes the states to accentuate the balance of power. Lack of central global government in the international system engenders the inter-state conflicts and wars, and also the security competition among states.

During the cold war period the structural realism had focused on the bipolar world order and behavior of the blocs and their leaders in the international scene, as well as distribution of power was one of the main theses within this school. Different approach to the bipolar order and the role of the state's military and foreign policies were also main discussion points of the offensive and defensive realist schools. The main goal of the scholars of the defensive realism is the state's survival, while offensive realist theory argues that based on the anarchist character of the international system, states tries to maximize their power and military capabilities. Unlike Mearsheimer, Waltz claims that the structure of international system does not provide state with incentives to maximize their power. According to Waltz, when great powers behave aggressively and maximize their power they will encourage their potential victims to come together and balance against the aggressive state.²⁷ That's why states try to achieve security rather than to maximize their power, and also they follow strategies, which would maintain the balance of power.

Following the fall of the Soviet Union and the end of the bipolar world order, the structural realist theory was criticized because of its non-ability to predict the collapse of the SU or the end of the Cold War period, in which Waltz strongly supported the idea of endless confrontation between two camps of the bipolar world. But Russia's return to the international system in the beginning of the 2000s with ambitions to be again one of the main political arbiters of the world system made the views of the structural realism again discussible in the post-cold war period. Russian foreign policy behavior, particularly in the context of global aspirations of the Kremlin and its imperialist nostalgia feelings in the post-Soviet space are the main tools for the analyses by the structural realist scholars. Especially new Russian-American confrontation, the Kremlin's global ambitions and its counter-deterrence to the American global hegemony could be the best examples for these analyses. The distribution of power thesis of the structural realism in the international system could be also analyzed from the Russian foreign policy behavior, mainly against the US. After the 9/11 events the presence of the U.S. military bases in the post-Soviet states has changed the power balance in favor of the United States, which it was perceived in the Kremlin as a threat for its national

interests, despite the fact that Putin directly following the terrorist attacks had agreed for deployment of the American military forces.

Structural realists tried to give answer why external powers choose the policy of intervention into other great power's sphere of influence? From the adherents' of this school point of view, one of the main causes for such kind of regional intervention is an existence of the peer rival power. An intervention by a hegemonic power in one region is the way of checking the rise of potential hegemon in another region.²⁸ Mearsheimer explains the behavior of regional hegemons and argues that there is an attempt to check other competitor hegemon(s) in other regions because they fear that a rival power will be powerful foe. Regional hegemons prefer that there be at least two great powers located together in other regions, thus as a result of their proximity they will concentrate themselves to each other rather than a distant hegemon.²⁹ The hegemonic rivalry theories, and particularly hegemonic war theory developed by Robert Gilpin also analyzes international relations from the perspective of the international system's structure. On the contrary to the Waltz's theory scholars of the hegemonic rivalry theories make allowance for the dynamical changes in the international system. According to Gilpin, a hegemonic conflict results from the uneven and differential growth of power among the political actors of the international system. Gilpin points out that the existence of a clear power hierarchy in the international system is the main guaranty for its stability and the stability could not be drastically changed even if there is minor power distribution. An important point in Gilpin's thesis is that if fundamental interests of a hegemon state are not violated or threatened, then unproportioned increase of power in the international system would not cause the instability. The status quo in the system would be undermined by the growth of power of the rival, which has potential to attenuate the power of a hegemon. According to Gilpin, a major objective of states was to increase their influence over each other to fulfill political, economic and ideological interests.³⁰ During the post- World War II order the Soviet –American hegemonic rivalry was changed with the collapse of the Soviet Union, and thus, the only hegemon of the new world order the USA could strengthen its position.

Miller argues that there are two variables that could explain the reason of intervention by a great power into regions outside of its geographical area.³¹ These variables are called as constraints and incentives. If constraints are low and incentives are high, then great powers follow the policy of intervention; when incentives are low and constraints are

high, then for great powers any intervention is unlikely; in the case of high levels of the both variables, non-intervention or limited intervention is preferable; and in the case of low level of both variables, for great powers intervention is unnecessary.³² For a long time after the Soviet collapse, because of economical and political turmoil in Russia, no one was expected the Kremlin's return back as a new challenger to the US global hegemonic ambitions in the world politics. These expectations were changed especially with the Russian-Georgian war in 2008. Vladimir Putin's foreign policy ambitions evolving Russian international influence militarily and economically could clearly explain the hegemonic rivalry theories approaches in the last decade.

As a consequence, it should be mentioned that to analyze the Russian foreign policy behavior is not an easy task, taking into account the imperialist legacy of the Soviet Union. It is based mainly on multifarious and complex factors. Even so, contemporary Russia's foreign policy behavior could be explained mainly with the classical realist approach, which focuses on national interests of a state and have connection to the foreign policy aims, its political, economic power and especially its military potential. But the hegemonic rivalry theories of the neorealist school also explain the role of the Russia in the contemporary international relations.

Neorealist and neoclassical realist theories of the international relations also explain state's foreign policy behavior in the international scene. Focusing on the systemic level of analysis, neorealist theory, and by focusing on a level of a state, neoclassical realist theory tries to explain the foreign policy as a result both external and internal factors that could be strengthen or weaken the influence of structural factors. Despite some differences, neoclassical realism shares not a few similarities with the traditional realists. These similarities are: state behavior mainly is affected by the international system; acceptance of the anarchic character of the international system; an assumption on international politics, which are competitive and on states that are egoistic.

But the main difference between neoclassical scholars and adherents of the classical or neorealist schools are based on the assumption that the use of the military force in the case of any threat to ensure its objective is the state's main primary aim and the balance of military capability plays an important role in the state's behavior. Neoclassical scholars refuse to accept this assumption by arguing that there are other strategies, which could be used by the state to respond threat, and despite that military

capability is one of the major components of the state's power, it can not be always the primary option.³³

According to Mearsheimer, "the essence of the security dilemma is that the measures a state takes to increase its own security usually decrease the security of other states".³⁴ The best way to secure survival is domination, and hereby great powers attempt to dominate their regions, which generally is called sphere of influences or backyards. But hegemony itself could cause a security dilemma, when regional hegemon attempts to check other regional hegemon because of the fear that a rival great power will be a powerful foe, as Mearsheimer argues.³⁵ Russia with its imperialistic ambitions would be problematic for the post-Soviet countries. But on the other hand decline of Russian imperialist power could trigger new ethnic and territorial conflicts, which easily could spill out to the territories of the South Caucasus and CA states. At the same time, the strengthening of the region countries from Russian point of view could pose a threat for the Kremlin.

Russian foreign policy could be also analyzed from the prism of the strategy of coercive diplomacy since the collapse of the SU in the former satellite republics. In opposition to "supportive strategy of suasion", Lynch uses the term "coercive strategy of suasion",³⁶ which he focuses on Russian use of peacekeeping forces in the conflict zones in the context of coercive interference in the internal affairs of the state. Russia uses tools like political and diplomatic pressure, coercive intervention and "peacekeeping" operations. Lynch, who developed the concept of coercive suasion, distinguishes three levels in the Russian suasion strategy: forms of behavior, targets of strategy and objectives.³⁷ To the forms of behavior belong: coercive interventions in the conflicts by Russian forces on ground; actions of Russian forces to protect the border zones; deployment of the Russian "peacekeeping" forces or exert pressure for the deployment of the Russian troops; economic and military assistance to the separatist movements, and political pressure to reach conflict resolution on Russian terms.³⁸

As mentioned above, the realist theories are the most closely connected with the study of neo-imperialism and great power politics. For explaining of Russian and American security environment and foreign policy strategies of both great powers in the SC and CA, I utilize applying theory of offensive realism. Russia, because of its huge size and population, and as a nuclear power is perceived still a potential danger. According to the theory of offensive realism, Russia will always remain dangerous to the West and

vice versa the United States will be remain as a threat to the superpower ambitions of the Kremlin. If we analyze the National Security Concepts, the Foreign Policy Doctrines and statements and theories of many Russian and American political scientists, then we should agree with Mearsheimer's views. So, following this assumption in my research I endeavor to explain that the White House's and the Kremlin's foreign policy strategies in the post-Soviet geography are shaped by the nature of the international political system under the principles of the offensive realism theory. According to Mearsheimer, there are five bedrock assumptions of the offensive realism.³⁹

First assumption is about the anarchic status of the international system. Mearsheimer does not interpret the term anarchic as engulfed or chaotic by wars and conflicts. Anarchic means that states are sovereign and do not comply with any higher authority. So, one of the main arguments of the theory is that international system lacks a central or supranational government.⁴⁰ The same explanation is affirmed by Waltz, who argues that wars and conflicts occur in an anarchic system, where nothing exists to prevent states from entering into conflict.

The second principle is: states as the main actors of the system own certain military powers and this power is used for interfering or destroying each other for their own survival. If there is no any other power, which could threat the existence of a state, then it means that the state has reached its hegemony status. States confides in self-help, and also figure their national interests and powers concurrently with the interests and powers of other states with the aim to ensure their existence in the anarchic system. Among the states exist fear, and that's why the states try to eliminate any perceived or existing danger. Mearsheimer defines great powers as states, and also argues that great powers have to have sufficient military power for engaging in conventional war against the most powerful rival in the world. But, a great power does not need any capabilities to defeat its main rival. Just, the great power should have enough power to turn conflict into a war.⁴¹ According to the father of the offensive realism, the theory focuses mostly on great powers because "the fortunes of all states are determined primarily by the decisions and actions of those with the greatest capability".⁴²

The third principle of the offensive realism is about the distrust and fear between the states. Great powers are suspicious of their rivals' intensions. Potentially, there is no guaranty; the states that possess military strength and capability would not attack to other state's sphere of influence or territory.

The fourth assumption explains the survival as the main goal of any state. According to Mearsheimer, states can also pursue non-security goals “as long as the requisite behavior does not conflict with the balance of power logic”.⁴³ Unlike defensive realism theory supporters, who although share the same view with offensive realists in emphasizing the need of the state to ensure their survival, offensive realist school argues that the survival of a state can be guaranteed by reaching the hegemony status, while defensive realist school supports balance of power idea as the best strategy to ensure the survival.

The last fifth principle of the bedrock assumptions is about the rationality of the states. Mearsheimer argues that; states behavior is based on their need to survive and on constraints afforded to them by the international system. In his theory Mearsheimer explains that states get involved in game theory through which “they consider the preferences of other states and how their own behavior is likely to affect the behavior of those other states, and how the behavior of other states is likely to affects their own strategy for survival”.⁴⁴

So, the main aim of this research is explained by the realist school theories, particularly by the offensive realism theory of the IR. The research thesis argues that principles of the above mentioned theory would be applied as a main theory to the events presented through case studies. As already mentioned, multiple case studies will give an opportunity to explain the findings and to test the hypothesis. Applying a rigorous theoretical approach will give a possibility to understand the Kremlin’s and the White House’s foreign policy strategies. Thereby, the importance of this research bases not only on the emphasis on the methodological and theoretical framework; but also it will make a contribution with its predictions on the behavior of the both neo-imperialist powers in the future.

A Background of U.S.-Russian Rivalry in the Region

In a unipolar era, geographical regions are considered as *poles of power* where great powers can banish other hegemonic interventions.⁴⁵ Russia tries to be a gateway for the West towards the former Soviet republics.⁴⁶ Acceptance of the Kremlin as an only hegemon of the former Soviet republics by the West is one of the main foreign policy strategy of Russia. By this way, Russia tries to use economic leverages for its political success.

Its economy depends mainly on natural resources, but at the same time, Russia tries to secure an access to the significant economic resources in its neighborhood. And in this context could be analyzed Russian energy diplomacy in the Caspian Sea. Because of that in the last decades a term like economic expansion entered to the Russian political literature. From the Russian prism, comparing to the military expansion, economic expansion would be tolerable for the Western countries. On the other hand, the Caspian region and its resources have already become an issue of misunderstanding not only between Moscow and Washington, but also the EU states became already part of the geopolitical game over the region. As a member of the most international organizations, Russia uses its diplomatic capabilities to negotiate with other powers in the world. Taking into account the idea that negotiation is the main instrument of diplomacy,⁴⁷ Russia needs to negotiate with the U.S. for securing its influence in the SC and CA. From diplomatic prism, since the Putin period Russian strategy mainly is based on the supporting the White House's policies and campaigns in the world where it doesn't cross with Russian red lines on the one hand, and with the aim to legitimate its national interests the Kremlin utilizes own version of narratives in the international relations on the other hand.

Some foreign policy analysts explain the reason of the deterioration in the relationship between Washington and Moscow, especially in the last years, with the fact that neither has much to gain from cooperation.⁴⁸ Russia is starting to throw its weight around.⁴⁹ It is obvious that Russia gets suspicious about the American intentions and policies in the South Caucasus and Central Asia, which could undermine its security interests, and that is the main obstacle for further cooperation between Russia and the U.S. If thinking realistically, then Russia acts with reason. In exchange Russian support to the U.S., after the terrorist attacks, in its war in Afghanistan, the White House supported the color revolutions in the post-Soviet regions, which was interpreted by the Kremlin as directed at Russian national interests in its sphere of influence.

But relations between the White House and the Kremlin since the Crimea annexation can be explained as fundamental change in Russia's objectives, according to the former American Ambassador to Russia John Beyrle.⁵⁰ The coup in Ukraine in February 2014 triggered one of the dangerous international crises in the international relations in the last two decades. For some political experts it was the most dangerous crisis between Russia and the United States since the Cuban missile crisis.⁵¹

The Crimea annexation is seen from the West as a response to the fall of pro-Russian Yanukovich regime and installation of anti-Russian regime in Ukraine. Probably Putin's main aim was not an extension of its territory through annexation of Crimea. It was continuation of Putin's policy on direction to revive Russia as a great country.

In Washington it is better understood that if the U.S. is still interested in securing its national security interests in the mentioned regions, then it must be ready to play a game in the strategic contest with the traditional powers like Russia and Iran. The United States should not maintain Russia in its pressure against the post-Soviet countries. As Robert Kagan argues, the United States should lead forcefully and be hegemonic power, if is not interested in ensuing of chaos in the world.⁵²

The Kremlin's initial allowance to the deployment of the American military forces in Central Asia was related with the realistic attitude of Russia. In Moscow it was clear that only the USA could effectively fight Taliban and Al-Qaeda terrorist forces along its borders. But later with the color revolutions in the post-Soviet space, Moscow saw the American presence in the region as a major source of instability than any benefits for its national security. Also China was against any kind of American intervention in Central Asia, and the government in Beijing has officially expressed that the White House presence in the region should be only short term and related with economic developments in the region. China and Russia could strengthen their positions, to certain degree, against the American presence in the CA, and also any pressure to the regional regimes by the U.S.

There are supporters of an idea that, Russian military must continue to have NATO as a primordial enemy.⁵³ Russia should oppose constantly to CIS members' joining NATO. The Kremlin should take into account the NATO's enlargement strategy towards the countries neighboring Russia and should not make any concessions by pursuing a pragmatic and effective foreign policy.⁵⁴

The United States' decision pulling out the American and NATO troops from Afghanistan in 2014 is clear sign that the White House indirectly owns up to its geostrategic defeat in the Central Asia against the Kremlin. The region turns again into the less important place for the United States, as it was in the pre-9/11 years. It can be seen as an end of a brief experiment to extend power and influence in the Central Asia.⁵⁵

But the New Great Game between the U.S. and Russia will move from the Central Asia to the western Pacific and East Asian waters. The

United States will try to secure naval supply route from the Persian Gulf to the Indian Ocean.

Anyway there is also different approach in debates on remote possibility for existence of a new Cold War between Russia and the West. As Obama argues, Russia is not anymore a global military power and is not an evil Empire unlike the SU. The Kremlin is not and cannot be global competitor as it was during the Cold War period. Russia is not in a position to match American power theater-for-theater worldwide.⁵⁶

Russian Foreign Policy in the South Caucasus and Central Asia

With the demise of the Soviet Union, its successor state Russia, in comparison to other new regional and non-regional external powers, has decisive influence on the South Caucasus and Central Asian regions. It can be explained with the 200 years historic legacies of the Kremlin in the regions, and also with the economic dependence as well as political and military pressure used by Moscow towards the region states since the beginning of the 1990s. Despite the fact that Russia was profoundly languished on military, economic and political levels in the beginning of the 1990s, the Kremlin is still of great importance in these Southern peripheries. As Kissinger argued, the collapse of empires engenders two contrary trends.⁵⁷ The first one is that the periphery states of former empire attempt to take advantage over the weakened imperial power, and the second trend is that the imperial power tries to restore its authority in the former political geography. These two regions in the former Soviet Union are the best examples for the explanation of the Kremlin's neo-imperial behavior towards the region countries since the demise of the Soviet empire. It might be explained with the "existence of a level of structural dependency that will not be overcome overnight".⁵⁸

Garnett also argued that, in the mid of 1990s, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, with all the constraints on Russian economic and military policies, were two regions where the Kremlin could appear for realization its activities.⁵⁹ He described the region states as a "belt of weak states".⁶⁰ Because of little international support, particularly Tajikistan and Georgia were vulnerable for the weakened Russia. Hyman argued that Soviet policy mainly in the CA has aimed to destroy of the pre-Soviet identity of the region ethnic nations.⁶¹

Since the beginning of the 1990s until today, Moscow's foreign policy strategies toward these geographical areas, and national interests in the region states were neither one-lined nor monotonous, rather have passed through many phases. A document signed in Belorussian Belavezhsкая Pushcha between Russia, Belarus and Ukraine on 8 December 1991, was declaration on the dissolution of the Soviet Union and on establishment of a new organization named as Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS).⁶² Later other post-Soviet republics, except three Baltic states, joined to the CIS.⁶³ In the following 5 years after the collapse of the SU, the position of the Western world can be explained with the abstaining from involving into the regional conflicts. At the same time Russia was also economic and political weak in realization its hegemonic ambitions toward the post-Soviet republics. In the last five years of 1990s, Russia started to force the CIS countries for the economic integration, but the countries interests were divergent in their approaches to Russia's offer. The closest allies of the RF in the post-Soviet area were mainly Belorussia, Tajikistan, Armenia, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan, and other states were interested in integration and establishment of closer cooperation with the Western political, economic and military institutions.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, as an important geostrategic area for the Russian Federation remained the South Caucasus where nationalist movements were growing among the ethnic minorities, and the Kremlin could manage the situation for the use of its own interests. Russia has implemented different strategies toward the region countries. Already in 1991, when the nationalist governments in the South Caucasus republics decided on secession from the Soviet empire and declared their independence, the Gorbachev's administration blackmailed these region countries by threatening them with the problems in the autonomous regions.⁶⁴ The Kremlin tried to pressure Georgia and has planned to disassociate the South Ossetia and Abkhazia from Georgia.⁶⁵ Military aid to the separatist movements in Azerbaijan and Georgia in the war against the central authorities and pressure to the South Caucasus republics to accept the mediator role of the Kremlin in the negotiations between the conflicting parties were main similarities of Russian strategy against the region countries. Since the beginning of the Putin's period, Russia continued its policy to establish predominant influence in these regions. The main approach was that these regions are the least costly economically, politically and internationally for Russia.⁶⁶

Armenia remains the main strategic ally of the Kremlin in the South Caucasus. The strategic partnership between Erivan and Moscow was deep rooted in a history, and during the independency years it was formalized with the Russian-Armenian treaty of friendship from 1997.⁶⁷ Since 2000, treaty of friendship between two countries was transformed into a strategic alliance within the CSTO.⁶⁸ As a result of political and economic influence, Russia could secure its economic domination in Armenia, and industry and main key services became dependent from Russian economy giants.

Relations between Azerbaijan and Russia in the 1990s can be characterized as cooled, and it was replaced with the mutual friendship agreement during the Russian president Vladimir Putin's two-day Baku visit in 2001. Agreements on dividing the Caspian Sea and its resources, and allowing the Kremlin using the Gabala radar station⁶⁹, the only military base of Russia in Azerbaijan were the main achievements of those warmed relations. Putin's visit was clear indication of the Russia's new attempts in its active South Caucasus policy. It would be fair to say that the visit gave more advantages to Azerbaijan than Russia. Azerbaijan could get everything, as it was possible from the Kremlin. It is also interesting to mention that during the meeting with Azeri President Aliyev, Putin has not touched upon to issues like the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline, and demand to station Russian military forces on the Azerbaijan-Iran border.⁷⁰

For Russia, the actions of the religious extremists and fundamentalists in the CA, was seen as a chance to strengthen its position in the region.⁷¹ The influence and existence of the United States in the former Soviet area was one of the main worries of the Russian leadership. For Russia, any kind of policies of the U.S. and the West in general in the FSU states are analyzed as "methods from the Cold War arsenal", as once an official from the Putin cabinet, Sergei Yastrzhembsky had stated, accusing the Europeans "in interference in the affairs of a sovereign states".⁷² Especially, following the events of September 11, the U.S. military presence in Central Asia deranged the Kremlin. Russia used the pressure policy on the former Soviet countries, and especially on the South Caucasus states to reverse their pro-Western course. Following the color revolutions in Georgia in 2003, in Ukraine in 2004, and in Kyrgyzstan in 2005, the new leadership in those countries started to strengthen ties with the West. As a result of these developments in the region, the Kremlin toughened its policy towards the region states, as well as towards the outside powers engaging in the post-Soviet space.

Russia is regularly alleged of new imperialism in its policy concerning to the former Soviet countries. From time to time, Russia is accused of using oil and other energy resources as tools of intimidation and blackmail.⁷³ Viktor Khristenko, Russian Energy Minister, responding to these critics by the U.S. Vice President Dick Cheney, explained that "Russia is deeply puzzled by recent commentary in the West that distorts Russian energy policies. Russia has moved away from Soviet era arrangements of subsidizing energy prices to our neighbors and turned to market based pricing mechanisms. We are aware that old impressions fade slowly, but it is time for the West to recognize and acknowledge the maturing role and state progress that Russia has achieved."⁷⁴

Not only the White House, but also the post-socialist countries' politicians criticize the Kremlin in using the energy resources as a tool against those states. Zbigniew Siemiatkowski, the former head of Special Security Service of Poland has imputed Russia by claiming that "what Russia does in the Eastern Europe is a new economic imperialism. Yesterday tanks, today oil and gas!"⁷⁵

Contrarily, Russian politicians and official representatives disclaim arraignments against the Kremlin based on imperialist foreign policy towards former Soviet countries, and explain that the West must "bury Cold War ghosts"⁷⁶ and accept Russia as a democracy. Dmitri Trenin explains that "Russia today is not, and is not likely to become a second Soviet Union. It is not revanchist and imperialist aggressor bent on absorbing its former provinces."⁷⁷

On the other hand, Russia's foreign policy concept (2000) clearly defined the relation between Moscow's political and economic interests: "Russia must be prepared to utilize all its available economic levers and resources for upholding its national interests."⁷⁸ That is the reason why Russian economic policies are presumed as a political instrument in the West. Hydrocarbon resources were used as a political tool and the Kremlin with the aim to penalize the pro-Western governments in its neighborhood has increased gas prices.

The national security strategies of the South Caucasus states during the first independency decade in their relation with the Kremlin had passed through three phases.⁷⁹ These phases had started with the radical independence demands from Moscow already in the end of 1980s. The Kremlin was seen as a major threat for the states political sovereignty. But at the same time Russia was acknowledged a strategic neighbor. It was understood primarily in Armenian attitude to the Russian presence

in the region. For Armenia, the Kremlin is considered as a counterweight against Turkey's political or military influence. Baku and Tbilisi were still against the Kremlin's involvement into the regional issues. The last phase, as Aves argues, was characteristic in Azerbaijan's position, which was the only country that resisted, become a close partner of the Kremlin, while Armenia's and Georgia's foreign policy strategies were based on strategic considerations.

In the abstract, Russia's strategic interests in the Central Asia could be defined as follows: - reassert its influence and maintain strategic control over pipeline routes for transportation of energy reserves from the Caspian Sea basin; - to be militarily only hegemon and to have only its own military bases in the region; - to avoid any other military, economic and political alliance among the region states or between the region states and any other third power.

Russia's foreign policy strategy could also be characterized between defensive and aggressive realism, as Tsygankov argued that both of these schools of thought supported the Kremlin's power constellation.⁸⁰ At the same time, foreign policy strategy of the Kremlin towards the post-Soviet countries is indoctrinated with imperialism and the syndrome of greatness.⁸¹ Politicians of the Euro-Atlanticist school in the Russian foreign policy supported an idea of integration to the Western community by adopting the Western values and following the policy of rapprochement with the United States after the fall of the Soviet Union. Representatives of the neo Euro-Asian school in their political views supported the idea of becoming an independent political pole in the international politics to balance the Western dominance. Calling any region, as its sphere of influence and having imperial pretensions toward these regions are one of the characters of the neo-imperialist foreign policy.

If the Kremlin Administration in previous years had tried to reestablish the control over the post-Soviet countries mainly by political and economic ways, increasingly Moscow uses military pressure for achieving its goal in these regions. In its relations with the post-Soviet countries, Russia has mostly relied on coercion policy, which in the last years it was substantially successful for the Kremlin. Compared to the Yeltsin's years, there is no doubt that Russian foreign policy under Putin in the South Caucasus and Central Asia since the beginning of the 2000s has better coordinated by the Kremlin.

The Kremlin's involvement in the post-Soviet regions during the first years of independence was in subjection to Russia's hegemonic efforts.

During the post-1993 years, until the end of 20th century, Russia under Yeltsin administration followed more ideological and military power in its relations with the region countries. Economic, ideological and political power logic was characteristic in Russia's foreign policy behavior during Putin's first two terms presidency. With the August war in 2008, Russia dropped a hint to the international society that military power of the Kremlin will be used against any other state, which will not recognize and respect its great power status in the region.

Russia has no respect to the independence of the region countries. In the case of Armenia, the Kremlin displays without stint how it disdains Armenia's independence and sovereignty. As Giragosian argues, the problem in Russia-Armenia relations is not in the partnership or relationship, but the lack of respect from Moscow, and imbalance between two countries in any alliance.⁸²

The August war between Georgia and Russia in 2008 is one of the best examples of the Russian neo-imperialist policies, which the Kremlin administration decided to intervene in the Georgian territories, annexed them and violated the international law principles. One of the main reasons behind the intervention was the foreign policy priority of the Georgian governments, which have followed well nigh the same policies since the gaining independence: to diminish Russian dependency and turn to the West, aiming the secure of protection from Russia. Especially, the Saakashvili government in Georgia after the Rose Revolution without stint intensified the integration to the Euro-Atlantic structures, established the security ties with the U.S. and criticized the Russian imperialist policies in its territory.

In consideration of this, Moscow has evinced with the August war that she is not going to share sphere of influence with any other third power, and is ready to procure its influence over the post-Soviet space by using hard and soft powers. Aim of the Kremlin is to pull all the post-Soviet countries to its orbit, including mainly both in political and economic spheres. In other words, based on its neo-imperialist foreign policy Russia aims to intensify and accelerate creation of union in the post-Soviet space.

Use of separatism in the South Caucasus conflicts by the Kremlin was aimed at preserving its declined influence over its former satellites. The secessionist conflicts which some of them called as frozen conflicts are still unresolved, and one of the main reasons is the Kremlin's lack of interest for any solution under international law principles. Russia tries to balance its strategic attitude against the USA in the SC and CA. And

neo-imperialist character of the Kremlin's foreign policy forces itself to keep under control any country in its sphere of influences. In his third period as President of Russia, Putin tries to institutionalize the Kremlin's gains by enduring territorial-political structures, as Blank argues.⁸³

With its military bases in abroad Russia aims to coerce the local governments. In Georgia's case three Russian military bases were located in the separatist regions and through these bases the Kremlin established its relations with the ethnic minorities and used the relations as leverage against the Tbilisi government. And by this way tried to maintain its military presence in the South Caucasus region. Russia's war with Georgia in August 2008 ended with the recognition of the South Ossetia and Abkhazia by the Kremlin. By signing a treaty Russia announced that it is going to recognize the borders between Abkhazia and South Ossetia on one side and Russia on the other hand.⁸⁴ These moves of the Kremlin are against the territorial integrity and sovereignty of Georgia, which could be explained as neo-imperialist foreign policy action on the way to create satellite states in the neighborhood that could influence and enforce post-Soviet countries to be dependent on Russia.

Foreign Policy Interests of the USA in the South Caucasus and Central Asia

The United States was one of the first states, which recognized the independence of the region states and established diplomatic relations with them. Over the last twenty years four main objectives defined foreign policy of the United States in the South Caucasus region: newly independent South Caucasian states should stay independent and sovereign; to support for the integration of the region states into the Euro-Atlantic community and global market economy; help the conflicting parties to solve their problems and promote free and open market democracy.⁸⁵

Strategically importance of the South Caucasus region for the U.S. was mentioned by the Department of Defense in 1994, with the aim to form the South Caucasus region as an area of secular, independent, and friendly states to the West.⁸⁶ Michael McFaul argued that "states such as Azerbaijan, Ukraine and Georgia have encouraged American involvement to balance hegemonic presence of the Kremlin in the region."⁸⁷

But still in essence, Russia-centric or *Russia first policy* in the American foreign relations was characteristic towards the South Caucasus states.⁸⁸

According to Brzezinski, this policy was characteristic only for first two years of the Clinton administration. But since 1994 the administration “pursues a policy of promoting of geopolitical pluralism” in the former Soviet states.⁸⁹

Establishment of a regional organization GUAM⁹⁰ in 1997 was a first attempt in the former Soviet space, which has aimed to rival against the dominance of Russia in economic, political and military spheres. It was not a secret that one of the main purposes of this alliance was with support of the U.S. to secure transportation of the Caspian energy supplies and in consequence they could pull off Russian dominance.⁹¹ In the Russian media the organization was accused as an anti-Russian regional group, and also it was characterized as group united by their complaints against the Kremlin. The GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldova) project in the post-Soviet space was characterized in the Kremlin as a U.S. backed organization. It was seen as an important strategic alliance that has ever formed without participation of Russia since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Since the beginning of 2000, GUAM members has developed significant principles that serve for the interests of the members on the one hand, and has harassed Russian interests in the region on the other hand. Member states agreed a strategy for the joint efforts on behalf of energy production; support of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the members; cooperate in security issues; work with the international and regional institutions and cooperate with the United States. It is important to mention that the GUUAM has not declared any military issues, and only economic and strategic cooperation was stressed among the member states.

In 1998, according to Stephen Sestanovich, an American Ambassador for the new independent countries, the U.S. policy toward the South Caucasus and Central Asia could be described by four factors: ⁹²strengthening modern political and economic institutions; energy development and the creation of an east-west energy transport corridor; regional cooperation and conflict resolution; security cooperation and the establishment of security dialogues.

The Caspian Sea natural gas and oil reserves have pointed emphasis for the U.S. as an alternative to the Persian Gulf energy resources in the 1990s. Geostrategic position of the Caspian Sea basin and CA make them an important location where the great powers meet each other. The White House recognizes that these regions where Russia aspires to be the only main player would lead the Kremlin to establish monopoly

of energy supplies and transportation and then to use it as a political tool against the West. Since the beginning of the 1990s, the White House had determined its economic goal as development of the natural gas supply from the Caspian Sea basin as an alternative to the Persian Gulf energy resources, and to guarantee the control of the transportation of these energy reserves to the world markets without passing through Iranian and Russian territories. Attempts to agree with the region countries on the determination of the natural gas pipeline routes were also main issues of the negotiations between American and region countries officials.⁹³

In its relations with the Central Asian states, the Bush administration also focused on cooperation in the economic and energy issues, which could be characterized as sticks in the American energy diplomacy. In the National Energy Policy Report, which was issued by the President of the USA George Bush, in May 2001, was suggested that "greater oil production in the region would not only benefit regional economies, but would also help mitigate possible world supply disruptions and transmit liberal ideas."⁹⁴ It was a kind of pressure for cooperation on energy issues against the energy rich countries of the region.

The Clinton administration prepared a Silk Road Strategic Act project of 1999,⁹⁵ which Moscow had interpreted it as the blueprint of a new American empire's involvement into the Central Asian and the South Caucasus regions.⁹⁶ All eight countries of both regions were covered by Senator Sam Brownback's act. According to section 2.6 of the act, which has proposed that the South Caucasus and Central Asian regions could produce oil and gas in sufficient quantities and it could reduce the dependence of the U.S. on energy from the Persian Gulf region.⁹⁷ In the wide sense, Brownback's intention was to assert control over the regions in order to prevent Russia, China and Iran from dominating it.⁹⁸ The act has contained also message to the U.S., which called the White House to encourage and assist the development of regional military cooperation among the countries of the South Caucasus and Central Asia through programs such as the Central Asian Battalion and the Partnership for Peace of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.⁹⁹

Respectively soft power and hard power politics describe better the Bill Clinton's and the George Bush's foreign policy concepts towards the South Caucasus region. Under the Barack Obama's administration foreign policy strategies of the United States in the region, and particularly bilateral relations with the region states was explained as smart power policy.¹⁰⁰ But in the reality compared to the previous two administrations, the last

one has already lost the most political and economic advantages in the region and lets an opportunity slip because of its passive involvement to the region.

For some American foreign policy analysts it seemed as a late decision in fully recovering the ground lost during the first years of Bill Clinton's presidency.¹⁰¹ By analyzing reasons why the U.S. decided to change its foreign policy towards the Caucasus republics, by mid 1994, Hunter argues that it could be explained as Western fears about Russian ambitions in the region.¹⁰² Until 1994, it could be interpreted so that the West had accepted the Kremlin's hegemony in Georgia and Armenia. In Azerbaijan, the West had pursued a doubtful policy, which it stemmed from the fact that the West was not interested in committing necessary resources including military assets.¹⁰³

Charap and Peterson described the U.S. foreign policy toward the region states as a derivative of Russia policy. "The White House failed to forge long-term partnerships and instead sought leverage, neglecting engagement that provided no benefit."¹⁰⁴

Thomas de Waal is one of the region experts, who also criticizes Washington stating that "no one in the White House is thinking how to approach the South Caucasus as a region, whose economic needs and security problems inter-connected and best resolved by a holistic approach."¹⁰⁵

The U.S. was interested since the collapse of the SU, in ensuring not to allow Russia to become again hegemony in the post-Soviet region. For this purpose, the White House's aim was to estrange former empire republics from the Russian influence and to create a belt of pro-American regimes. Especially after the signing an agreement in Istanbul on BTC pipeline project in 1999, which was mainly supported by the United States, with the goal to oppose against the sabotage of the Kremlin, the White House tried to be sure on nature of the governments by pressuring them to be pro-western. Heydar Aliyev and Eduard Shevardnadze governments, respectively in Azerbaijan and in Georgia, have followed more pro-western policies than pro-Russian. And in that case the Kremlin has tried to destabilize political situation in this geography by assassination attempts against Shevardnadze, as well as by supporting secessionist movements in the South Caucasus. Permanent smoldering in the South Caucasus states of Azerbaijan and Georgia was suited Russian neo-imperialist strategy.

During the George W. Bush period, the U.S Administration increased its foreign policy strategies and interests towards the South Caucasus states. It

was the time when there were discussions on the possible membership of Georgia and Azerbaijan to the NATO and Washington increased military aid programs to the region countries.

According to Sussman and Krader, color revolutions were realized as a result of four types of foreign assistance: political, financial, technical and propaganda methods.¹⁰⁶ "Democracy promotion" became part of new imperialism in the foreign policy of the United States.

Because of its geostrategic position, the Caspian Sea basin was one of the important issues in the U.S. foreign policy in the 1990s. Just with the goal to avoid Russia from recovering its great power status the White House supported the realization of the new pipeline projects, which conflicted to the Kremlin's interests, and had aimed to weaken Russian influence in the mentioned geographies.

Although during the election campaign in the end of the 1990s, George Bush has occasionally criticized the Clinton administration in failing to develop a comprehensive energy policy. One of the main features of the U.S. foreign policy towards the South Caucasus and particularly the Caspian region was the support for the construction of a new oil pipeline running from Azerbaijan's Caspian coast through Georgia to Turkey's Mediterranean coast. An American strategist Brzezinski had proposed this project by arguing that new east-west pipeline project should oppose Iranian and Russian south and north pipeline projects, and also should bypass Iranian and Russian territories,¹⁰⁷ even though the proposed pipeline by the White House was the most expensive project in comparison to the Iranian Baku-Kharg project.¹⁰⁸ As Dick Cheney once avouched at U.S.-Azerbaijan Chamber of Commerce Conference, "Azerbaijan is of great significance not only to the future of the region, but to the future of a diversified and balanced global oil market. But the realization of this potential depends...on politics, as the struggle to get these resources to market involves various countries with competing interests."¹⁰⁹

Debates on the probable involvement of the United States in Central Asia were one of the significant discussed topics throughout the end of the 20th century and early 21st century among the both academic and politic communities. Among the region experts were politicians who argued that because of the small contribution of the Caspian region states to the global energy market, as well as implausible possible natural gas export from the Caspian basin to the West are not enough for attracting the region to the U.S. foreign policy interests in the beginning of the 1990s. It should not be understood that the Caspian basin and the region states were totally

far from the White House's interest, but only policymakers could not decide for the region and its countries as a top priority for Washington. Few economic interests of the U.S. in the region played an important role in the White House's position toward the post-Soviet Central Asia. It can be explained with a geographical and economic position of the region countries in the new world community.

From geostrategic prism, Henry Kissinger called for the creation of the pro-Western Central Asian buffer zone between two regional powers – Russia and China.¹¹⁰ This part examines the United States interests and policies toward Central Asia with emphasis on its political, economic, military and strategic interests since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

Geostrategic and geographical distance of the CA region from Washington during the Soviet Union has made the region frivolous for the White House. Only after the fall of the SU the region became one of the markets of American capital and later Washington slowly began to open the region for its military and political objectives. The world is divided into main concern areas in American strategic thinking.¹¹¹ The place of Central Asia had been shifting from post-Soviet Eurasia to either Greater Middle East or South Asia.¹¹² Laruelle explains the reason of separation of Central Asia from rest of the post-Soviet space as aim to promote a new attitude of regionalization by reducing a traditional Russia-centered focus. Since 1999 the region is with Middle East, North Africa, Pakistan and Afghanistan, part of the Central Command at the U.S. Defense Department. In 2006, Central Asia moved from the Europe and Eurasia Bureau into the new Central and South Asia Bureau at the State Department of the United States.

Although the region itself with its full of transnational threats such as terrorism, narcotic trafficking and organized crime were important political issues which engendered disquiet for Washington in the 1990s, the White House changed its little attention only after the September 11 terrorist attacks. And since these events the mentioned security problems of the region were understood as directly security threat to the United States foreign policy and national interests. It became clear that if the first years of the last decade of the 20th century, Washington's policy was explained with the destitution of the solution of the problems in the Central Asian region; then post-9/11 foreign policy objectives of the United States could be characterized with the actively political and military involvement in the region, which especially during the Bush's Administration period American goals turned to be hard rather than soft.

It is true that energy reservation in the Caspian Sea does not have considerably importance for the United States for the purposes of energy supply and national security. So, one of the primary goals of the U.S. in supporting multiple pipeline projects and in getting influence on the pipeline route in the Caspian basin, beyond any doubt was avoiding Moscow and Tehran as transit states from the project. Also, to support American industrial firms in involving Caspian region was part of American foreign policy interests. Some political analysts in Washington, in the beginning of the 2000s were troubled about the lack of interests of the U.S. in the Caspian region, arguing that if the White House would not help to realize the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline project, then it would not be perceived only as a failure of the U.S. foreign policy, but also Washington will lose its friends and allies in the region.¹¹³

Even foreign policy-makers of Clinton Administration were not interested in irritating the Kremlin by interference in its backyard, military cooperation and multiple pipeline project interests have caused changes in its relations toward Russia and other regional powers in the U.S. foreign policy approach. An American Congress has passed bills, which supported diversification of energy supplies from the Caspian region and the Central Asia in the late 1990s.¹¹⁴

An energy policy report, which was released by the Bush administration, has indicated that the exploitation of the Caspian basin energy resources could benefit the economies of the region states and could help mitigate world supply directions, which was one of the White House's security goals in the region.¹¹⁵ Support of the building BTC oil pipeline was also highly recommended in the report, by facilitating American oil companies in the region to use the pipeline.¹¹⁶

In February 2008, Secretary of State of the US Condoleezza Rice informed the Senate Foreign Relations Committee that the Secretary does "intend to appoint...a special energy coordinator who could especially spend time on the Central Asia and Caspian region."¹¹⁷ Rice stated that a key job of the coordinator would be to encourage the establishment of oil and gas pipelines that bypass Russia, thus decreasing its control over the regional flow of energy. Fear from the restoration of Russia's great power status and its growing control over oil and gas distribution in the Caspian basin that could undercut the White House's influence in the region compelled the United States to appoint a special coordinator.

There are some foreign policy experts who criticized the Bush administration and argued that the aim of the U.S. should be seeking

working relationship and cooperation with other regional powers of the region, and by focusing on anti-terror goals, the White House should not be interested in taking control of the energy resources of the Caspian basin.¹¹⁸ During the war in Afghanistan, in the American media was mentioned that “the State Department is exploring the potential for post-Taliban energy projects in the region, which has more than six percent of the world’s proven oil reserves and almost 40 percent of its gas reserves.”¹¹⁹

Oil factor also played a decisive role in the agreement on ceasefire in the territorial conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia over Mountainous Karabakh in 1994.¹²⁰ Former Advisor to Azerbaijani President Vafa Guluzade argued that during the Azerbaijani-Armenian war in the early 1990s, the Armenian troops with support of Russia would have occupied major part of Azerbaijan, if there were no any strategic interest of the U.S. towards Azerbaijan and indirectly to the oil reserves in the Caspian Sea.¹²¹ Energy resources and transit opportunities of Azerbaijan were main factors, which the West and especially the U.S. interest towards the region and particularly Azerbaijan could protect its independence from the Russian imperialist policies. So, analyzing these arguments it becomes clear how the oil and gas resources could be important for the country’s independence and security.

In 1997, the Deputy Secretary of the United States Strobe Talbott, in his speech stated the goal of the U.S. in CA as “not to become dominant of the region, but to make it free of other power’s domination”, so making it possible for the region states to be stable and peaceful.¹²² But geopolitical realities forced the United States to fill vacuum in the region by deploying its military forces and increasing amount of its financial aid to the region countries in the following of 9/11.

There were politicians and diplomats who argued that because of the historically few interests and policies of the U.S. toward the region, allies of the White House, like Turkey and the EU states could also be contacted for ensuring the White House’s strategic and economic interests in CA.¹²³ Zbigniew Brzezinski stated that for the maintaining its global primacy the White House has to prevent any possible threat and competitor from containing these regions. According him, the U.S. strategy towards CA could not be implemented “except in the circumstance of a truly massive and widely perceived direct external threat.”¹²⁴

Stephen Blank argues that Washington still lacks a South Caucasus strategy.¹²⁵ He criticizes also since the Obama period the United States accepts the South Caucasus and Central Asian regions as the Kremlin’s

sphere of influence.¹²⁶ One of the negative aspects of the Obama's region policy is the decreased attention to the South Caucasus. Although there is no any specified South Caucasus strategy on the Washington's agenda, the USA tries to keep balance in the region- no war and no peace along pipelines.¹²⁷

Conclusion

As mentioned in the Introduction part of this paper, one of the main goals of the research was to examine whether the foreign policy strategies of the United States and Russia in the South Caucasus and Central Asia in the post- Cold war period could be characterized as neo-imperialist or not? The research evaluated the foreign policy strategies and underscored the influenced determinants that have influences on formation of those policies.

Throughout the 20th century and in the beginning of 21st century the nature of imperialist and neo-imperialist policies was one of the controversial subjects, which not only historians, but also IR scholars, and scholars of other fields tried to explain motives behind of those policies. Pointing the specific foreign policy patterns, as an analytical part of the paper, I analyzed Russian foreign policy strategies under Boris Yeltsin, Vladimir Putin, Dmitri Medvedev and then again under Putin's new presidency. I have argued that the current phase of Russian neo-imperialist foreign policies in the mentioned regions aims to restructure its great power status not only economically, but also in the political, military and security spheres with the aim to be in the right place in the international affairs.

The research has yielded several conclusions. The case studies analyzed in the previous parts of the paper indicate that Russian and American foreign policies in the South Caucasus and Central Asian region are driven by its need for survival. If for the Kremlin it means to be the only hegemon in the region by preventing any influence of the United States, then for the White House need for survival bases on the principle not to let Russia again become the only hegemon and main regional power in the mentioned regions.

First, during the first decade of the independency, the Kremlin had pursued a foreign policy strategy that aimed to strengthen its influence in its neighborhood and attached importance to integrationist policies within the CIS. One of the aims of the Kremlin was the creation of buffer states in

the near of its borders. Later, this integrationist policy was replaced with the Russian dependency strategy, which aimed to make the region states dependent on Moscow, when the Kremlin realized that its integrationist strategy came to grief. Second, starting with Putin's rise to power Russia attempted to secure the regional status quo. Any change of the status quo, especially by any neighbor state's action was considered as a threat against the Kremlin. At the same time, Russia dictated that any close relations between the post-Soviet countries and any foreign regional or great power that directly or indirectly might have jeopardized Russian geopolitical interests would be interpreted as a threat. In his second term as a President, Putin and later Medvedev have pursued foreign policy toward the mentioned regions' states that has only strengthened the same strategy.

The nature of international politics still remains conflictual. Russia is continuing to consolidate its own influence on the former Soviet republics, which for the Kremlin are the zone of the exclusive interests. Especially, since the Vladimir Putin's presidency Russia regardless of the international consequences, strongly comes out against to any interference made by the West, mainly by the U.S. into these areas. The case of the August War with Georgia in 2008, serves as a model in this attempt of the Kremlin.

Whether we argue Russia and the United States to be a neo-imperialist power or an empire, both the White House and the Kremlin demonstrate neo-imperialistic behavior. The last two decades demonstrate how neo-imperialism in Russian and American foreign policy strategies grows through military coups, political interventions, and also by transforming economic cooperationists into their political proponents for the aim to ensure their neo-imperialist military-political domination. It is true that historically all empires have presented similar characters or neo-imperialist behavior is common feature for all the neo-imperialist powers, to differentiate American empire or neo-imperialist foreign policy from Russian empire and neo-imperialist foreign policy is one of the main aspect of this research. Although foreign policy approaches of the White House and the Kremlin to the regions seem different, both of them follow the strategy, which should be ended with gaining influence and eradicating the rival power out of the regions. This course of conduct arose from the need to protect their national, political, and economic and security interests.

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