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Power Race in Asia and Turkey's Asia Policy

The geopolitical importance of Asia has been manifestly growing with the new conjuncture that started to be built after September 11. The US operation to Afghanistan was the first indicator of a great competition between the only global actor, the USA ; the heir of a former superpower, Russia ; and a new but a very strong state in Asian politics, China . Asia will continue to be the area of rivalry between major powers in the foreseeable future considering the existing conjuncture. Alliances against common threats may continue to be set up but it is a fact that each of these countries will continue its struggle to remain or become a global actor in world politics by trying to shape the world around it.

The US , being the only global power today made its first step into Asia and is determined not to take that step back in the near future. Russia , as it has done since 1991, is aiming to reach its once-existing status in world politics by using its influence in post-Soviet region, by setting alliances and most importantly by trying to form hegemony in energy. China on the other hand, being the most rapidly developing country in the world, considers moves of the US in the Middle East and Eurasia as parts of a policy of stopping its growing power. Besides these three powers another newly emerging regional power, India is trying hard to have a say in Asian politics as part of its strategy to become a global actor in the future.

Turkey 's Asia policy, which has been reshaped since the end of the Cold War, will both cause challenges and provide opportunities within this conjuncture. It is easily noticeable that the excitement that occurred with the collapse of the Soviet Union could not be enough to make Turkey a major actor in the post-Soviet area. However, Caucasus and Central Asia continue to be regions of strategic importance for Turkey .

So, some questions appear unresolved. Can the power of the US power in the region that was physically felt in the region with the Afghanistan operation be permanent given the recent developments in South and Central Asia ? Will Russia gain back its global power that it lost with the collapse of the Soviet Union ? Can China transform its economic growth into a leadership in Asian politics? What can India do to become more powerful given its relationships with these powers? Finally, what is the position of Turkey in the power race in Asia and how should Turkey approach Caucasus and Central Asia ?

This paper tries to analyze the competition in Asia for power between the countries involved in recent years, Turkey 's policy towards Caucasus and Central Asia and find some clues for possible answers to these questions.

The US

The US having remained the only global power after the collapse of the Soviet Union turned its eyes to Asia after a short time. The end of the Cold War offered the US a new great area of influence. Thus, the 'superpower' decided that the post-Soviet region provided a great opportunity to replace its dominance with that of the former USSR . This would also be a good step to approach China . It is seen that the US considers that the way to sustain its global dominance in world politics is to win the power race in this continent. By this way, the control of the 'Heartland' of Halford Mackinder will also be

provided ^[1]. The particular regions where the US has concentrated to prepare the grounds for possible future developments appear as the Caspian Region and Central Asian countries. The fact that the 'the axis of evil' consists of three Asian countries also indicates the geography the US will have to deal with the most in the near future. The US , which carried the Iran nuclear issue to the agenda of international community after Afghanistan and Iraq operations, is trying to show that its influence in Asia will be permanent although it is the only Trans-Atlantic state within the power race. Moreover, if Pentagon's report released on February 2006 which assumes that China will be the only rival of the US in the

future ^[2] is taken into consideration, it is evident that the US does not want to stay behind in this race.

September 11 and the US Strategy towards Asia

International issues in the early 21st century have been mainly shaped by the terrorist attacks against the US in September 11, 2001 and its response to them in Asia and the Middle East. The US has been established in Asia with both operations to Afghanistan and Iraq and does not appear to leave the region very early despite the debates on whether the US armed forces in Iraq should be sent back home. The current problem about Iran's nuclear problem is another indicator that the US, being the only genuine global actor of contemporary world will not just watch what is going on from Washington but will try to be as much active as possible in Asian politics.

After 9/11, international community had to agree that global terrorism had become one of the most threatening factors against national, regional and global security. Therefore, the 'operation freedom' in Afghanistan was highly supported not

only by NATO members but also by one of the major policy makers in Eurasia, Russia^[3]. Another emerging regional power China did not voice against the operation to Afghanistan since Islamist-separatist movements were also perceived to be a serious danger for its internal security. Therefore, the US was sure that its moves in the Eurasian chessboard would be of strategic gain for it. The Russian-American partnership against international terrorism was concerned as a start of a new

international order that would give way to the continuation of American dominance in world politics^[4]. Afghanistan would be a gateway to Central Asia; a region where Russian influence has not yet been erased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. Its invaluable strategic position between India, Pakistan, Iran and China was also very attractive. Thus, the US presence in the region would be guaranteed with military presence and regime change in Afghanistan. The opening of Afghanistan, as US Assistant Secretary of State Richard Boucher put it, has transformed it from an obstacle separating Central Asia from South Asia into a bridge connecting the two. Furthermore, President Bush behaved in a quite realistic and pragmatic way getting the support of the authoritarian Karimov regime in Uzbekistan, which was already looking for opportunities to bloc Russian dominance and prevent an Islamist revolt headed by the Islamist Movement of Uzbekistan

^[5]. The two countries soon became "strategic partners" as declared by both Bush and Karimov. This partnership was strengthened in October 5, 2001 as the US had the right to the base in Karshi-Khanabad. Another strategic gain of the US in the region would be the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan. Russia and China did not seem to oppose the moves of the US and this agreement paved the way for the claims that the US would from now on be the only power in world politics since Russia and China decided to join the Western liberal-democratic bloc. However, this looked like the silent wait of giants.

One fact was missed in predictions about the future developments about US-led anti-terrorist activities. Russia and China were the Asian powers that did not support the Iraq war. In addition, the stronger opposition came from France and Germany, partners of the US in NATO. The three years of US presence in Iraq could not provide stability and democracy in the country although there have been elections and a referendum.

The Iraq operation is mainly considered as a part of the Greater Middle East Project that aims to 'democratize' over twenty countries from North Africa to Central Asia. Another strong idea discussed among scholars is that one of the long term goals of the operations conducted against terrorism is to benefit from the rich energy resources. Therefore, The US would reach the energy line in Caspian Region and Central Asia more easily and thus acquire a better position within "the New Great Game" taking place for the natural resources of the region. Moreover, it is claimed that the moves of the US in Central

Asian chessboard would be a great basis for better observing the developments in South Asia^[6].

Actually, the US had already been making efforts to be involved in Eurasian political agenda. Many countries from the former Soviet bloc joined the Partnership for Peace program of NATO that was established in 1994. The support for the establishment of GUUAM was also significant for the US. This way, US could have a stronger voice in the post Soviet region and balance the Russian influence. GUUAM, which comprised of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldavia, aimed to form a strong economic alliance by helping the economies of the members to be integrated into world economy and decrease the Russian pressure on each of them.

By the year 2003, some developments in Eurasia caused the emergence of an impression that the US was on the right track on its aim of democratizing the countries that are governed by authoritarian regimes. The first example was Georgia. The ex-communist Shevardnadze had to leave his presidency to the liberal Saakashvili, who had received his education in the US. Although it was claimed that there was no direct involvement of the USA in the 'Rose Revolution' process, there is no doubt that this revolution turned the direction of Georgian foreign policy from Russia to the West. This first reaction against the rule of Russian-backed leaders was followed by the 'Orange Revolution' in Ukraine in 2004. As a result, the first two letters of GUUAM, Georgia and Ukraine had changed their axis of politics with soft revolutions. The country that seemed to benefit in the short term out of this was inevitably the USA. The declared aim of the Ukrainian president Yushchenko to become a member of the EU and the efforts to make it also a NATO member have manifestly made the US advantageous.

Although things seemed to be going quite well for the US, its influence in Central Asia that began to be felt very highly after the regime change in Afghanistan did not last long. The decision of Islam Karimov that the US troops should leave his country "in six months" damaged American interest in the region very much. The authoritarian Karimov was exposed to serious criticisms and warnings of both the US government and human rights groups after his attitude towards the unrest in Andijan in spring 2005. After this event, Karimov being worried about losing his authority ended the strategic partnership between Uzbekistan and the US. Furthermore, Uzbekistan decided to cut its ties with GUUAM in May 2005. It is a big wound for the US to lose a country with such a geostrategic importance in Central Asia.

The US, whose troops had to leave the Karshi-Khanabad base after the note of Islam Karimov in July 2005, could not tolerate any other losses in the region. Therefore, it has cancelled or at least delayed its warnings and desires about democracy. The indicators of this are the elections in Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan that were held in 2005 and the invaluable position that Bush administration gave Kazakh President Nazarbayev during 2006.

US Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice's visit to Kazakhstan in October 2005 is very important in order to understand how the US has reshaped its foreign policy towards Central Asia as it lost Uzbekistan and Sino-Russian influence in the region has increased recently. Condoleezza Rice defined Kazakhstan as the "regional model" and praised it for its successful level of development since gaining independence in 1991. This was the first serious official indicator that the US was looking for a new ally in Central Asia. It should be noted that Kazakhstan is not as democratic and free as the US would desire it to be, however the US has no other options than ignoring the undemocratic situation in Kazakhstan in order to secure a better strategic place in the region. From then on, Kazakhstan has been regarded by the US as "a true leader" in Central Asia. Dick Cheney's visit to the Central Asian "leader" in May 2006 and Nazarbayev's visit to the US in September 2006 strengthened the "strategic partnership" between the two countries. Kazakhstan is important for the US also since it possesses vast natural resources. The US supports establishing new pipelines through new energy transportation routes

because it believes that diversification of energy transportation routes will increase stability and its own energy security [7]. Therefore, Kazakhstan is encouraged to realize flow of Kazakh oil through BTC pipeline and Kazakh gas through a trans-Caspian pipeline. However, although both leaders stress that the two countries are strategic partners, it does not seem likely that the US will be able to bring Kazakhstan into its orbit since the latter follows a very successful balancing policy between Russia, China and the US.

The most important development after Rice's visit to Kazakhstan was that the US Department of State reorganized its South Asia Bureau to include Central Asia. Formerly, Central Asia was under the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs. This new "Great Central Asia" policy primarily aims to give South Asian states access to the vast and rapidly-growing energy

resources in Central Asia [8]. This policy finally aims to break the growing Chinese influence in Central Asia by supporting India's desires to become a regional leader, decrease Russia's control over Central Asian energy resources and transportation routes, increase Afghanistan's economic welfare and hence make the US the dominant power in Asian politics.

As Boucher mentions, the objectives of the US in Central Asia are "ambitious", but it cannot afford failure anymore. The US has made a strategic mistake by thinking that its influence had increased in Eurasia with the support of the Central Asian countries to operation freedom and with the soft revolutions. This caused the US to lose Uzbekistan. Furthermore, it seems that the US could not predict the future counter moves of Russia and China in the future which did not oppose the Afghanistan operation. The US, thinking that the activity area and the unifying power of the Shanghai Cooperation

Organization was diminished as it was aimed at Central Asia [9], could not predict also that its own moves would result in the strengthening of the organization. It is claimed that the activities of Russia and/or radical Islamic groups will increase in the region in the absence of the US. It is also considered that the US, losing so much time and power in Iraq overlooked the developments in Central and South Asia. In addition to this, it is manifest that Russia-China partnership will not welcome further efforts of the US to shape the region alone. So, the US will have to increase its influence in countries that are of strategic significance to it and are in the main energy routes. However, this will not be easy if the chaos in Iraq, the opposing voices coming from Central Asia and China's becoming the center of power in Asia rapidly are together taken into consideration.

Russian Federation

Russian Federation, which passed through a stage of convalescence for a short time after the collapse of the Soviet Union, seems to have become a center of power again for its neighborhood region especially with the latest moves of President Vladimir Putin. Russia, with the aim of reestablishing its influence in the region after 1991, has signed many agreements, settled partnerships and by this way tried to control the newly independent former Soviet region. The reason behind these efforts is Russia's goal to become a super power again and lead the world from today's unipolar structure to a multipolar one. However, it is manifest that the US is the only global power in terms of economy, military and political influence. Therefore, Russia will behave more carefully in the near future and try to increase its influence in its former area of sovereignty. As a result, relations with the US seem to have softened in the last few years. However, it is an inevitable fact that Russia will try to look for opportunities to take the US, which has formed grounds to locate itself to the region after September 11, off from its 'near abroad'. Putin, who made the cooperation with China to come to a level that it had never

been so high before, also continues his support for the authoritarian leaders of the region [10]. Furthermore, energy policy that has become evident in the last period is one of the strongest-perhaps the strongest- means of Russian foreign policy.

According to all these, Vladimir Putin seems to be following a "multi-vectoral" foreign policy just as he mentioned in 2004 [11].

The aim of this multi-vectoral foreign policy is to make Russia advantageous in fields that are of priority for itself in a peaceful way.

The Near Abroad

Fifteen independent states emerged in the region after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991. The Commonwealth of Independent States, which was founded in December 1991 with the participation of the former Soviet states except Georgia [12]

and the Baltic countries, have always been of strategic importance for Russia. Russia has got a certain and clear influence on the community's establishment and gaining an identity [13]. The Russian Federation Foreign Policy Concept, which was renewed in June 28, 2000, gives a great importance to regional priorities. So, the 'Near Abroad' doctrine that was accepted in 1993 indicates what kind of a roadmap Russia should follow in its relations with the former Soviet republics that remained out of Russia's borders. Russia, being determined since 1993 that Central Asia, Caucasus, Ukraine and Belorussia are former parts that belong to it, decided that the main goal is not to make these regions and

countries be separate from it. It has made its strategy towards the region more understandable since that time.

September 11 and Russian-American Relations

It can be said that important changes have started to take place in Russia's near abroad mainly after the US established itself in Asia.

The first one of these changes was the unexpected rapprochement between Russia and the US [14]. At this level, cooperation against the emerging threats in the changing world order was important. Putin, giving a green light to the US on cooperation in battling with terrorism, connived at the super power's establishment in the region. This rapprochement caused comments that Russia and the US from then on would behave like strategic partners for the solutions of regional and global problems. Furthermore, it was a serious development for Russia that the countries in the region, which desired to protect themselves from the Russian dominance in economy and security, gave support for the Afghanistan operation.

The aim of the US to shift its geostrategic priorities to Eurasia in the 21st century and its plans on this direction causes political problems for the Russian elite. Other changes that Russia was dissatisfied with were, of course, the replacement of the former Soviet or pro-Russian leaders in Ukraine, Kyrgyzstan and Georgia with 'supporters of democracy'. Russia, according to many experts, could not keep its effectiveness in its near abroad and had to leave its place to the US as a result of the 'rose', 'orange' or 'tulip' revolutions. Yet, it was certain that Russia would not keep on being silent after these changes.

The rapprochement between Putin and Bush consists of an obligatory togetherness that both of the countries used in order to minimize threat perceptions and follow the aims that carry priority. For instance, Russia wanted to become advantageous in the Chechen problem by benefiting from the process that the US started under the name of 'battling terrorism'. With this unexpected rapprochement, Putin actually aimed to prepare the base for his future moves. As a matter of fact, the US could not get the support that it had expected from Russia in the Iraq war and Russia took action in order to regain the power that it lost in the former Soviet region.

Russia actually did not oppose the Iraq war very seriously and waited to see the reactions of France and Germany, who are the allies of the US in NATO. One can conclude from this that Russia acted rationally and put its relations with the US into order. Then, it started especially after 2003 and tried rapidly in 2004 to implement the policies that would enable Russia to

regain control in the near abroad in the near future [15]. The positive reappraisal role of Russia in Central Asia was strengthened with the signing of strategic partnership declaration with Uzbekistan in 2004 and the fact that Russia will unhesitatingly and undoubtedly support the authoritarian regional leaders whenever the threat of civil unrest emerged [16].

The strategic partnership Uzbekistan formed with the US did not last long and the country was forced to enter into Russian protection again because of the warnings of the West about the infringements of democracy. After the Andijan events in May 2005, Uzbekistan turned its face to Moscow almost completely. Russia has been the biggest power to support the country, which was isolated by the West, after the events. The relations between the two have reached such a positive level that it had never been so in the past. Russia and Uzbekistan conducted a joint military exercise in September 19, 2005.

Furthermore, Russian Gazprom Company signed a large deal in Uzbekistan on September 27, 2005 [17]. The security agreement that Putin and Karimov signed together in November 14, 2005 is the most important development between Russia and Uzbekistan in the last years. Moreover, Uzbekistan joined the Eurasian Economic Community that is led by Russia on January 25, 2006. The joining of Uzbekistan to this organization, which consists of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belorussia and Russia, have paved the way for comments that Uzbekistan had sworn to be under Russian

command [18]. Finally, in August 2006, Uzbekistan signed the agreement that made it a Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) member again after 1999, in which it had decided to withdraw from membership.

These developments in security and economic issues indicate how fast Russia benefits from the decreasing influence of the US in the region. Russia is preparing the correct substructure to regain its power in the 'near abroad' and making the correct moves at the first necessary opportunity.

Stronger Organizations in the Near Abroad

Despite Russia's efforts to increase its influence in the entire former Soviet area, it is manifest that it cannot reach the objective that it desires. Georgia and Ukraine seem to be the two countries that Russia have lost in the near abroad with the 'democratic' revolutions. Russia, being aware that it has lost its former influence within the CIS, turns towards more realistic formations. The CIS is no more totally under Russian control with rapprochements of some members to the West and the aim of some members to join the NATO. Because of this, it is understood that Russia will try new unions or

organizations with more loyal countries instead of trying to control all the CIS [19]. With the developments in the last years, it has become clear that Russia will try to do this through the Collective Security Treaty Organization and/or the Eurasian Economic Community (EEC).

One of the means that Russia developed in order to control the countries in its near abroad is focusing on security issues [20].

There are still Russian military bases in many countries that consider that the maintenance of their security, to a certain extent, depend on the Russian presence in the region. These countries are Armenia, Belorussia, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Moldova and Ukraine. Russia has started to make moves in order to make its influence be felt by the CIS countries, especially after the US increased its power in the 'near abroad' after September 11 with its military presence and

the colored revolutions. It can be said that Russia has been successful in this direction.

It is understood that Russia's perception of national security does not only include Russian Federation's internal security,

but also the territories of the countries in the near abroad^[21]. CSTO that has been operating since September 2003 is very important for Russian and Central Asian security. Russia is trying to transform the CSTO into an effective organization that

is perceived as a strong international and multi-functional body^[22]. Russia gained an air force base in Kant of Kyrgyzstan in 2002 just 50 kilometers away from the US base in Manas. Moreover, if the fact that Russia has gained another military base in Tajikistan in 2004 is taken into account, it will be realized that Russia has been trying to settle bases nearby the regions where there is American military existence. The Organization has got stronger with Uzbekistan as a new member after the decision taken in last August. Becoming a member of the CSTO in August 2006, Uzbekistan made the change in its foreign policy that has taken place within the last two years more clear. Uzbekistan's membership in both the EEC and the CSTO is a success of Russia against the US in Central Asia. Furthermore, it seems that Putin has followed a very clever strategy on Kyrgyzstan by not letting this country follow a US-oriented foreign policy such as Ukraine and Georgia after the Tulip Revolution in March 2005. Kyrgyz President Bakiyev made his first official visit to Russia in April 2006 and the two leaders agreed on the expansion of the Russian air base in Kant. Moreover, two countries held joint anti-terrorist drill in October 2006 inside Kyrgyz borders.

Further steps could be taken about organizing common Russian-Central Asian military forces. These troops may become the Peace Force of the CSTO and some plans can be made to prepare the troops for peace operations in Asia mainly against Islamist movements. There are already some efforts of Minister of Defense Sergei Ivanov to make CSTO take part in the security of Afghanistan. Furthermore, Putin said on January 31, 2006 that Uzbekistan should not be let become another

Afghanistan^[23]. These words indicate how serious the security concept of Russia towards the region is.

The second initiative through which Russian influence in the near abroad has been increasing is the EEC. The fundamental goal of EEC is to reach a customs union by the end of 2008. The second concrete goal of EEC is to create a common energy market between the member states. There is no doubt that the second goal can be best understood as a part of Russia's policy of energy hegemony that has become manifest in the last two years.

It is becoming clearer that EEC and CSTO are mutually reinforcing. It is even claimed that the CSTO will be transformed

into the politico-military wing of the EEC^[24]. As a result, Russian strategy on these two organizations should be carefully observed in order to make predictions about the future of Russian influence in its near abroad.

Energy: Strategy for Becoming a Leader

Russia has been looking for ways to become a more effective actor in both regional and global politics since 1991. Russia, having understood that it no more possesses the strategic importance of the Soviet Union with the end of the Cold War, chose energy as the means to become a regional and then a global leader again. Actually, it had to choose energy. As Vladimir Putin stated on December 22, 2005 at the Russian Security Council meeting, the only area in which Russia can

become the leader of the world in the short and medium term seems to be energy^[25]. The Ukraine gas crisis have justified how much Russia is important for Europe and Turkey as well as its near abroad. After the crisis, a view occurred throughout the world that Russia uses energy as a means to impose its own policies. Georgian President Saakashvili's

claims after a pipeline problem that Russia uses energy as a political card should also be taken into consideration^[26]. Therefore, any kind of development that Russia intentionally or unintentionally causes has great effects on the region.

Putin's declaration that world-standard prices should be demanded from the former Soviet republics, which buy the Russian gas for very cheap, will either make these countries remain at Russian axis or cause them to turn their faces to different powers. Russia can provide strengthening of the already advantageous position of Gazprom in Uzbekistan in

return for political protection to Islam Karimov^[27]. One of the last ports where Russia is playing the energy card on the Eurasian chessboard is Turkmenistan. With the Russian-Turkmen cooperation, Russia has aimed to be advantageous towards Ukraine, which causes discomfort in energy. As it can be remembered, Ukraine had to increase the amount of the Turkmen gas that it bought during the gas crisis in last December 2005. Putin is claimed to have demanded from Niyazov

that Turkmenistan will not become an alternative for Ukraine during Niyazov's visit to Moscow in January 23^[28]. Furthermore, it appears that Niyazov did not approve the construction of the Trans-Caspian pipeline, which is desired by the West since it would disturb Russian interests in the region. The pipelines that were decided to be built between Russia and Germany, Russia and Greece, and the Blue Stream project with Turkey also provide Russia a very large area to use its energy card.

There is still debate on the Siberia pipeline with China. It is guessed that the topic of the talks between George Bush and

Hu Jintao during Bush's visit to China in November 2005 was Russia^[29]. Hence, Putin's visit to Japan during the same days is not a coincidence. Japan is another country which wants to bring Russian gas to its borders with a pipeline passing through Siberia. Energy cooperation was the most important topic of Putin's visit to China in March 2006. Two sides signed important documents that are focusing on exportation of Russian natural gas to China.

As it is seen in these examples, Russia prefers to be fast in the energy politics. With petroleum and natural gas agreements, many countries from Central Asia, East Asia, Black Sea region and Europe have engaged their energy politics to Russia. Some of these countries have taken the support of Russia against the West. If it is considered that especially Central Asian

countries are satisfied with Russia's policies, it can be said that it will be easier for Russia to increase its control on the countries in the region and its importance in global scale.

China

China, whose economy became the fifth biggest after the US, Japan, Germany and Great Britain with a growth rate of 9.9% in 2005, seems to sustain its economic success in the foreseeable future [30]. China, profiting from the effects of globalization, has become one of the most influential powers in Asia in recent years. China, by taking part in cooperation organizations in the continent, tries to observe and play a major role in almost any kind of developments in Asia. According to a report of the Pentagon issued in February 2006, China will be the only genuine rival of the US in the future in global scale [31]. In fact, China seems to become a global power within the next decades if its economic development and military activities are taken into consideration.

China, being one of the five permanent members of the UN Security Council, is very sensitive about security issues around it. Having delayed its territorial disputes with India and solved them with Russia, China has had the opportunity to develop quite good relations with its neighbors in recent years. Therefore, it can be said that China is trying to prevent any kind of events that would slow down its economic growth, endanger its security and consequently detain it from becoming a global power.

The common view is that China's possible access to a significant place in global politics will not be a development that would be desired either by the US or Russia. However, China is eager to show that it is able to affect international decisions such as the Iran nuclear dispute and fight against terrorism. It was declared in the 16th congress of Chinese Communist Party in November 2001 that, China just like Russia is not pleased with today's unipolar world and that a multipolar world would provide the most suitable conditions for regional and global security [32]. For now, Russia and China are aware that they cannot alone undermine the dominance of the US in world politics and thus these two powers are in a conjunctural partnership. Undoubtedly, China has a great significance for Southeast Asian countries. China also established quite positive relations with the Central Asian countries because of its threat perceptions and growing need for energy in the last few years. This way, China can have a greater say in Asian politics.

China, thinking that problems in Asian countries such as India, Pakistan, North Korea and Iran should be solved by an Asian power, aims primarily to reach leadership in Asia. Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which is used as a means to enable this aim, has also been increasing its importance and influence in the last few years.

Recent Moves: Energy, Security and Regional Leadership

It is evident that China will need more energy support in the 21st century in order to continue its efforts to become a super power. According to the International Energy Agency, China will have to increase its oil imports from 1.9 million barrels of today to around 10 million barrels a day in 2030 [33]. China, acquiring the 65% of its oil from the Middle East perceives the presence of the US in the region especially in Iraq as a threat. Therefore, China's desires that the role of the UN in reconstruction process of Iraq should increase and that the use of Iraq's natural resources should be left to administration of Iraqi civilians is likely to strengthen [34]. That's because China considers the issue both in terms of energy security and about its rising position against the US.

China, trying to decrease its dependence on the Middle East in terms of energy has turned its direction to Central Asian resources in order to diversify its energy imports. The most important country in this region for China, for now and in the short term will be Kazakhstan. Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) bought Kazakhstan's PetroKazakhstan in October 2005 for a 4.2 billion price. Moreover, it is of strategic significance for China that the Atasu-Alashankou pipeline of around 1000 kilometers that will deliver Kazakh oil to China was inaugurated in 15th December, 2005. By this way, China can also develop better relations with Kazakhstan which has taken strong steps to become the leader of Central Asia. Turkmenistan is the second most important Central Asian country for the future energy plans of China. During Turkmen President Niyazov's visit to China in April 2006, two countries signed an energy deal of 30 years which will enable the flow of 50 billion cubic meters per year of Turkmen gas to China starting from 2009 [35]. Indicators make it clear that China will replace Japan as the number one oil importer within the next few decades. Hence, the strategic importance of Central Asia and Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan in particular, will increase in the near future.

It will also be one of the possible developments that China will pay more attention on growing its strategic influence in Central Asia, the door that opens the road to the West for it [36]. There are several identifiable reasons that make Central Asia and the states that are involved within the so called region inevitably important for China's future in terms of its threat perceptions. The problem of Uighurs in Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region or Eastern Turkestan as the region is historically named and the possible help that can be given for Uighur separatists from Central Asian countries are strong enough to make China afraid of the developments around its Western borders. Secondly, The Manas Base of the US in Kyrgyzstan is very close to the Chinese border. It is even claimed by some analysts that China can join the base race in

Central Asia that now takes place between Russia and the US [37].

Chinese President Hu Jintao's visit to Laos, India and Pakistan just after the APEC Summit in Vietnam in last November is another signal that China is seriously trying to increase its influence in the continent.

An important issue that enabled China to raise its voice in global politics because of its right to veto in the UN Security

Council is the Iran nuclear problem. Although it seems that China agreed to act with the other veto holders according to the report that was issued from the IAEA, losing a major ally in Asia will be very costly for China. China provides 14% of its oil from Iran and there are strong ties between the two countries in both industry and commerce. What is more important is that a possible attack of the US to Iran would be a highly undesired situation since Iran and its neighboring region is inside the national interest and security perception of China. China is acting according to the existing conjuncture now, however claiming that China from now on can be persuaded in issues like this easily or that it will side with the US may be a very early mistake.

Shanghai Cooperation Organization: An Anti-American Bloc?

There is a noticeable increase in the efforts of the states that claim to become the superpowers of Asia in the future to base their actions on an international or a regional cooperation organization. At this point, SCO possesses a quite significant position in Asian politics. The organization, which is observed to be standing on its feet with initiatives of China, is also preparing the basis for the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. The forum called the 'Shanghai Five' was founded in April 1996 with the participation of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan in order to find a permanent solution to territorial disputes between China and the former Soviet republics. It is no secret that the fundamental goal of the organization, which transformed into the SCO in 2001 with the membership of Uzbekistan, is to reduce the US influence in Asia and make the countries of the region side with Sino-Russian partnership against the US. In April 1996 moreover, Russia and China for the first time declared their "strategic partnership", which has been strengthened through the SCO for the last 11 years.

Both China and Russia has interests on both the organization and the region. China aims to reach the energy resources of the Caspian Region, approach the Middle East, widen the markets of Chinese commodities and finally form an economic hegemony in the region. On the other hand, Russia's membership in a more coherent and stronger SCO carries many advantages. If the organization can get more mature in the next five or ten years, global policy makers will begin to think of

Russia not as a single player, but as a partner in a large economic and political bloc with growing influence in world politics [38]

. The common aim is to reach a multipolar world. It has also been aimed to use the SCO to end the rivalry and the threat potential between China and Russia.

It is understood from the declaration on the establishment of the SCO that the fundamental mission of the organization is to function as a regional security mechanism [39]

. Firstly, China has solved its territorial disputes with Russia and the other member neighbors. Secondly, the organization has been a means to stop the support that is assumed to be given for the separatist Uighur groups from Central Asian countries. Just like China, Russia also has tried to find regional support for the Chechen problem by using the SCO. It is, thus, noticed that Russia and China have come to terms on Islamist/separatist movements.

Islamist movements are a threat also for the Central Asian countries. Moreover, the organization is a good way for the Central Asian member states of balancing the Russian influence on their security, economy and foreign policy with another power. The establishment of a center for anti-terrorism in Bishkek (moved to Tashkent in 2004) and a permanent secretariat, the decision on a common flag for the organization and the growing cooperation among the members in regional security [40]

has paved the way for views claiming that a NATO-like organization is emerging in Asia. The importances of SCO for Russia and China have increased after the September 11 since these two powers were afraid of losing their influence in the region. The fact that there is a serious emphasis on anti-terror activities within the organization is an indicator that Russia and China are both trying to give a message to the US and to receive the support of the international community. By this way, it will be shown that the US and its allies are not/will not be the only center dealing with terrorism, which has become a global issue.

The Anti-Americanism in SCO has reached its top level in the Astana Summit in July 2005. At the summit, it was demanded from the US to set a calendar to leave the bases on "SCO lands". It is interesting and important to see that the countries,

where there exist US military bases, are named as "SCO lands" [41]. As a result, the US had to leave the base in Karshi-Khanabad of Uzbekistan after that decision.

SCO has become the biggest regional organization of Asia with Mongolia (2004), Pakistan, India and Iran (2005) getting the observer status in the organization. Also, it is important that the population of the territory it covers, if the observers are included, reaches 3 billions.

The China-Russia military exercise named "Peace Mission 2005", which was conducted in August 2005, is a clear warning to the US. With this exercise between the powers of the SCO, the message that the security and stability of Asia can only be

provided by Asian powers was sent to the US [42]. The assumption that the common operation in the exercise was done

with the 'authorization of the UN' can be considered as another warning for the US [43]. With Peace Mission 2005, it was also aimed to make the authoritarian leaders of Central Asia, who are afraid of experiencing serious unrests within their borders further trust the Sino-Russian partnership. As Russian Defense Minister Sergei Ivanov said, the six member

countries of the organization will conduct joint anti-terror exercises inside Russian borders in 2007 [44]. It was later announced by Russian officials that the CSTO will also join the "Peace Mission Rubezh 2007". This will be another manifestation of strengthening Russian-Chinese strategic partnership which is directed against presence of the US in there area of interest.

According to experts, the June 2006 summit once more justified that the SCO operates on the basis of strong opposition to

the United States in the regional geopolitical contest. The Declaration on the 5th Anniversary of SCO, not interestingly, puts emphasis on international law, the capability of the United Nations on global issues and double standards implemented by the US. Moreover, a clear warning is made to the US by emphasizing that democracy should not be exported and diversity of civilization and model of development should be respected.

SCO now has got two members who are also members of the UN Security Council. If India and Pakistan also increase their status to permanent membership, the number of nuclear weapon holders in the organization will be four. Despite all the positive developments in SCO in recent years, it is not clear to see whether the organization will be a basis of partnership for the nuclear powers of today and super power candidates of the future or this togetherness will end up early.

It is difficult now to guess how much the partnership between China and Russia that was formed against common threat of the US will endure. However, it is manifest that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has reached a bigger capacity and power than was aimed in the beginning. That is because the security problems in the region were so serious and the USA located in Asia with the war against terrorism.

There are also strong claims that the SCO was established by Russia and China in order to control each other's growing capabilities. According to this view, it will be possible that these two powers form strategies on their ways to become a global power that threaten the other. This can really be one of the aims of the two countries, but it is evident that the SCO is mainly targeted against the influence of the US. If the decisions that the organization has made and the implementations up to now are taken into consideration, it seems that the future of SCO is very highly dependent on the actions and capabilities of the US.

India

India's economy has been growing very fast in recent years and it seems that it will keep this growth in next years. Indian economy grew above 8% in years 2003 and 2004 and it is estimated that a growth of around 7% will be achieved in 2006

similar to that of 2005^[45]. The role of India in Asian politics will inevitably rise in the near future since it is both economically growing and it tries to strengthen its military, economy and nuclear capability with serious agreements with Russia and the US. If its desire for a multipolar world is also taken into consideration, it can be said that India will become more popular in regional agenda. India's ties with the US and Russia will make its position much more strategic within the power race in Asia. Traditional Sino-Indian rivalry is another issue that will become more critical in next few years.

There has been an observable softening in the relations between the USA and India in recent years. It was justified in President Bush's visit to South Asian countries in early March 2006 that the geostrategic significance of India for the US is very high. The nuclear deal signed between Bush and Singh during the visit will help politically cement the US-India strategic relationship viewed as critical for ensuring America's strategic and economic strength in the region in the near future^[46].

On the other hand, the deal will enable India to develop its nuclear arsenal easily without restriction. The rise of China as economic and military superpower will eventually challenge American global dominance^[47]. Therefore, an investment in India's future will be indispensable to the US. This is accepted to be the fundamental reason why the US overlooks India's efforts to enhance its nuclear program although it has not even signed the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty. It is also another important indicator of India's potential aggressive foreign policy that is by some estimates the world's biggest arms importer^[48]. India has strengthened its defense systems quite seriously with agreements with the US on air missile systems, F-16 aircraft and other sophisticated army equipment^[49].

It was mentioned earlier in this paper that the US has reshaped its foreign policy towards Central and South Asia. The nuclear agreement signed in March and the reshaping of US foreign policy towards the region last year together mean that The Bush administration is committed to support India to become a "major power". India's importance for the US was reassured in early December as the US House of Representatives approved the Indo-US nuclear cooperation bill.

Although the relations are good now, the US is manifestly dissatisfied with India's ties with Iran. American-Indian interests intersect at anti-terrorism and the stability of Persian Gulf but the fact that India has sustained its energy cooperation with Iran just like China is problematic for the US. It is claimed that the US will help India more on nuclear

energy in order to make it give up the Iran-Pakistan-India oil pipeline project^[50]. Furthermore, Pakistan's becoming a de-facto ally of the US on anti-terrorism after September 11 may push India away from it. It should also be taken into account that the tolerance of the US for Indian nuclear plans may push Sino-Pakistani nuclear ties and thus negatively affect the balance of power in the region, which would result in an increase the possibility of a friction between China and the US.

Geopolitical struggle in Central Asia stands to become more complicated as India has moved to establish an air base in Ayni in Tajikistan^[51].

The Ayni base is a clear manifestation of Indian Central Asia policy that has become more apparent in the last one year. Moreover, accession to Central Asian energy resources is vitally important for India. The energy resources of the Caspian Sea and especially the Trans-Afghan pipeline project, which is planned to deliver Turkmen gas from Afghanistan to India is of strategic significance to India. The threat of Islamic terror is another issue why India has to take care of Central Asia. It appears that it will have as much support from the US as it can in its Central Asia policy since the US tries to balance the increasing Russian-Chinese influence in the region with a new but a major power.

India's relations with the traditional ally Russia is as good as it was in the past. In January 2007 Russian President Vladimir Putin made his fourth his visit to New Delhi since taking office. On the other hand, India's only partner in defensive matters is not the US. Russia is India's largest military partner since the Cold War times. According to a statement from

Russia Ministry of Defense, the officials of the two countries are working on a defense agreement of 10 billion dollars. The energy cooperation between the two partners will also continue. One item on the agenda for Putin's visit, Indian

officials have said, is a proposed India-Russia joint venture to explore for oil in Siberia [53]. Furthermore, India's becoming an observer of the SCO and the declaration that the year 2008 will be celebrated as the year of Russia in India are important developments. The Indian-Russian cooperation has to continue as long as both countries need the diplomatic, military and economic support of each other.

Sino-Indian relations are not as positive as India's relations with the US and Russia. Since the Cold War, these two countries have perceived each other as a threat. China's energy and military cooperation and partnership with Pakistan have been disturbing for India. Therefore, it is thought that the only way for India to be respected by China is to accelerate

economic growth and provide the modernization of military [54]. On the other hand, although there is a tension between India and China, the growing interdependence in economy forces these two to cooperate. China will be the biggest commercial partner of India in the next few years. The commercial capacity between the two countries is expected to reach

15 billion dollars in 2007 [55]. India's becoming an observer in SCO is important also for China. There has also been important progress in solving the Sino-Indian territorial dispute. As a result, there are both positive and negative aspects of the relations between India and China. It can be said that these two powers will not easily determine whether the other one is a partner or a threat for itself.

India's membership in the SCO can be good for itself since that will enable it to join the Russian-Chinese partnership in Asian politics. India may consider that it has to join this strategic alliance in order not to be away from developments in the region. India will try to benefit from the Sino-Russian strategic alliance in Asia, but it is too difficult to claim that the once expected Russia-China-India strategic zone can come into existence in the near future.

India, having benefited from American foreign policy towards South and Central Asia especially after September 11, has enlarged its strategic area of interest to Western and Central Asia [56]. Indo-Russian alliance is another factor that increases the possibility of success for India. Consequently, in the near future, India will try hard to gain an important position in entire Asian and global politics. This can be noticed from its multi-dimensional and ambitious foreign policy.

Turkey

Turkey's relations with Asia are mainly focused on the Caucasus and Central Asia that are together preferred to be called Eurasia. In the first few years after the collapse of the Soviet Union, Turkey endeavored to expand relations with the newly independent Turkic-speaking states of Caucasus and Central Asia. As it is stated in the website of Turkey's Ministry of

Foreign Affairs, the independence of Central Asian countries gave Turkish Foreign Policy a new dimension [57]. On the other hand, the concept of a 'Turkic world from the Adriatic Sea to the Chinese Wall' started to be used by politicians and experts especially during the early 90s. It is considered that the main aim of Turkey was not creating an alternative for the

West, but strengthening Turkey's political position against it by acquiring new brother nations in Eurasia [58]. By this way, Turkey could have felt stronger in Western structures. Therefore, with its secular-democratic structure, Turkey tried to be a model for the Turkic states and the others in the Caucasus and Central Asia.

Turkey helped the Turkic states to strengthen their administrative, political, educational and security structures. Nearly 20 thousand students from the Caucasus and Central Asia have studied in Turkey since 1991. Furthermore, the Turkish International Cooperation Agency (TİKA) was established in 1992 mainly to provide technical assistance to these countries. Heads of State Summits of Turkic-Speaking Countries were held eight times from 1992 to until 2006. Turkey also enabled these newly independent states to join international organizations and programs such as the Council of Europe, ECO, OSCE and NATO's Partnership for Peace. As for financial support, the Turkish Eximbank extended important amounts of loans to

companies doing business in the region [59].

However, Turkey's attempts to expand its influence in the Turkic World could not be as successful as it was desired. The reasons of this can be given as follows; most importantly, Turkey lacked the financial means and resources to play a

substantial economic and political role in the region [60]. It should also be mentioned that Turkey lacked the sufficient academic infrastructure to deal with the newly emerging reality in the East just after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Also, the internal developments and traditions peculiar to each of the newly independent states caused them to think that the secular democratic Western model, the so-called 'Turkish Model', was difficult to implement and consequently Turkey may have lost its attraction. Similarly, Turkey may not have possessed the initial excitement towards the region in the late 90s. Moreover, within few years after gaining independence, the Turkic States attracted attention of major powers such as the US, China and the Russian Federation; and that of other regional powers such as Iran and India. This increase of attention from other states gave the Turkic states a chance to widen their foreign policy perspectives and caused Turkey to have a smaller say in regional politics.

Moreover, it became clear within some years after the Turkic states became independent that the expectations of Turkey and those of these states hardly overlapped. The romantic discourse that became very serious among Turkish politicians and public opinion was seen to be insufficient in order to strengthen the ties with those states. So, it was understood that a strategy which is not basically aimed at national interest could not become successful.

Finally, the Russian influence in the region has shown that these countries had to cooperate with Russia more than with

Turkey . Russia having recovered itself from the effects of the peaceful divorce, became the dominant actor in regional politics with the 'near abroad' strategy after 1993. The Russian population in these republics, strong economic ties and the dominance of Russian language helped Russia to keep its influence in Central Asia and Caucasus . Russia 's threat perceptions about Turkey 's new role in the region were also effective on both Turkey and the Turkic states. Such a perception that Turkey desired to become the 'big brother' of the new independent states occurred among the leaders although Turkey did not follow such a policy. Furthermore, one of the most important obstacles that has prevented and still continues to prevent Turkey from having more fruitful relations with the Turkic states is that these countries are still led by autocratic leaders who take their powers from former Soviet structures. For this reason Turkey has had difficulty in choosing between these regimes and the democratic opposition ^[61] . These former Soviet structures have inevitably made the Turkic states dependent on Russia to a certain extent.

Although the economic indicators say that the commercial relations have been rapidly growing in the last few years, they are not at the level that Turkey needs in order to have a greater say in Eurasian politics. Turkey 's commerce with Central Asian countries could reach a total of 1.7 billion dollars in 2004.

One dimension which increases the geostrategic significance of Eurasia for Turkey is energy. Turkey , having learnt a lot from the Ukraine gas crisis of December 2005, will have to try harder to decrease its dependence on Russia and increase diversity in energy supply. The Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline that was inaugurated in May 2005 carries strategic importance for Turkey not only for energy but for political cooperation between Turkey and the countries involved. It is manifest that the BTC, as well as the gas pipeline projects with Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan would enable the newly independent post-Soviet states decrease their dependence on Russia and strengthen their ties with Turkey . It has also been an accelerating factor for Turkey 's aim of becoming an energy terminal between Caspian region and Europe on which there has been evident support of the US . As the former President Demirel mentions, the BTC could not be easily realized without the support and help of the US ^[62] . It appears that Turkey will focus more on the Caspian region because of the growing importance of energy security.

Another important issue is the democratic development levels of these countries. If it is considered that the administrative structures have recently been getting stronger, waiting for serious democratic developments in the near future will not be a realistic approach. Thus, Turkey should both encourage the strengthening of democracy in the region and avoid harming the relations causing serious reactions of the present leaders. This does not mean that Turkey should support the authoritarian and even autocratic leaders but it should avoid being ignored in the region. Furthermore, it would be a sound policy trying to give up the leader-based policy towards these countries and giving more weight to relations with the civil society. Such an approach will enable Turkey to strengthen the cultural ties with the peoples of the region and decrease any negative effect emerging from possible "colorful revolutions", changes in administrative structures or political crises with the present leaders ^[63] . Civil society ties can help the strengthening of democracy and the consciousness of citizenship within the Turkic countries. If another state tries to increase such ties, it can be perceived as part of a strategy to establish hegemony in the region; however Turkey 's historical and cultural ties can prevent the emergence of such misperceptions.

The 10th Turkic States and Communities Friendship, Brotherhood and Cooperation Meeting in September 2006 and the 8th Turkic-speaking States Heads of States Summit in November 2006 helped a renewal in mutual relations. However, the facts that Uzbekistan did not attend the summit and that Turkmenistan has not been represented by its president in the summits since 2000 are serious challenges for Turkey 's regional policy. The summits should be carried on in the following years and all the leaders should be persuaded to attend. Although these summits do not seem to possess an important instrumental significance for Turkish foreign policy now, they can play a role for Turkey 's future prestige.

Trying to act according to the results of today's conjuncture may be a good strategy for Turkey to be followed in the short term. It is seen that Russia , China and the US have focused on the security problems in the region since they also affect their own securities. So, Turkey can try to increase cooperation in anti-terrorism with the Central Asian countries by providing them information, economic and military support. Turkey 's own experience on internal security can be beneficial also for the Turkic countries.

It is unclear whether the 21st century will be a Turkic century as the 8th President Özal claimed; however it is manifest that there has been a great deviation from this pronounced goal, which obviously could not be realized. In fact, that will be of no use for Turkey to develop such an ambitious and groundless discourse. Instead of envisaging the 21st century as belonging to Turks, Turkey should follow a realistic, rational and well-designed strategy by evaluating its economic capacity, cultural and historical ties with the region, the domestic situations inside the states that are within Turkish domain of interest and Turkey 's relations with Russia as well as ongoing Russian influence in the region. Although it does not seem possible that Turkey can join the competition between major powers in the Caucasus and Central Asia , still it has a potential of affecting the future of the region. Romanticism emerging from Turkey 's historical and cultural ties with Central Asia and Caucasus should be balanced with a realistic foreign policy strategy based on national interest and the Caucasus and Central Asia should continue to be considered as two regions consisting of states equal to Turkey . Such a strategy can also give Turkey the opportunity of playing the Eurasian card in the Balkans, the Middle East and Cyprus .

Conclusion

Asian politics seems to have much more significance than ever for the world in the foreseeable future. Growing competition between major powers will shape the continent very much. There will be both cooperation and rivalry between both small and great powers. The USA , being the only global power, will have to pay more attention to the processes in Central, South and East Asia . It is a significant question to be answered whether the USA will try to encircle China in order to have a permanent power in the continent just as the latter claims or be more tolerant to the acts of the future's superpower. Russia on the other hand will try to benefit from each failure of the USA in Asia and become a superpower again by using energy

as a political instrument. The new star of the 21st century, China, having left the territorial disputes aside, will concentrate on transforming its economic growth to a leadership in world politics. The strategic partnership between Russia and China, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will be very important for the security, economic and political issues in the continent. India, another emerging power in Asia, will also try to gain a safe position within the competition and will be more prestigious than ever. Fight against terrorism; struggle for finding reliable allies or “strategic partners”, decreasing factors that threaten national security and energy security will be the common goals all the mentioned states will continue to pursue. Within this conjuncture, Turkey, being a country that has historical, linguistic, religious and ethnic connections with especially Central Asia and Caucasus should support the development of democracy in the region, stiffen its energy security, and develop civil society ties with the region.

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