

REGIME SECURITY vs. IMPERIALIST GEOPOLITICS: WHICH FACTORS DOMINATE THE DECISION MAKING OF THE CENTRAL ASIAN STATES?

REJİM GÜVENLİĞİNE KARŞI YAYILMACI JEOPOLİTİK: ORTA ASYA DEVLETLERİNİN KARAR ALMA SÜRECİNİ HANGİ FAKTÖRLER ETKİLEMEKTEDİR?

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ABSTRACT

Following the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, powerful actors acting according to an imperialist geopolitical approach, such as Russia, China, the United States, European Union, Turkey and Iran, pursued a foreign policy aimed at dominating the regional states. However, the items on the agendas of Central Asian leaders were quite different from those of the powerful states. In the first years of their independence, the leaders promised to adopt democratic reforms. But in the course of time they constructed authoritarian regimes. After reinforcing their power over the political mechanisms, the leaders gave priority to the preservation of their regimes, or in other words maintenance of their posts, while determining the domestic and foreign policies. The leaders, acting in view of these concerns, have avoided close relations with the countries who threatened or criticized their regimes, and in order to preserve their regimes they were not reluctant to be in contact with the rival great power(s). In this respect, they have objected to democratization in their countries, and by keeping in mind the balances among different clans within their countries they have spent their time so as to protect their posts. In the meantime, the privileged clans have also supported the existing policies of the leaders.

Key Words: Central Asian States, Foreign Policy, Authoritarian Regimes, Russia and USA.

ÖZET

1991 yılında Sovyetler Birliği'nin yıkılmasıyla birlikte, yayılcı jeopolitik kuramlara göre hareket eden Rusya, Çin, ABD, Avrupa Birliği, Türkiye ve İran gibi ülkeler, bölge ülkeleri üzerinde hakimiyet kurma politikası güttüler. Ancak Orta Asyalı liderlerin gündemleri, bu devletlerin dış politika yaklaşımlarından oldukça farklıydı. Bağımsızlıklarının ilk yıllarında, demokratikleşme yönünde vaatlerde bulunan liderler, zamanla otoriter rejimlerini inşa ettiler. Siyasi mekanizma üzerindeki hakimiyetlerini pekiştiren liderler, iç ve dış politikayı belirlerken, önceliği kendi rejimlerini veya diğer bir ifadeyle kendi makamlarını korumaya verdiler. Bu düşünceler ışığında hareket eden liderler, kendi rejimlerini tehdit eden ülkeler ile sıcak ilişkiler kurmaktan sakındılar ve kendi rejimlerini muhafaza etmek için rakip büyük güçler ile temas içerisinde olmaktan çekinmediler. Halen daha bölge liderleri, önceliği kendi rejimlerine vermektedir. Bu bağlamda, demokratikleşme adımlarına karşı çıkan liderler, yine de kabileler arası dengeleri gözeterek, varlıklarını sürdürmeye çalışmaktadır. Liderlerin bu politikalarına ise, kendisine ayrıcalıklar tanıdığı kabilelerde destek vermektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Orta Asya Devletleri, Dış Politika, Otoriter Rejimler, Rusya, ABD.

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Introduction

After the collapse of the former Soviet Union in 1991, in favor of the Mackinder's Heartland approach, some Western and Russian scholars as well as politicians have evaluated the regional political developments within Central Asia in conformity with the zero-sum game mentality. For them, future foreign policy orientations of the regional states would determine the possible structure of the post-Cold War international system. Especially for the American scholars, if they chose to have close relations with Turkey, they would become pro-Western regimes and Russia's influence in the region would be decreased. But on the other hand, if they adopted the Iranian regime, the Islamic political systems and radical Islamic ideologies would dominate the Central and South Asia areas.

Until 1995, in its foreign policy, the United States gave priority to the Russia's and other former Soviet Republics' nuclear capabilities as well as the political and economic reform attempts in Russia. Meanwhile, Russian Atlanticist politicians, for example Andrey Kozirev, while erasing their concerns about the Western threat, spent their energies to adopt a free market economy and semi-democratic political system in their own country. In spite of optimistic expectations of the Gorbachev regime, Russia went through serious economic and social difficulties in which living standards of the Russians sharply deteriorated as a result of the shock therapy policy.

Thus, the Atlanticist Russian politicians lost their power in the Russian politics and the Eurasian nationalist group won the elections in 1995. Then, they dominated the governmental institutions, particularly the Duma. With the encouragement of their nationalist concerns based upon Alexander Dugin's geopolitical foresights, Russia declared that the Central Asia was (and still is) its backyard, being its Near Abroad. On the other hand, due to the commercial and political interests of the American government as well as the American oil companies, the Clinton administration prepared a new Caspian Sea policy formulated within the framework of power politics. At the end, from the mid-1990s, the great powers, Russia, China and the United States, including Turkey and Iran, have reviewed the developments in Central Asia from the perspective of the concept of the New Great Game, by making an analogy with the historical Great Game between the British and Russian Empires, and from their geopolitical and geo-economic gains.

However, the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan had different agendas for their own countries from those of the great powers. First of all, they had to create new independent states, completing nation- and state-building process; transforming state-controlled economies to free market ones; and finally enhancing their national security capabilities. Therefore, while rejecting any attempt that aimed at forming hegemony over (or domination in) the region, they have preferred to have mutually beneficial and equal relations with the states as much as possible.

In favor of that mentality, the essay argues that although the geopolitical factors, for example geographical location, population and natural resources, have affected their decision making processes, the leaders chose to formulate their foreign policies according to expectations and needs of local people and concept of regime security in addition to the geopolitical conditions. For that reason, to understand their foreign policies, it is necessary to understand the role of internal factors in their foreign policies before discussing their approaches.

The New Great Game among the Great Powers: Imperialist Geopolitics

Just after the collapse of former Soviet Union, the regional developments in the post-Soviet area were examined by scholars, such as Alexander Dugin and Zbigniew Brzezinski¹, from the geopolitical perspectives based upon the understanding of geopolitical and geo-economic domination of the region by the great powers, in addition to the zero-sum game mentality. Thus they mentioned that in favor of imperialistic geopolitical understanding², Iran as an Islamic country, would (or could) dominate the regional affairs and then the regional countries could adopt the Iranian Islamic regime. For that reason, the American administration encouraged Turkey to be a democratic, secular and moderate Muslim model for the regional countries as an alternative to the Islamic regime. But after 1995, a strategic competition among Russia, the United States and China emerged as a result of strategic features of the region.³

First of all, Central Asia is estimated to be the world's third largest reservoir of oil and natural gas after the Persian Gulf and Russia and in the meantime it is a strategic transit center for delivering these energy resources toward the European market. By flowing the regional natural resources to the world energy market, dependence of the European countries, Japan, and other Western countries upon the Middle Eastern energy resources will be decreased. That flow will also substantially enhance global energy security.⁴

¹ Alexander Dugin and Zbigniew Brzezinski in their academic studies have expressed the domination of the region by the great powers and they divided the region into several areas of influence. Thus they have analyzed the regional affairs from the perspective of new great game, which is aimed at establishing geopolitical hegemony, formatting cultural influence, controlling flow of energy resources, and providing regional security. For further information, see; Gregory Gleason and Marat E. Shaihtudinov, "Collective Security and Non-State Actors in Eurasia", *International Studies Perspectives*, No. 6, No. 2, 2005, pp. 274 – 284; Mark Bassin and Konstantin E. Aksenov, "Mackinder and the Heartland Theory in Post-Soviet Geopolitical Discourse", *Geopolitics*, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2006, pp. 99 – 118.

² For further information, see; Matthew Edwards, "The New Great Game and the New Great Gamers: Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 22, No. 1, March 2003, pp. 83 – 102.

³ For further information, see; Gawdat Bahgat, "Oil and Terrorism: Central Asia and the Caucasus", *The Journal of Social, Political and Economic Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, Fall 2005, pp. 265 – 283; Bruce Pannier, "Shifting Tides of Influence in Central Asia", *Radio Free Europe / Radio Liberty*, 1 August 2009.

⁴ For further information, see; Farkhod Tolipov, "Nationalism as a Geopolitical Phenomenon: the Central Asian Case", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2001, pp. 183 – 194; Mirzohid Rahimov, "From Soviet Republics to Independent Countries: Challenges of Transition in Central Asia",

Second, the region is located at the center of such a geographic location surrounded by China, Pakistan, India and Russia; thus who dominates the region will control the internal political affairs of others.⁵ Third, the regional countries could contribute to maintenance of the world power balance. On the one hand they can challenge the Russian monopoly in the world energy sector. On the other hand, by cooperating with Russia and China, they can stabilize the growing American power in world politics.⁶

Despite the geostrategic importance of the region, between 1991 and 1994 the Russian politicians disregarded the regional affairs. But since 1995 Russia has made serious attempts to dominate the region that has been seen as its backyard or near abroad.⁷ Because of its resentment of the US hegemony, its search for a renewed great power status and its desire for economic progress, the Russian politicians are motivated to pursue imperialist policies toward the region. In the meantime, they have wanted to protect their territorial integrity by responding effectively to any regional rebellion, such as radical Islamic movements, the war in Chechnya, the Tajik civil war, while preserving its security and economic ties with the regional countries.⁸

According to the 2005 report prepared by the Russian Security Council, Russia's dependence on the Central Asian energy resources increased; therefore, it was vital to access these resources. Meanwhile, the region has been a natural and controlled buffer zone between Russia and other Asian great

Perspectives on Global Development and Technology, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2007, pp. 291 – 312; Yerzhan Kazyhanov, "On Kazakhstan", *American Foreign Policy Interests*, No. 28, 2006, pp. 189 – 191; Mahmoud Ghafouri, "The Caspian Sea: Rivalry and Cooperation", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 25, No. 2, Summer 2008, pp. 81 – 96.

⁵ For further information, see; Mirzohid Rahimov, *From Soviet Republics to Independent Countries*, pp. 291 – 312.

⁶ For further information, see; Kurt Radtke, "VII. Sino-Indian Relations: Security Dilemma, Ideological Polarization, or Cooperation Based on 'Comprehensive Security'?", *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, Vol. 2, No. 3-4, 2003; Marat Ersainovic Shaikhutdinov, "Central Asia: Developing the Region in the Vortex of the Geopolitical and Geoeconomic Antagonisms of the World Powers", *American Foreign Policy Interests*, No. 29, 2007, pp. 45 – 58.

⁷ In April 2005, former President Vladimir Putin described the collapse of the Soviet Union "as one of the greatest geopolitical catastrophes of 20th century". For further information, see; Richard Weitz, "Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, pp. 155 – 167.

⁸ For further information, see; Zharmukhamed Zardykhon, "Russians in Kazakhstan and Demographic Change: Imperial Legacy and the Kazakh Way of Nation Building", *Asian Ethnicity*, Vol. 5, No. 1, February 2004, pp. 61 – 79; Houman Sadri, "Elements of Azerbaijan Foreign Policy", *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2003, pp. 179 – 192; James Brian McNabb, "The Unanticipated Utility of U.S. Security Structures: Avoiding Cold War II in Central Asia", *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 25, No. 4, 2006, pp. 307 – 327; David Lewis, "Resources and Rivalry in the 'Stans'", *World Policy Journal*, Vol. 25, No. 3, Fall 2008, pp. 125 – 135; Taras Kuzio, "History, Memory and Nation Building in the Post-Soviet Colonial Space", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2002; Inomjon Bobokulov, "Central Asia: is There an Alternative to Regional Integration?", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 1-2, March – June 2006, pp. 75 – 91; Subodh Atal, "Central Asian Geopolitics and U.S. Policy in the Region: The Post-11 September Era", *Mediterranean Quarterly*, Vol. 14, No. 2, Spring 2003, pp. 95 – 109; Pavel K. Baev, "Assessing Russia's Cards: Three Petty Games in Central Asia", *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 17, No. 2, July 2004, pp. 269 – 283; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Geopolitics versus Democracy in Tajikistan", *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 14, No. 4, 2006, pp. 563 -578.

powers.⁹ With the encouragement of these factors, Russia spent its energy to reintegrate former Soviet Union republics within the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States and the Collective Security Treaty Organization.¹⁰

Due to that mentality, Russia has seen the American and European activities in the region as a direct threat to its national security and regional dominance. Even they have viewed the deployment of American troops in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Afghanistan after the September 11 attacks, as a violation of its unwritten post-colonial rights, so that it enforced the regional countries to call for total withdrawal of the American troops from the region.¹¹

Contrary to Putin's concerns, the Western countries described the collapse of the former Soviet Union as a victory of Western liberal democracy¹²; therefore, the American administration has strictly rejected re-domination of the region by any regional great powers, such as China and Russia. Due to its geopolitical evaluations and its needs, such as energy dependency, the emergence of new commercial opportunities, and new security threats (terrorism, drug trafficking), the American officials have pursued such foreign policy objectives, which are openly contrary to the Russia's expectations. Because of their growing dependency on the imported oil and natural gas¹³, they supported the East-west energy corridor and financed several international oil pipelines in order to diversify energy sources, to stabilize energy prices, to maintain energy security, and to decrease their dependency on the Middle East oil.¹⁴

Second, they encouraged the regional states to complete their nation- and state-building processes to become more autonomous and self-sufficient powers in the region. Thus they have aimed at checking the growing power of Russia, curbing the influence of Iran, and opening the region to global markets.¹⁵

⁹ For further information, see; Matthew Edwards, *The New Great Game and the New Great Gamers: Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder*, pp. 83 – 102.

¹⁰ For further information, see; Mahmoud Ghafouri, *The Caspian Sea: Rivalry and Cooperation*, pp. 81 – 96.

¹¹ For further information, see; Annette Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order", *International Affairs*, Vol. 80, No. 3, 2004, pp. 485 – 502.

¹² For further information, see; Boris-Mathieu Petric, "Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan or the Birth of a Globalized Protectorate", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 319 – 332.

¹³ The United States imported nearly 40 percent of its oil and 24 percent of its natural gas consumption from abroad. In the coming future, it will import nearly two of every three barrels of its consumption from abroad. Additionally, dependency of the EU's energy import is also increasing. In 2030, it will import 90 percent of its oil and 80 percent of its natural gas consumptions from abroad. Most of oil comes from the Middle East and most of the natural gas from Russia. For further information, see; Matthew Edwards, *The New Great Game and the New Great Gamers: Disciples of Kipling and Mackinder*, pp. 83 – 102.

¹⁴ For further information, see; Houman Sadri, *Elements of Azerbaijan Foreign Policy*, pp. 179 – 192; Richard Weitz, *Averting a New Great Game in Central Asia*, pp. 155 – 167.

¹⁵ For further information, see; Subodh Atal, *Central Asian Geopolitics and U.S. Policy in the Region: The Post-11 September Era*, pp. 95 – 109.

In the security field, the Western countries have identified the region as part of an arc of instability from the Middle East to North East Asia, so that they provided bilateral and multilateral assistances to the regional countries in order to enhance the border security, and to curb terrorism and drug trafficking. In favor of that policy, the United States has close military cooperation with Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, organized joint military exercises, and encouraged the regional countries to become members of the Partnership for Peace program of NATO.¹⁶

In order to fight against the Taliban militants in Afghanistan, the Pentagon currently develops military plans covering the potential deployment of the US Special Forces that would train local military forces in Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. In the meantime, General David Petraeus, the Head of US Central Command, was in Tashkent on August 18, 2009. He signed a military cooperation agreement in which both countries would expand bilateral strategic contacts and engage in joint trainings. Britain has also engaged Turkmenistan about the possibility of opening a new supply route to Afghanistan across Turkmen territory. Currently, a small contingent of US military personnel operates in Ashgabat to assist refueling operations. Thus the Turkmen government has allowed for the landing and refueling of transport planes at Ashgabat airport.¹⁷

The Obama administration has proposed significant increases to its aid packages for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Thus the administration hopes that stabilizing these countries will enhance the US efforts to defeat Taliban militants in Afghanistan. According to the proposal, Kyrgyzstan would get \$41.5 million economic aid and \$2.9 million military assistance under Foreign Military Financing Program in 2010. Tajikistan would acquire respectively \$46.5 million of economic and \$1.5 million in terms military assistance.¹⁸

The regional affairs are also attractive to the Chinese authorities, because they have desired to reduce the tensions along its borders with former Soviet Union spreading toward the Eastern Turkistan region, to import its growing energy needs from the region, to have close economic and commercial relations

¹⁶ For further information, see; John Heathershaw, "Worlds Apart: The Making and Remaking of Geopolitical Space in the US-Uzbekistani Strategic Partnership", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2007, pp. 123 – 140; Doulatbek Khidirbekughli, "U.S. Geostrategy in Central Asia: A Kazakh Perspective", *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2003, pp. 159 – 167; William Lahue, "Security Assistance in Kazakhstan: Building a Partnership for the Future", *the DISAM Journal*, Fall 2002/Winter 2003, pp. 6 – 17; Fred H. Lawson, "Political Economy, Geopolitics and the Expanding US Military Presence in the Persian Gulf and Central Asia", *Critique: Critical Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 13, No. 1, Spring 2004, pp. 7 – 31; Kanat Saudabayev, "Kazakhstan and the United States: Growing Partnership for Security and Prosperity", *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2005, pp. 185 – 188.

¹⁷ Deirdre Tynan, "Central Asia: Pentagon Plans for Deployment of Special Forces to States outside Afghanistan", *Eurasia Insight*, 17 September 2009; "Uzbekistan: Washington Denies Interest in Returning to Khanabad Airbase", *Eurasia Insight*, 24 August 2009; Deirdre Tynan, "Turkmenistan: Ashgabat Hosts US Military Refuelling, Resupply Operations", *Eurasia Insight*, 8 July 2009.

¹⁸ Joshua Kucera, "Central Asia: Washington Boosts Aid to Region to Bolster Afghan War Effort", *Eurasia Insight*, 12 May 2009.

with the regional states, and to balance the growing power of the United States through creating a multi-polar world structure. For that reason, they provided military and financial aid to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan to combat the Islamic threat and they were the initiators of the formation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in order to assure security and stability in the region.¹⁹

Concerns of the Regional Leaders about Policies of the Great Powers and the New Great Game

Although the great powers have discussed the regional developments from the zero-sum game perspective, by favoring multivector relations with as many powers as possible based on the mutual benefit and equal partnership, the regional leaders chose not to become a part of such geostrategic competition; therefore, the new great game in the region has been played out between the great powers, so that they have sought to maneuver among the major powers without jeopardizing their political independence where having diversified relations meant for them underpinning of their autonomy. For that reason, they desire to have allied ties with Russia, good-neighborly and mutually advantageous cooperation with China, and tactical relations with the United States.²⁰

Due to the fact that the Central Asian states are land-locked countries, they still heavily rely on the transportation and pipeline systems of Russia. Although they have seen Russia as a receding colonial power and they have never welcomed any Russian domination again within the framework of the CIS, they have still described Russia as their reliable strategic partner and the guarantor of regional as well as world peace and security. For the Central Asian states, Russia is still an essential part of the regional economy and trade, because more than 70 percent of all regional exports reach the world market through the northern route. Russia is also traditional market for local goods.²¹

Secondly, Russia, due to its military capability, can maintain peace and security in the region against the radical Islamic movements and other separatist attempts. Thirdly, there are illegal migrant workers in Russia from Central Asia; therefore, they play a very effective role in their countries' economies by transferring their salaries to their families. Lastly nearly 25 million Russians live in the Central Asian countries and they have close ties with their

¹⁹ For further information, see; Vitaly Vol. 36, No. 8, 2008, "China and the SCO Member Countries of Central Asia: Cooperation Over Energy", *Far Eastern Studies*, pp. 67 – 82.

²⁰ For further information, see; Paul Kubicek, "Regionalism, Nationalism and Realpolitik in Central Asia", *Europe – Asia Studies*, Vol. 49, No 4, June 1997; Zharmukhamed Zardykhan, "Kazakhstan and Central Asia: regional perspectives", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 2, 2002, pp. 167 – 183.

²¹ For further information, see; Nick Megoran, "Revisiting the 'Pivot': The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan's International Relations", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 170, No. 4, December 2004, pp. 347 – 358; Taras Kuzio, "Promoting Geopolitical Pluralism in the CIS", *Problems of Post-Communism*, Vol. 47, No. 3, May/June 2000, pp. 25 – 35.

motherland, so Russia has an effective instrument to manipulate the regional affairs.²²

While they are worried about any Chinese expansionist policies, they still see it as an upholder of the status quo in the region by balancing the Russia's power and it is also a new market for the local goods.²³

Despite the objections of both China and Russia, the Central Asian states have never eliminated the Western orientation in their foreign relations. For them, the West symbolizes new economic and commercial relations, financial support, foreign direct investment, and military assistance. In the meantime, they believe that if they have good relations with the Western countries, they can obtain credits for the social projects; integrate their economies with the world economy; develop their national industrial infrastructure; improve the technological infrastructure of the oil and natural gas sectors; form their national armies; and balance the Russia's power in the region.²⁴

Suitable to the concerns mentioned above, Kazakhstan has pursued multi-vector foreign policy, which meant having close relations with the United States, European countries, Russia, China, and other regional powers. Although Kazakhstan has planned to construct new pipelines that bypass the Russian route and to diversify sources and funding in order to secure its economic and political independence, the Kazakh leadership has established close and cooperative relations with Russia, due to the facts that its industrial enterprises are still mostly integrated into the Russian economic infrastructure, it is dependent upon existing supplies of oil from Russia, ethnic Russians inhabited the northwestern part of the Kazakh territory and it has lacked trained and powerful military personnel and technology; therefore, it depends on Russia's protection in order to guard its border with China. It has also favored regional security initiatives, including Russia.²⁵

Additionally, Kazakhstan has also close economic, political and military relations with the United States. Today, the Western oil companies dominate Kazakhstan's oil industry. Although it does not have any intention to become a full member of NATO, it has preferred to cooperate with the NATO within the

²² For further information, see; Z. K. Suerkulov, "The Kyrgyz Republic: Security Matters", *Military Thought*, Vol. 15, No. 3, July 2006, pp. 206 – 211.

²³ For further information, see; David Lewis, *Resources and Rivalry in the 'Stans'*, pp. 125 – 135.

²⁴ For further information, see; Ertan Efeğil, "11 Eylül Sonrası Orta Asya'da Silahlanma Girişimleri ve Bölge Güvenliğine Etkileri", Kamer Kasım and Zerrin A. Bakan (Ed.), *Uluslararası Güvenlik Sorunları*, (Ankara: ASAM Publications, 2004), pp. 141 – 153; Ertan Efeğil, "11 Eylül Sonrası Büyük Devletler Arasında Artan İşbirliği", *KÖK Araştırmalar*, Vol. 4, No. 1, Spring 2002, pp. 163 – 176; Ayça Ergun, "XIII. International Challenges and Domestic Preferences in the Post – Soviet Political Transition of Azerbaijan", *Perspectives on Global Development and Technology*, Vol. 2, No. 3-4, 2003, pp. 635 – 656; Pınar İpek, "The Role of Oil and Gas in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Looking East or West?", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 7, November 2007, pp. 1179 – 1199; Mark N. Katz, "Revolutionary Change in Central Asia", *World Affairs*, Vol. 168, No. 4, Spring 2006, pp. 157 – 171.

²⁵ For further information, see; Sebastien Peyrouse, "Nationhood and the Minority Question in Central Asia: The Russians in Kazakhstan", *Europe – Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 3, May 2007, pp. 481 – 501.

framework of the Partnership for Peace program and to have bilateral military relations with the United States and Turkey.²⁶ Today, Kazakhstan is the chair of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe.²⁷ Lastly French President Sarkozy visited Astana on October 6, 2009. During his visit, he signed \$6 billion worth of business deals.²⁸

Like Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan has formulated a balanced foreign policy in which it has close relations with the United States and Turkey while it is cautious not to disturb Russia and Iran. On the one hand, Azerbaijan declared its intention to become a full member of NATO and cooperated with the Western oil companies to develop its energy sector. On the other hand, it became member of the CIS.²⁹ On October 26, 2009, the Azeri foreign minister, together with Armenia and Georgia, discussed ongoing economic and political cooperation with the European Union under the Eastern Partnership Programme.³⁰

Since the 1990s President Karimov has pursued such a foreign policy that gradually distanced Uzbekistan from Russia, because he associated the pursuit of sovereignty of Uzbekistan with Uzbekistan's attempts to undertake a foreign policy of de-linkage from Russia. While presenting himself as defiant against the Russian imperialism, he has resisted the Russian-led integration efforts within the CIS. In favor of that mentality, in 1999, for example, Uzbekistan withdrew from the CIS Collective Security Treaty by accusing Russia of using the organization as a hegemonic tool. By formulating a westward foreign policy, it had a close alliance with the United States in order to modernize its national army, to make Uzbekistan as a regional leader, and to improve its economic conditions.

But Uzbekistan has continuously been interested in maintaining some degree of relations with Russia because of its dependency on the Russia's security guarantee against radical Islamic movements and its economic infrastructure. For that reason, President Karimov always describes Russia as its key neighbor as well as an insider. For example, although it signed the US – Uzbek Status of Forces Agreement after the September 11 attacks, Uzbekistan

²⁶ For further information, see; A. Arystanbekova, "Kazakhstan: Ten Years in the U.N.", *International Affairs*, Vol. 48, No. 4, 2002, pp. 150 – 156.

²⁷ Joshua Kucera, "Kazakhstan: Evaluating Astana's Democratization Intentions", *Eurasia Insight*, 14 September 2009.

²⁸ Regis Gente, "Kazakhstan: French President Takes Heat from Civil Society Activists Over Astana Visit", *Eurasia Insight*, 13 October 2009.

²⁹ For further information, see; Shannon O'lear, "Azerbaijan's Resource Wealth: Political Legitimacy and Public Opinion", *The Geographical Journal*, Vol. 173, No. 3, September 2007, pp. 207 – 223; "Caucasia: EU and Caucasus Diplomats Discuss Cooperation", *Eurasia Insight*, 26 October 2009; "Turkmenistan: Investment Conference Highlights Slow Pace of Reform", *Eurasia Insight*, 19 October 2009.

³⁰ The Programme is a campaign meant to bring the three Caucasus states as well as Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova closer to EU through free trade and harmonization of legal codes. It finally has aimed at creation of a free trade zone that includes the bloc's 27 members and its six post-Soviet partners. "Caucasia: EU and Caucasus Diplomats Discuss Cooperation", *Eurasia Insight*, 26 October 2009.

did not give concrete concessions to the United States that would disturb Russia. The rise of Islamic radicalism in Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan and the Tulip Revolution in Kyrgyzstan pushed Uzbekistan to seek a rapprochement with Russia. In favor of that understanding, it immediately signed military cooperation agreement with Russia and in 2005 it applied to join the Eurasian Economic Community. Meanwhile it became full member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.³¹ This year, Uzbek and EU officials hoped to improve bilateral relations.³² For example, the European Union has intended to lift its four-year embargo against Uzbekistan. As mentioned earlier, US General David Petraeus paid an official visit to Tashkent and signed a military cooperation agreement.³³

In Kyrgyzstan, Russia has a special place in its political and military realms. Today, Russia has dominated major economic sectors of Kyrgyzstan while being its most important economic partner. Nearly 500 thousand Kyrgyz workers have lived in Moscow. On the other hand, Kyrgyz President Akayev opted for a foreign policy favorable to the West. In order to secure support of the Western states, he followed the advice of liberal international economic advisers and implemented liberal economic reforms. Kyrgyzstan has also permitted the deployment of the US military troops in its territory.³⁴ In 2008, Kyrgyzstan and the USA signed an agreement in which they agreed to keep Manas air base operational, but named as the Transit Center at Manas International Airport.³⁵

Due to its internal instability, the priority of Tajikistan's foreign policy is to develop and to deepen mutually beneficial ties with Russia. In 2004, the Tajik regime offered Moscow permanent stationing rights.³⁶

Basic Factors Influential in Their Foreign Policymaking

Role of Geopolitics: Competition for the Regional Leadership

Although the regional countries did not have any intention to become a part of new great game, it does not mean that the geopolitical factors, such as demography, geography, natural resources, did not play any role in formulating

³¹ For further information, see; Leila Kazemi, "Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy: 1991 to the Present", *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 56, No. 2, Spring 2003, pp. 205 – 216; Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Uzbekistan and the United States: Friends or Foes?", *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 14, No. 1, Spring 2007, pp. 107 – 116; Vitaly Naumkin, "Uzbekistan's State-Building Fatigue", *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2006, pp. 127 – 140; Slavomir Horak, "The Ideology of the Turkmenbashi Regime", *Perspectives on European Politics and Society*, Vol. 6, No. 2, 2005, pp. 305 – 319.

³² Deirdre Tynan, "Uzbekistan: European Union Look Likely to Lift Arms Embargo", *Eurasia Insight*, 22 October 2009.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ For further information, see; Z. K. Suerkulov, *The Kyrgyz Republic: Security Matters*, pp. 206 – 211.

³⁵ Deirdre Tynan, "Kyrgyzstan: US Armed Forces to Remain at Air Base for Afghan Resupply Operations", *Eurasia Insight*, 23 June 2009.

³⁶ For further information, see; Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Geopolitics versus Democracy in Tajikistan*, pp. 563 – 578; Annette Bohr, *Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order*, pp. 485 – 502; Boris-Mathieu Petric, *Post-Soviet Kyrgyzstan or the Birth of a Globalized Protectorate*, pp. 319 – 332.

their foreign policies. For example, by mentioning its geographical location, huge oil and natural gas reserves, and permanent neutrality policy, President Turkmenbashi expressed that in the coming future Turkmenistan should become a center of peace-building activities and financial transactions in the region. By attracting attention to their populations, military power, natural reserves, and political culture, a strategic competition between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan has emerged for the regional leadership.³⁷

According to the Uzbek leader Islam Karimov, due to Uzbekistan's strategic importance and being demographically the strongest nation in the region, Uzbekistan had a legitimate right to claim its regional leadership. For him, as a prime regional actor, only his country could secure the regional stability. But with the assistance of its expanded military strength, the Uzbek government played a very active role in the Tajik civil war and used the force against the opposition groups in Kyrgyzstan. But his assertive attempts created feelings of insecurity in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Thus they cooperated with Russia and China in order to counterbalance the growing power of Uzbekistan.³⁸

One the other hand, Kazakh leader Nazarbayev regarded Kazakhstan as a natural center as well as a de facto regional leading power in Central Asia by virtue of its greater economic development and open political culture.³⁹

Initial Questions Emerged after the Collapse of Former Soviet Union

Despite the regional strategic competition between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, existing geopolitical factors have never dominated their foreign policies, because after their independence, they had a completely different agenda from those of the great powers.

For the Central Asian states, the collapse of former Soviet Union meant deterioration of economic conditions and living standards, emergence of political and ethnic clashes, territorial issues and boundary demarcations and eruption of intergroup tensions. When they became independent states, they lacked effective state institutions, industrial infrastructure, national army and national identification, because during the Soviet period, they were deprived of having direct contact with the international community and of having more autonomous state institutions. Additionally, their economies were interconnected to all other former Soviet republics.⁴⁰

³⁷ For further information, see; Peter Sinnott, "Kyrgyzstan: A Political Overview", *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol. 29, 2007, pp. 427 – 436; Ertan Efeğil, "Bağımsızlık Sonrası Türkmenistan'ın Siyasi, Ekonomik ve Kültürel Politikalarının Genel Değerlendirmesi", *KÖK Araştırmalar*, Vol. 3, No. 1, Spring 2001, pp. 245 – 264.

³⁸ For further information, see; Stuart Horsman, "Uzbekistan's Involvement in the Tajik Civil War 1992-1997: Domestic Considerations", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1999, pp. 37 – 48; Matteo Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks Abroad'", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2007, pp. 105 – 122.

³⁹ For further information, see; Annette Bohr, *Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order*, pp. 485 – 502.

⁴⁰ For further information, see; Deniz Kandiyoti, "Post-Soviet Institutional Design and the Paradoxes of the 'Uzbek Path'", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2007, pp. 31 – 48;

In this case, they had to create sufficient ground for nation-building, foster the conditions for economic and social development, cultivate existing state institutions, establish national armies, adopt new legal regulations, maintain internal security and stability, reinforce their countries' independence by having bilateral and multilateral relations with other states on basis of mutual benefit and equality principle, and avoid any territorial claims.⁴¹

With the enforcement of these initial questions, the regional states preferred to follow such foreign policies, which were based on active, balanced, pragmatic and constructive dialogue. While they mentioned that the period of confrontation after the collapse of the former Soviet Union had come to an end and thus constructive cooperation and dialogue among the states became the dominant paradigm in the world, they desired to have good neighborly relations with the European Union, friendship and cooperation with Russia, China, and mutually advantageous contacts with all interested states. In the meantime, they rejected any revisionist policies that would be pursued by the great powers, such as Russia, the United States, and China.⁴²

In favor of these concerns, in their foreign policies, they gave priorities to following matters: asserting and consolidating their sovereignties, assuring their political stability, facilitating their economic developments by exporting oil resources to the world market, decreasing their dependency on Russia, and effectively preventing the security questions.⁴³

Regime Security as a Diagnostic Factor

Despite the internal structural questions, first of all, the regional leaders focused on consolidating their political regimes⁴⁴, which was contrary to their initial concerns of forming democratic states.⁴⁵ After consolidating their political

Matteo Fumagalli, "Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: the Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 4, June 2007, pp. 567 – 590; Valentine Borisovich Bogatyrev, "The Central Asian Transition: Threats to Security", *Helsinki Monitor*, No. 3, 2003, pp.277 – 286.

⁴¹ For further information, see; Payam Feroz, "Tajikistan: Nationalism, Ethnicity, Conflict, and Socio-economic Disparities – Sources and Solutions", *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2002, pp. 39 – 61; Alisher Ilkhamov, "Neopatrimonialism, Interest Groups and Patronage Networks: The Impasses of the Governance System in Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 1, March 2007, pp. 65 – 84; Ahmet T. Kuru, "Between the State and Cultural Zones: Nation Building in Turkmenistan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2002, pp. 71 – 90.

⁴² For further information, see; Annette Bohr, *Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order*, pp. 485 – 502; Ayça Ergun, XIII. *International Challenges and Domestic Preferences in the Post – Soviet Political Transition of Azerbaijan*, pp. 635 – 656.

⁴³ For further information, see; Barbara Kiepenheuer-Dreschler, "Trapped in Permanent Neutrality: Looking behind the Symbolic Production of the Turkmen Nation", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 25, No. 1-2, March – June 2006, pp. 129 – 141.

⁴⁴ In March 2005, President Bakiyev promised a new era of democracy and good governance. He called for constitutional changes. But in the course of time he increased his executive powers that brought regional administrators directly under the President. He set up his own political party, Ak Zhol.

⁴⁵ The regional states have preferred to copy the Putin model of governance, which means limited democracy, a marginalized opposition and strong presidential power. For example, Tajikistan leader Rakhmanov has centralized state power in his hands, co-opting the rivals. His personal

authorities through expanding security agencies⁴⁶, harassing the political opposition and putting the press under their strict control, they spent their energies to legitimize their regimes. They equated the concept of regime security to the pursuit of sovereignty, which was defined as the recognition of state independence (in reality, the existing regime) by internal and external actors; therefore, the membership of international and regional organizations became the first priority in their foreign policies in order to gain international recognition.⁴⁷

Within the framework of that mentality, the Presidents defined the national interests according to the demands of regime security. In the meantime, the regime continuity has been seen as synonymous with national security and political stability.⁴⁸ So any movement that demanded democratic rights, but challenged the regime security, has been described by the Presidents as radical movements, such as the Islamic parties or other opposition groups.⁴⁹

Nevertheless, that priority has also determined their foreign policy tendencies. For example, at the beginning, for them, sovereignty, in other words regime security, meant decreasing their dependency on Russia, diversifying their relations with outside world, including the United States, and establishing their national armies. In favor of that understanding, they tried to have close relations with the Western countries. But in the course of time, when the Western countries criticized their human rights violations and even some

administration is the source of all power in the country. He slowly abandoned a broad political front. President Niyazov's Turkmenistan was one of the world's most repressive regimes. He did not tolerate any political opposition. His follower, President Berdimuhamedov, has promised limited reforms, including improving the education system, higher pensions and salaries and greater attention to agriculture. But he built a powerful client network in Turkmenistan and there are still no officially recognized opposition groups. In Kyrgyzstan, after the Tulip Revolution, President Bakiyev has created a functional one-party state ruled by small elite at its core. According to Viktor Kovtunovsky of the Civil Society, Kazakhstan is turning into the most obvious example of a totalitarian state. In this country, the strength of a regime is based on personal power. For further information, see; International Crisis Group, "Kyrgyzstan: The Challenge of Judicial Reform", *Asia Report*, No. 150, 10 April 2008; International Crisis Group, "Kyrgyzstan: A Deceptive Calm", *Update Briefing, Asia Briefing*, No. 79, 14 August 2008; International Crisis Group, "Turkmenistan After Niyazov", *Policy Briefing, Asia Briefing*, No. 60, 12 February 2007.

⁴⁶ In Uzbekistan, the Uzbek security organs are the key actors to keeping President Karimov in power. For further information, see; International Crisis Group, "Political Murder in Central Asia: No Time to End Uzbekistan's Isolation", *Update Briefing, Asia Briefing*, No. 76, 14 February 2008.

⁴⁷ For further information, see; Alessandra Ceccarelli, "Clans, Politics and Organized Crime in Central Asia", *Trends Organized Crimes*, Vol. 10, No. 3, 2007, pp. 19 – 36; Roy Allison, "Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 2, June 2008, pp. 185 – 202; Jessica N. Trisko, "Coping with the Islamist Threat: Analyzing Repression in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 24, No. 4, December 2005, pp. 373 – 389.

⁴⁸ International Crisis Group, "Tajikistan: On the Road to Failure", *Asia Report*, No. 162, 12 February 2009.

⁴⁹ For further information, see; Zharmukhamed Zardykhon, *Russians in Kazakhstan and Demographic Change: Imperial Legacy and the Kazakh Way of Nation Building*, pp. 61 – 79; Vitaly Naumkin, *Uzbekistan's State-Building Fatigue*, pp. 127 – 140; Shahram Akbarzadeh, *Geopolitics versus Democracy in Tajikistan*, pp. 563 -578; Jessica N. Trisko, Pinar Ipek, *The Role of Oil and Gas in Kazakhstan's Foreign Policy: Looking East or West?*, pp. 1179 – 1199.

American institutions, such as the Soros Foundation, supported colorful revolutions in the region, they chose to have close relations with China and Russia. Thus, while limiting their contacts with the Western world, the Collective Security Treaty Organization and Shanghai Cooperation Organization became fundamental instruments for the security of their regimes.⁵⁰

By using their countries' revenues to bolster their positions on power, on the one hand, they resisted any kind of radical changes within the society that would threaten their regimes; on the other hand, they formed solidarity groups based on kinship, clan, tribal or regional relations. They created nation-states where they provided privileged positions to their solidarity groups in the political and economic fields.⁵¹ Under these conditions, these privileged groups are allowed to use their positions in order to advance their private interests in exchange for supporting their presidents.⁵²

Role of Security Issues in their Foreign Relations and Economic Reform Attempts

After the regime security concept, internal and regional security issues have dominated foreign policies of Central Asian states. On the one hand, these security issues, such as organized crimes (drug trafficking), radical Islamic movements (Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-at Tahrir al – Islami), terrorism (Al-Qaide), instability in Afghanistan and Tajikistan, illegal migration and nuclear proliferation, affect directly their decision making process. Thus, they wish to have close relations with the regional countries, including Russia and China, which have been seen as guarantors of their national securities and they aim to obtain foreign aid in order to fight against the security questions, so that in the course of time, strengthening and maintaining the regional stability have become the paramount objective of their security policies.⁵³

On the other hand, they did not want to provoke possible threat areas, such as border issues and minority questions in order to maintain security of their regimes. During the Soviet era, their boundaries were drawn artificially with no regard to ethnic lines, due to the fact that their boundaries were seen as administrative lines. Immediately they signed agreements in which they guaranteed principles of non-interference, territorial integrity and inviolability of existing borders.⁵⁴

⁵⁰ For further information, see; Roy Allison, *Virtual Regionalism, regional structures and regime security in Central Asia*, pp. 185 – 202; Leila Kazemi, *Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy: 1991 to the Present*, pp. 205 – 216.

⁵¹ Today, in Turkmenistan, clan structure seems to still play an effective role in certain social interactions. In Tajikistan, the corruption among higher bureaucrats are endemic. They have benefited from control over the main export commodities. In Kyrgyzstan, Bakiyev has created a system controlled by the ruling family, widespread corruption and a monopoly over economic and political patronage. For further information, see; Joanna Lillis, "Kazakhstan: Corruption Scandals as Indicator Clan Infighting in Astana?", *Eurasia Insight*, 7 October 2009.

⁵² For further information, see; Edward Schatz, "Reconceptualizing Clans: Kinship Networks and Statehood in Kazakhstan", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 33, No. 2, June 2005, pp. 231 – 277.

⁵³ For further information, see; Maureen S. Crandall, "Low Grades for Petro-States in the Former Soviet Union", *Journal of Third World Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2007, pp. 189 – 210.

⁵⁴ For further information, see; Zharmukhamed Zardykhon, *Kazakhstan and Central Asia: Regional Perspectives*, pp. 167 – 183.

As mentioned above, the existing regimes have used such threats as an instrument to justify their regimes.⁵⁵ For example, while mentioning such threats, the local elites did not permit local people to express their complaints about the existing conditions.⁵⁶ If the opposition parties declared their objections, the elites blamed them of representing and/or cooperating with the radical Islamic movements. In Turkmenistan, President Turkmenbashi declared his policy of Ten Year Stability. In Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, having a nationalist perspective, the Presidents claimed that people should not organize demonstrations against the existing regimes for the sake of local people.

Concerning the minority issue that several minorities emerged as a result of their independence⁵⁷, they managed to avoid serious inter-ethnic conflicts. In this respect, they did not pursue such a policy that aimed at protection of co-ethnics abroad and they kept themselves away from meddling with each other's minorities⁵⁸, because they gave priority to the issues of state independence, political stability and regime security. At the end, the Diasporas are marginalized from their political discourses.⁵⁹

In the economic field, the regional states advocated gradual economic reforms that would not disturb existing political order; because they were concerned that shock therapy policy could cause social uprisings that could risk both the country's stability and continuity of their regimes. For example, the Uzbek leader preferred to adopt the Chinese model of gradually modernizing its economy in order to prevent any political change.⁶⁰

⁵⁵ Ibid.

⁵⁶ Joanna Lillis, "Kazakhstan: Zhovtis Case Turning into Test of Astana's OSCE Credibility", *Eurasia Insight*, 9 October 2009; Joshua Jucera, "Kazakhstan: Evaluating Astana's Democratization Intentions", *Eurasia Insight*, 14 September 2009.

⁵⁷ For example, today a significant number of Uzbeks lives in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Tajiks are also the majority of at least two provinces in Uzbekistan. According to 1989 census, 808.000 Kazakhs live in Uzbekistan and 332.000 Uzbeks in Kazakhstan. For further information, see; Nick Megoran, "On Researching 'Ethnic Conflict': Epistemology, Politics, and a Central Asian Boundary Dispute", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 59, No. 2, March 2007, pp. 253 – 277.

⁵⁸ But Kazakhstan took serious attempts to change the demographic situation in Northern provinces, in favor of local Kazakhs, due to the fact that after the independence the Russians demanded their political autonomy from Astana. In the meantime, Uzbekistan interfered into domestic affairs of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, because the Uzbek government was concerned that the developments in these countries were threatening its territorial integrity and political independence rather than ethnic affiliations. For further information, see; Azamat Sarsembayev, "Imagined Communities: Kazak Nationalism and Kazakification in the 1990s", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 3, 1999, pp. 319 – 346.

⁵⁹ For further information, see; Leila Kazemi, *Domestic Sources of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy: 1991 to the Present*, pp. 205 – 216; Matteo Fumagalli, *Framing Ethnic Minority Mobilisation in Central Asia: the Cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan*, pp. 567 – 590.

⁶⁰ For further information, see; Morgan Y. Liu, "Hierarchies of Place, Hierarchies of Empowerment: Geographies of Talk about Postsocialist Change in Uzbekistan", *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 33, No. 3, September 2005, pp. 423 – 438; Martin C. Spechler, "Authoritarian Politics and Economic Reform in Uzbekistan: Past, Present and Prospects", *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 2, June 2007, pp. 185 – 202.

Conclusion

The determining factor in the foreign policies of the Central Asian states is regime security rather than geostrategic competition among the great powers. Considering the continuation of their regimes so important, the regional leaders shaped both their foreign policy objectives. They equated the regime security to the concepts of national interests, national security, and political independence. They even accused the opposition parties of being current threats against their territorial integrity and national security. In reality, they challenged the existing regimes. Thus, the leaders established authoritarian regimes and used the geostrategic competition as an instrument in order to consolidate their political powers.

But existing attitudes of the regional leaders inevitably will pave the way for the emergence of deteriorating conditions in the region that will threaten the regional stability in the coming future. First of all, their current foreign policy mentalities have prevented the improvement of the economic, social, and political conditions of the local people, because for the sake of their regimes the leaders have supported their solidarity groups by giving privileged positions in the political and economic fields and they have not made serious attempts for the economic and political reforms. Thus, most of the local people have been condemned to poverty and they have no opportunity to express their concerns and demands. In the meantime, their attitudes have also blocked any kind of radical changes and solidarity among the regional people and states.

On the one hand, the regional leaders have not desired to be a part of New Great Game and opposed domination of the region by any great powers. On the other hand, especially Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan have an intention to dominate the regional affairs by mentioning their superior geopolitical capabilities. But these policies have worried other regional countries.

In the meantime, such kinds of policies in reality threaten the regional security, because the leaders do not take serious steps to improve internal conditions for human rights and democratization and their policies do not respect the rights of minorities. This attitude enforces the opposition groups and prevents minorities from expressing their political demands.

Consequently, while examining the foreign policies of the regional countries, their motivation of preserving their existing political positions should never be forgotten, and based upon that reality other countries should formulate their foreign policies. The geostrategic competition among the great powers creates a suitable atmosphere for the regional leaders to pursue their policies. In order to eliminate that paradox, the great powers should display a common attitude toward the regional states. However, under the existing conditions, it is not possible to see such consensus among them.

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