

Central Asia in the Russian Strategic Accounts

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Abstract: *This paper aimed to explore the Russian strategy in central Asia especially the Caspian, explain why this place became so important on the international political stage, moreover, and provide the key elements of Russian strategy and its optional agenda for the future development there. Through this paper you will discover several facts about Russian influence and its active role there. Then understand why the U.S. came to the central Asia and what is the target behind the American intervention in Afghanistan.*

Keywords: *Central Asia, Caspian, Commonwealth, Russian strategy.*

I. Introduction

Geopolitics experts agree on the fact that there has been no area in the world since the collapse of communism that had the strategic significance like that of the Caucasus region, Central Asia and the Caspian Sea in between. It is where everything accumulates; the heritage of history, future promises, popular revolutions, rebellions, armed movements, gas and oil fields and of course the Russian-American military maneuvers.

Historical background:

The countries in this region got their independence from the former Soviet Union more than two decades ago. However, it can't be considered a divorce but a temporary separation. As we know Russia was the biggest loser from the collapse of the Soviet Union, that it lost Central Asia and parts of the Caucasus Regions¹. However, the area stripped from Russia was not of great significance in terms of population (80 million people) or land space (5 million km²)². While the political, economic and security losses were incalculable, as Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and a great part of the Caspian Sea were part of the former Soviet Union before it collapsed and today Russia seeks to establish solid relations with those countries to maintain its conventional influence in this area and take advantage of the energy sources there to eventually achieve economic benefits which would boost its regional and global position in the field of energy.

II. From a strategic view point what does central Asia mean for Russia?

The central Asia and is very significant for Russia not only from economic-wise but also security-wise, in other words, the dominating on this region guarantees obtaining buffer zones to preserve the Russian security which became disclosed to a large extent and to secure its geopolitics interests.

The significance of the Central Asia for Russia can be demonstrated through the following:

1. It is a strategic area that has always been considered the Southern wing, and a major pillar for the national security (being the closest to Europe). Which explains why the former Soviet Union used to concentrate plenty of strategic weapons in this area, specially, in Kazakhstan. Thus, it is natural that Russia takes this area for its own spot, an acquired right, its influence area, and one of the most important focal points in the Russian strategy³.
2. There are millions of Russian people in the states of the Caspian Sea (Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan) and six million of them in Kazakhstan alone which is 40% of the population⁴.
3. From the geopolitical side, Central Asia represents one of the weakest points in the Russian geopolitical latitude, so it is not a coincidence that these areas have been for ages the stage for some fierce military operations between the Heartland represented by Russia and Rim land represented by Iran and Turkey that

¹ Jad jeiyv, the geopolitics of Caucasus, (Moscow international relations press, 2001), p 213. available in Russian.

² Dr. Fouziy Darweesh, "Russian interests in the Caspian", Al-Aram newspaper, August 10 (2004) available at <http://digital.ahram.org.eg>

³ Attif Abdul Hameed, "the dimensions of the conflict on the central Asia and Caspian oil", Al-Ahram newspaper, April 11 (2006), available at <http://digital.ahram.org.eg>

⁴ Mustafa Abdullah, "is America will succeed in capturing the oil of Iraq and the Caspian", Al-Aram newspaper, October 15 (2003)

Russia's domination on the Caspian Sea and its neighboring states will open the gate to the Mediterranean Sea⁵.

The economic factor might be not the motive behind the Russian interest in the Caspian Sea, because its traditional influence on the region based on the basis that it does not take interest in the conflicts or the resources in view of the alternatives available. However, it does not mean to give way to others, particularly, the United States to control the region because that implies limitless security and political threats⁶. Accordingly, in view of the Region possesses, Russia would take any serious threat against this Region or any threat launched from the Region against Russia, as a serious threat against the Russian national security. Subsequently, any passive move from the countries of the region directly affects the security of the Russian Federation which compelled Russia to bind these countries through the Commonwealth treaty. Russia realizing it can't dispense with these states, and to maintain some strategic connections with them, it established a Commonwealth of the twelve independent states on 21 December 1991 and three of them bordering the Caspian Sea such as Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan⁷. Russia wants its relations with the former Soviet Union states especially those which border the Caspian Sea to be similar to those of the United States of America with the states in Central America and the Caribbean and the role it is playing today in the Caspian Sea Region resembles the American role in South America over the past two decades⁸. Accordingly, the Russian strategy in this region gives top priority to the Russian national security over all the political, economic and cultural regards, despite the fact that they are connected and concentrates on the military factor which is obvious through the following:

1. Facing the American threat represented by the heavy American military presence in states close to Russia especially in Central Asia(Kyrgyzstan).
2. Facing any chance of turbulence inside the Russian Commonwealth especially in case of the civil rights of the Russian minority were violated or if the states of the Commonwealth should set up any security arrangements with foreign forces which is what happened in 2008 when Russian tanks invaded Southern Ossetia and expelled the Georgian forces⁹.
3. Panning for local and regional wars to replace the plans for an expanded global encounter against the western bloc. Instead, Russia started preparations to engage into combat operations of local and regional nature especially in oil-gas-rich areas such as the Caspian Sea¹⁰.
4. Taking interest in strategic deployment issues specially troops switching from peace to war condition.
5. Ensure the founding of buffer zones to preserve the Russian security and its geopolitical interests.
6. Maintaining stability in the region to avoid any ethnic tensions.
7. Making so much efforts and attempts to prevent any state from dominating on the Caspian Sea Region.
8. Working on supporting and developing its relations with the regional powers in the area such as China, India, Iran and Turkey and even with the remote states like France and Germany.

The Russian strategy in the Caspian Sea is based on the military presence that the Russian fleet is the most powerful among the fleets of the Caspian Sea states and the Russian ships in this area are over hundred. Besides, in 2012, Russia introduced the most advanced ship "Dagestan" missile ship which is armed with missiles that resemble the American Tomahawk. And the Russian orientation exceeds the attempt to protect its interests in the Caspian Sea, specially, in light of the unstable situation in Syria and the Iranian nuclear issue¹¹.

⁵ Zada wajed, "The Richs of the Caspian sea ignite a cold war between Moscow and Washington" , Al-Bayan magazine, no106, septemper12,2001

⁶ Dyari Saleh Majeid, International competition on the paths of the oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea: A Study in Political Geography,(Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research,2010) p102-201 available in Arabic

⁷ Dyari Saleh Majeid, International competition on the paths of the oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea: A Study in Political Geography,(Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research,2010) p81-100 available in Arabic

⁸ Dr. Fouziy Darweesh , The international competition on the Caspian's wealth, (Ghobashi press,2005) p53 available in Arabic

⁹ Dr. Fouziy Darweesh , The international competition on the Caspian's wealth, (Ghobashi press,2005)p77 available in Arabic

¹⁰ Dyari Saleh Majeid, International competition on the paths of the oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea: A Study in Political Geography,(Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research,2010)p132-211 available in Arabic

¹¹ Dyari Saleh Majeid, International competition on the paths of the oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea: A Study in Political Geography,(Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research,2010) p221-237 available in Arabic

Moreover, The Russian strategy in Central Asia is also based on the military presence which is in response to the American military presence in the region, that in 2003 Russia set up its first military base since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the base contained about twenty fighter aircrafts and one thousand soldiers and it is only thirty km away from the American air base Manas in Kyrgyzstan. In addition to that, Russia has two military bases in Tajikistan, the agreement of the first was signed by the presidents of the two countries on 16 April 1999 in Moscow but the official opening was in December 2004 when president Putin inaugurated the Dushanbe military base with 8500 soldiers and the legal framework of the agreement guarantees a long-term Russian military presence in Tajikistan. The second base is Kulab with one military unit stationed in, it is only 300 km to the south of the capital Dushanbe and a hundred km far from the Afghan borders, it is equipped to accommodate fifty military aircrafts including helicopters. Moreover, to enhance its presence and military relations with the states of Central Asia especially those neighboring the Caspian Sea Russia and Kazakhstan signed a deal to establish a regional defense system on 30 January 2013, the document was signed by the Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Kazakh Defense Minister Adilbek in Astana the Kazakh capital¹².

III. Conclusion

Geography is linked to security, As for Russia, it has expanded its influence in the region of central Asia especially the Caspian Sea basin, competing with the United States, and has signed military cooperation agreements with most of the countries there.

However, both of the United States and Russia Seek gaining economic benefit from the development in the region, and to identify the ways in which energy will pass through to the outside world and to enhance their influence, both parties have sought to establish close links with the local leaders and expand their commercial and financial relations there to gain full control over the sources of oil and natural gas and control process of exporting to the world markets.

Until today Russia has not been able to fully seize the central Asia oil or restrain the American expansion in the region, and the United States couldn't prevent big oil companies from shipping their production via pipelines that pass through Russia.

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¹² Dr. Fouziy Darweesh , The international competition on the Caspian's wealth, (Ghobashi press,2005) p41 available in Arabic