

Turkey as a stabilising power in Euarasia

Havva KOK ARSLAN¹

Abstract: One of the founding fathers of geopolitics and geostrategy, Harold Mackinder, asserted that the analysis of “who rules Eurasia, rules the world” applies to the Eurasian power struggle. Although since 2010, the BRICS (Brazil, the Russian Federation, India, the People’s Republic of China, and South Africa) countries have been on the rise within the multipolarity of the international system, it has been the first time in history that a non-Eurasian power, the US, has dominated Eurasia for about 80 years. This article will use the rivalry between the US, the Russian Federation, and the People’s Republic of China to illustrate the role of Turkey as a stabilising power in Eurasia.

Keywords: US, Euroasia, China, Stability, Russia, Turkey.

Introduction

Although the term “Eurasia”, created by joining the words “Avr” and “Asia”, describes the continent formed by the union of Asia and Europe geographically, its definition varies and is difficult to ascertain because many states’ interests and objectives confluence in this region (Evgeniy, Yilmaz, 2017:17). According to Anil Çeçen, Eurasia’s centre is Anatolia, as well as southern Russia, Moldova, Ukraine, and the Black Sea. From Vienna in the west, encompassing the Caucasus and Central Asia in the east, and extending to the People’s Republic of China, including Xinjiang in the south, Eurasia is a wide area that also includes the Middle East. It is located in the middle of Asia, Europe, and Africa (Çeçen, 2015:11).

In the west of Eurasia, the US dominates the small region. There is instability and fragmentation in the vast region in the middle, where the population is low. In the Far East, where the population is dense and China is located, the US can gain control of a small part of the peninsula. In the

¹ Uskudar University; Department of Political Science & International Relations, ORCID 0000-0003-0029-7628. havva.kokarslan@uskudar.edu.tr

south of Eurasia, there is no stability, and anarchy prevails. There are states with great potential in terms of energy resources, and there is also one state with a large population that can be involved in the struggle for regional hegemony. Eurasia can be described as a “chessboard” where the geopolitical power struggle prevails. There are not only two but also many forces with different cultures and diversity in the encounter (Brzezinski 2022, 53).

Zbigniew Brzezinski sees France, Germany, Russia, China, and India as key “geostrategic players” in Eurasia, apart from the US, in terms of both being at a sensitive point and having the power to move different balances with the behaviours they can display in critical times. He listed Ukraine, Azerbaijan, South Korea, Turkey, and Iran, which he defined as the geopolitical axis, as countries that could develop an effective strategy and be effective in the struggle for Eurasia (Brzezinski 2022, 64-65). In the context of our subject, we will focus on Turkey’s stabilising power in Eurasia by referring to the small-scale Eurasian struggle of the US, China, and the RF.

Although it was thought that Turkey would lose its importance after the dissolution of the USSR, Turkey, which was previously seen as an “outpost” and “border, coastal country” by Western countries, has become one of the central countries of the international arena and a leader in the restructuring of Eurasia with its economic and military potential. In addition, after the collapse of the USSR, Azerbaijan, Armenia, and Georgia established their presence in the Caucasus in terms of the presence of Circassians, Abkhazians, Dagestanis, and North Caucasian communities, which are some of the communities that make up the Turkish state. It is very important for Turkey to be a neighbour to these countries (Çeçen 2015, 14).

Struggle for dominance in Eurasia

The American Struggle for Domination in Eurasia

After the disintegration of the USSR, Eurasia regained its importance. In the process of globalisation, Western nations believed it was necessary to look to non-Western regions for world dominance, where, in general, China, Russia, India, and Turkic and Muslim states predominate. This was after the US joined NAFTA and the North American Union, and Europe joined the European Union. That has turned Eurasia into a geopolitical struggle area again (Çeçen 2015, 17).

Although world-renowned geopolitical analysts have put forward many theories in the struggle for dominance in Eurasia, what is important today is the effort to establish global dominance, not regional. In this sense, the US has brought its power and superiority to the world as well as to Eurasia with the powers it has in the relevant geography and the influence it has established on the states in Eurasia (Brzezinski 2022, 62). It is possible that the power to become the biggest competitor to the US comes from Eurasia, and just like the expansionist great powers the world has seen so far, the US will need to monitor and control states that can change the balance of power and/or be geopolitically strategically important to maintain Eurasian states' dependence on the Eurasian peoples' obedience (Brzezinski 2022, 62-63).

The fact that Eurasia is a very large geography is in favour of the US. If two big states in Eurasia, the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, are open to cooperating with the US, regional energy will be directed to a very different point. Although the RF and the PRC are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, they have some sensitivities towards each other. The PRC's high population density, high economic growth, impending intervention in the eastern regions, and inclusion of these lands inside its borders are all causes for concern for the RF. As for the PRC, it is uneasy about the RF's desire to develop energy transportation and economic opportunities in Eurasia to its advantage, which undermines their mutual trust (Yilmaz, 2017, 156-157).

"Eurasia is home to most of the world's politically assertive and dynamic states. All the historical pretenders to global power originated in Eurasia. The world's most populous aspirants to regional hegemony, China and India, are in Eurasia, are all the potential political or economic challengers to American primacy. After the United States, the next six largest economies and military spenders are there, as are all but one of the world's overt nuclear powers, and all but one of the covert ones. Eurasia accounts for 75 percent of the world's population, 60 percent of its GNP, and 75 percent of its energy resources. Collectively, Eurasia's potential power overshadows even America's.

Eurasia is the world's axial supercontinent. A power that dominated Eurasia would exercise decisive influence over two of the world's three most economically productive regions, Western Europe and East Asia". Brzezinski wrote that Eurasia is the "chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played," where there are many "geostrategic players" and "geopolitical pivots". He added, "How the United States both manipulates and accommodates the principal geostrategic players on the

Eurasian chessboard and how it manages Eurasia's key geopolitical pivots will be critical to the longevity and stability of America's global primacy".

Immediately after the collapse of the USSR, the US initiated Operation Provide Comfort and Provide Comfort II military operations to cause confusion and prevent the domination of the region by rich Germany and Japan, rival Russia, and China. Turkey and Israel played the "Trojan Horse" role in preventing the US from being the dominant power and the Middle East countries from getting stronger and coming together to form an Ottoman Empire (Çeçen 2015, 12).

The Struggle for Domination of the Russian Federation in Eurasia

Although Russia has strategic weaknesses as it has lost Eastern Europe economically to the EU and geostrategically to NATO, it has been an important power in Eurasia historically and due to its geopolitical pillars. It has the potential to prevent instability arising from the vacuum in Eurasia as an "Eurasian" and "global power" and is determined to struggle under the dominance of Central Asia. Russia is holding a strong hand against China by working with the US and against the US with the rising power China (Davutoğlu 2011, 472-474).

Although it has lost some of its pieces that would enable it to be superior in the game in Eurasia, Russia is a geostrategic player that will increase its influence on the states in the west and east, both by making its presence felt in every sense in the states that emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union and by gaining its full power (Brzezinski 2022, 69). Although the Russian Federation, as the new player in the old empire, cannot solve the human and economic problems required by an empire, it has the potential to become a "superpower" with its strong military structure and centralised system. However, at this point, the four areas – Ukraine, Central Asia, the Baltics, and the Caucasus – are of strategic importance, and the Russian state needs time to ensure their development. For this, Russia hopes the US will focus its attention on different places. Russia thought it could solve this problem by turning the attention of the US to the Middle East after the September 11 attacks. Russia, along with China, greatly benefited from the US spending its resources on the war on terrorism after the September 11 attacks (Yılmaz 2017, 181-183).

***The Struggle for Domination of the People's Republic of China
in Eurasia***

Another geostrategic power in Eurasia is the People's Republic of China. China is in a position to become a great regional power that changes the balances in Asia with its ambitions and the choices it makes in this direction due to its idea of being the centre of the world, which has increased in parallel with the development of its economic power. In the case of a "Greater China", it is a player with the capacity to negatively affect Russia due to its relations with the states that emerged after the collapse of the USSR in the west, as well as the fact that the Taiwan issue comes to the fore even more in the Far East (Brzezinski 2022, 69-70). The fact that the PRC is a permanent member of the UN Security Council, despite its demographic structure, politically socialist system, and economic "gradual liberalisation", has made it a great power. This enables strategists like Huntington to see China as the main player in balancing power against the West and as the main point of Eurasian-centred strategies (Davutoğlu 2011, 477-478).

Although China's foreign policy shows status quo tendencies in line with a state that is against revisionist policies by respecting the territorial integrity and independence of other states, it looks like a good participant by adopting participation in international institutions, even though the power politics that it describes as "peaceful ascension" is actually "aggressive". By not showing its hatred towards the West at the moment, China seems to be preparing "strategic defence", which requires not revealing its "hard power" until making sure that it has full dominance as the global power (Yılmaz 2017, 178-179). Before a possible war with the US, China is creating an economic power area with the world's fastest-growing market, the BRICS, gaining security allies with the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), increasing its influence over Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India, and thus both taking the "Silk Road" under control and seeking to prevent NATO's eastward expansion. Russia and China resolved their border disputes and agreed to cooperate against the West and increase trust and stability towards each other in 2004.

Having the power to change the balances in the Asia Pacific and the Middle East, as well as being bordered by smaller states compared to the more influential USSR after its collapse, China has made Central Asia a centre where its strategic goals come together (Davutoğlu 2011, 477-478). In addition, China tried to follow a policy of eliminating the internal problems it experienced in Central Asia by developing influence in regions such as Eastern Turkestan, Tibet, and Inner Mongolia, where the Uyghur, Kazakh,

and Kyrgyz Turks live (Davutoğlu 2011, 478). However, the fact that China, as well as Russia, needs time to complete its development and Russia does not pose a major obstacle in terms of Chinese interests does not bring the two players against each other (Yılmaz 2017, 183).

Towards the end of the 1990s, the strategic importance of East Turkestan/Xinjiang and Tibet increased even more for China, whose economic growth was increasing. First of all, the underground resources in the region gained special importance in terms of being one of the sources of energy for the Chinese industry, which focuses on continuous production. The separatist movements of Tibetans and Uyghurs, the possibility of Tibet's inclusion in India, and the possibility of East Turkestan/Xinjiang's independence will cause the loss of the exit to Pakistan via the Himalayas, which makes China very uneasy because it is trying to supply oil and natural gas through pipelines from west to east. By following a pro-Pakistan policy in the Indian conflicts, China aims to eliminate its dependence on the Strait of Malacca and the Indian Ocean, from which it obtains most of its oil, and it can reach the Middle East's oil in a more reliable way through Pakistan. India, on the other hand, has entered into competition with China by developing its relations with China's ally Myanmar and is trying to create a balance of power against China with Vietnam, Japan, and the US (Yılmaz 2017, 180-181).

Turkey's Role in Eurasia

After the disintegration of the Eastern Bloc, a geopolitical vacuum emerged in the USSR-dominated areas. This situation further increased the strategic importance of these regions. Central Asia has come to the fore in the global dominance efforts of great powers such as the US, Russia, China, Japan, Germany, France, and England, which are trying to turn the situation in their favour in terms of geopolitics and economy. The presence of regional powers such as India, Iran, Pakistan, Ukraine, and Korea and intra-regional powers such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan has caused Turkey to be one of the most important determining factors in the balance of power and alliance efforts (Davutoğlu 2011, 468-469).

In addition, the fact that the current and possible alliances of Eurasia, EU countries, Japan, Russia, and China require a delicate balance in Eurasia is important in terms of preventing international crises that may affect the world. At this point, Eurasia and especially Central Asia have a very

important place for the US, which can be affected by possible alliances, especially in terms of maintaining its global power (Davutoğlu 2011, 468-470). In addition to realising its geopolitical and political economy goals, the US also wants to prevent the instability arising from the strategic vacuum in the region. However, due to the fact that it is a transoceanic power, it is very costly to provide the military power required by the role of the world's gendarmerie. For this reason, NATO is trying to expand its activity to the east, gain control with organisations such as the OSCE, be active in Eurasia, and establish strategic partnerships and alliances to provide balance. In this context, Turkey stands out both in terms of its geopolitical and geostrategic position and in terms of having effective power relations in Eurasia (Davutoğlu 2011, 470-472).

After the Cold War, the spread of the strategic power struggle from Eastern Europe to the interior of Eurasia, the Balkans, and the Caucasus brought about a change in the NATO mission. With its deep power structure in Asia, Turkey has long been seen as a "strategic partner" for the US, enabling it to make its policies in this geography around Turkey (Davutoğlu 2011, 492-493).

Turkey is a country that has an extremely important geostrategic and geopolitical position at the point that connects economically developed Europe and the Asian and African continents, which are the raw material warehouses. For this reason, Turkey has been an effective power with which both Eurasian and Atlantic countries strive to develop friendly relations in terms of both the transportation of raw materials via the Mediterranean and the Black Sea and the fact that 75% of the world's energy lines are on the transit route (Evgeniy and Yılmaz 2017, 247-249). The instabilities experienced after the Arab Spring made Turkey a reliable power to be supported by the Caucasus, Middle East, and Central Asian countries. Turkey has been the only preferred and advantageous route (Evgeniy and Yılmaz 2017, 248-249).

Stabilising Power in Eurasia: Turkey

Turkey is a stabilising power with its presence in the Black Sea in Eurasia and with its Mediterranean-Black Sea transportation, preventing the states that gained independence in the Caucasus from entering Russian domination, balancing Russia, being a counterbalance to Islamic conservatism, and preventing conflicts in the Balkans. As a power and NATO's outpost, it is an extremely important "geopolitical axis" (Brzezinski

2022, 73). World powers are struggling in the race to have energy resources and dominate in Iraq, Syria, the Caucasus, and its surroundings, and at this point, Turkey's role as the power that can provide peace and stability has strategic importance (Evgeniy and Yilmaz 2017, 250).

Turkey, in the face of conflict or potential conflicts that may turn into conflicts in all its bordering neighbours, works hard both to protect its own national interests and to prevent crisis situations and civil wars not only in the countries where they take place but also in the whole region and, moreover, the world. It develops diplomacy in order to prevent it from happening on a large scale and to provide stability and peace (Altun 2022, 142-146).

Stabilising Power in the Middle East: Turkey

The struggle for dominance between the Middle East, the world's rich oil and natural gas resources, the US, China, and Russia is very important. Dominating this region means having extremely low-priced, long-term energy resources and, in this sense, having the power to direct the world economy (Öztürk 2012, 105). The US has greatly benefited from Turkey's cooperation in this area and the steps it has taken to prevent the influence of China and Russia in this geography, dominate oil resources, prevent the dominance of the great powers, ensure the stability of the collaborating Gulf countries, and protect Israel (Öztürk 2012, 104-106). Turkey is also an extremely strategic player in terms of being on the transit route of the Middle East and the Caspian region, providing energy supply to Europe and the Mediterranean, and forming a safe supply route. The Black Sea and Caucasus regions, where Turkey is located, are geographies where Russia is open to trade and are the points of political conflicts and wars.

After Bashar Assad took over the administration, Turkey tried to develop strategies to provide a peaceful solution through diplomatic means. Thanks to US President George W. Bush, who created trade and visa facilitation, support was provided for the economies of both countries. Turkey brought the two countries to the brink of an agreement. However, due to Israel's sudden attack on Gaza, Turkey could not stand by Israel's intervention in Palestine, although it wanted to contribute to peace, and the negotiations were interrupted (Altun 2022, 151-154).

Turkey's role in the "Astana Process" with Russia and Iran within the framework of the Syria crisis has been one of the important steps towards ensuring the stability of Syria (Druzhinin, İbrahimov and Mutluer 2019, 9).

Turkey as a Stabilising Power in the Ukraine-Russia Crisis

In the 2014 Ukraine crisis, Turkey advocated for diplomacy and communication between the parties since it understood that taking armed action would put additional burdens on both Russia and Ukraine. Defending the geographical integrity of Ukraine in the face of Russia's annexation of Crimea, Turkey stated that it was not possible to accept the annexation and that it would mean a violation of international norms. Over time, Turkey tried to attract the attention of international public opinion so that this issue, which many countries, especially European states, left behind, would not lead to a bigger crisis, a war, especially in the region and internationally in the future (Altun 2022, 173-175).

At the end of 2021, when the Russian Federation started to build up its military, President of Turkey Recep Tayyip Erdoğan had intense diplomatic meetings with the parties, and it was conveyed to the parties that they could meet in Turkey. Since the beginning of Russia's intervention in Ukraine on February 24, 2022, Turkey has been one of the few countries that has gained the trust of both countries with its foreign policies. On the other hand, Turkey, which is trusted as a stabilising power with its mediation and support roles in conflict resolution in the region, brought the parties together first at the Antalya Summit and then in Istanbul. In these meetings, Turkey stated that it could be a guarantor country for long-term peace, and meanwhile, it sent teams within the Red Crescent and AFAD to Ukraine for humanitarian aid support. On April 5, the evacuation of people in Mairupol was carried out. In the Ukrainian refugee crisis (based on years of experience with Syrian refugees), after the second phase of the war that started with Russia's intervention in Eastern Ukraine, he warned that the crisis is an important issue waiting for an international solution, both in the region and in the entire international community.

Turkey was also effective in preventing a food crisis in the world due to the fact that Ukraine and Russia, which are the leading countries in grain production, were at war and in the delivery of Ukrainian grain to the world by making an agreement with both countries when famine was about to arise in some African countries (Altun 2022, 175-181). Being aware of the fact that Ukraine will be affected the most by the deaths of its people and the losses in every sense of the war, Turkey has fulfilled its role as a mediator and maintained its stabilising power as the most reliable actor in the region. Turkey has also continued to show its active role in preventing the refugee and food crises that may cause long-term and major problems in the world (Altun 2022, 182).

Unlike the international powers that claim to exist for stabilising purposes but cause instability by disrupting the balance of power and creating power struggles with their presence and policies, Turkey's foreign policy for the last 20 years is a remarkable example of how it can contribute to international peace by mediating and advancing international peace and stability and developing diplomacy for the resolution of conflicts (Altun 2022, 182-183).

Conclusion

The Eurasian region, which consists of the union of Europe, the centre of global politics and economy in the West, and Asia, where the dominance area is on the rise by increasing its economic development in the East, has always been the scene of the struggle of the great powers that want to establish influence. The global power of the US, with its rising power after the Cold War, showed itself in Eurasia, and for the first time in history, a non-Eurasian power became the ruler of Eurasia. However, it is well known that every hegemon's power will weaken over time and leave its place to another order. At this point, geostrategic experts state that the US should make plans for this in the short, medium, and long term. In this direction, the Russian Federation, which was established with the disintegration of the USSR, tries to gain influence in the countries that used to be under the influence of the USSR and to play an active role in Eurasia. At the same time, the People's Republic of China, which is on the rise in the east of Asia, appears to be a serious rival. The interests of these three states converge in Eurasia.

In the process that developed with the Arab Spring, Turkey has provided negotiations for the stabilisation of the countries in the region and has become a regional power that is appreciated and taken as a role model with the relations it has developed with the authoritarian regimes and regional powers in the Middle East countries where power rivalries are experienced. His efforts to host the refugees who fled their countries during the Syrian civil war set an example for the world and received support from the international community. Due to Russia's intervention in Ukraine, the European Union countries that have imposed sanctions on Russia, which is the largest energy supplier in this sense, have turned to different energy supply alternatives. At this point, Turkey has become a very strategic player with its location in the middle of the North-South, East-West energy transmission route, with the Black Sea to the Mediterranean through the Bosphorus crossings, and the Central Asian countries-Caspian Sea-Europe

connections. Turkey, which has always supported issues such as providing humanitarian aid to the Ukrainians in the developing war conditions and accepting refugees, has also played an active role in the delivery of Russian grain to the world by taking an active role in the grain problem with its diplomacy. It is an indication that it is a stabilising power in Eurasia, where competition is experienced.

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