THE CASPIAN REGION: HISTORY, THEORY, AND PRACTICE

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INTRODUCTION

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, the Caspian Region has been transformed into a battleground for power confrontations between the world’s leading countries, not only due to its geo-strategic position, but also because of its immense hydrocarbon resources. Concerning the importance of the Caspian Region, the former Vice President of the Bush administration, Dick Cheney, emphasized during his speech to oil industrialists in Washington, D.C. in 1998, “I cannot think of a time when we have had region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian.”¹ However, it would be misleading to suggest that the geopolitical and strategic importance of the Caspian Region is limited to the last two decades of the modern history. It has been a “pivot pin” throughout history and has attracted the attention of various empires due to its significant geographical location.

This research paper will investigate the geopolitical importance of the Caspian Region while analysing the historical data and theoretical approaches introduced by scholars of geopolitics during the 20th century. The research methodology is based mainly on content analysis and literature reviews. The principal sources systematically consulted for information are newspapers, journals, statements, reports and communications, scholarly books, and journal articles in this field.

DEFINING THE CASPIAN REGION: HISTORICAL AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

The geopolitical importance of the Caspian Region has increased in correlation with international awareness of its hydrocarbon resources following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. Various scholars have been studying the history of the Caspian Region, the development of its oil industry, the role of Caspian hydrocarbons in international energy security, power rivalries over the control of the Caspian Region, pipelines politics, etc. Thus, there are numerous publications analysing

THE CASPIAN REGION, CONNECTING TWO DISTINCT AREAS OF THE FORMER SOVIET UNION, THE CAUCASUS AND CENTRAL ASIA.

the Caspian Region as a geographical area, and discussing which countries belong to this geo-strategic region. As a new geographical term, the Caspian Region has attracted scholarly attention in the last decade of the twentieth century. At the academic level, there is a debate over whether it consists only of the littoral states of the Caspian Sea, or whether it functions as a broader geopolitical and geo-strategic term, encompassing the wider region. Geographically, the Caspian Region consists of the five littoral states: Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. However, the geopolitical meaning of the term can hardly be restricted to the littoral states of the Caspian Sea. Regarding this, there are various opinions on the term Caspian Region. One of them is that as a geopolitical term, the region consists of the wider territory at the border between Europe and Asia, known as a “Eurasian Pearl”, joining two regions of the former Soviet Union: the Caucasus and Central Asia. Other scholars use the term Caspian Region to mean the republics of Central Asian and South Caucasus, along with Pakistan, Afghanistan and even the Middle East. Mustafa Aydin, a prominent expert in Caspian Studies, identifies the region as follows:

“The Caspian Region is centred on that inland body of water that is called a sea because of its size and includes five independent states that surround it: Russia, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Iran. The contemporary usage of the term ‘the Caspian Region’, in a wider geopolitical sense, implies a ‘geopolitics determined by peculiarities of geology, [that is] huge natural resources’, which has led to the formation of ‘a region defined by oil’ and gas. The result is the emergence of a new strategic region encompassing most of Central Asia, the North Caucasus and Transcaucasia as well as such nearby states as Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and even China. Thus the Caspian Region, connecting two distinct areas of the former Soviet Union, the Caucasus and Central Asia...”

Based on these notions, it is possible to conceptualize the Caspian Region, which can be also identified as the “Greater Caspian Region”, as a geographical area located in the central part of Eurasia (a geographical

pivot) which connects economically and politically significant regions of the world, such as: the Middle East, Europe, South and East Asia.

**THE “GREAT GAME”: RUSSIAN AND BRITISH ENGAGEMENT IN POWER POLITICS IN THE “GREATER CASPIAN REGION”**

The Greater Caspian Region connecting the key zones of Asia and Europe has been a crucial area within the Eurasian landmass because of its geographical importance throughout history. Before the metaphor “Great Game” entered into the vocabulary, this region had been used as a significant commercial and military passage, and had been the object of rivalries and machinations for centuries. The term “Great Game” was coined much later when Tsarist Russia and Great Britain engaged in a power competition over the region in the 19th century. The basic narrative concerns the Russian expansionist policy toward the area to the south, threatening to create a new world monarchy, while Great Britain wanted to counter the consequences of Russian aggression. In fact, Britain was afraid because of its interests in India, one of its colonial possessions. There was an argument that the object of the Great Game was not only Central Asia, but also Afghanistan and India, and Britain was aware that if Russia established its control over Central Asia, it would mitigate penetration into its colonial India. Therefore, David Fromkin, who coined the term “Great Game”, narrates, “by the last quarter of the nineteenth century, it was a common assumption in Europe that the next great war - the inevitable war - was going to be the final showdown between Britain and Russia”.

The concept of the “Great Game” is usually attributed to British East India Company intelligence officer Arthur Conolly. In 1837, Arthur Conolly wrote two letters to Henry Rawlinson: “You’ve a great game, a noble one, before you” and, in other letter: “If only the British Government would play the grand game...”\(^\text{10}\) Gerald Morgan writes that Conolly was not concerned with the power confrontation between two Christian nations, Russia and Britain. He was seeing the Game as a spiritual and antislavery crusade. He wrote: “We should help Russia cordially to all that she has a right to expect - unify Afghanistan, shake hands with Persia....Thereafter we should civilize and Christianize the rest of the region”.\(^\text{11}\) However, his concept entered the world historiography as a term to explain political rivalry between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain. It was the British novelist Rudyard Kipling who introduced this concept to the world history through his novel.\(^\text{12}\)

It has been mentioned that the “Great Game” concerned political rivalry between two European empires that began in the late eighteenth century and continued until the formation of the Soviet Union. In 1791, Russia’s annexation of the strategic port town of Ottoman Empire, Ochakov, raised British concerns and Prime Minister William Pitt opposed this action by Tsarist Russia. Britain feared that the emergence of Tsarist Russia as a powerful empire might challenge the existing balance of power as controlled by Britain. However, for a long time this fear was set aside due to the Napoleonic wars. According to David Fromkin, “until the wars of the French and American Revolutions, Russia was regarded by the British as their natural ally; and despite the several difficulties that arose between them in the years between 1789 and 1815, this was the opinion that most Britons seem

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to have held at least until the end of the Napoleonic wars". However, after the Napoleonic wars, Britain's concerns about Russia were stirred once again by Russia’s expansionist policy toward the south and its desire to annex additional territories belonging to the Ottoman and Persian Empires.

The “Great Game” was the result of various disagreements between Britain and Tsarist Russia, and there are still disputes among historians and scholars about the specific causes of the rivalry between them. Various reasons were highlighted to explain Tsarist Russia’s designs on the area to its south. The first reason was economic; Russia was looking for a market for its goods. The economic factor was triggered by the US Civil War, which caused a shortage in the supply of cotton. “Cotton was a prime motive not only in initiating expansion, but also to consolidating the territory of the Russian political and economic system as rapidly as possible”. Concerning this, Russian historian A.A. Mikhailov writes,

“The abolition of serfdom in Russia in 1861 gave domestic industry and trade a powerful impetus. Cities, factories and plants were flooded by many thousands of freed serfs. The increased production made the task of expanding markets especially pressing. Industrialists inundated government with petitions to increase market opportunities for their products, including in Central Asia”.

**THE ABOLITION OF SERFDOM IN RUSSIA IN 1861 GAVE DOMESTIC INDUSTRY AND TRADE A POWERFUL IMPETUS.**

Russian expansion toward the East and the South was also motivated by what Moscow considered its civilizing mission, the “Manifest Destiny”, to bring Central Asian nomadic peoples under Russian control. Slavery was another factor that shaped Russian policy toward Central Asia. Some of the Central Asian Khanates, from time to time, raided Russian territories around the Caspianates, capturing Russians to sell as slaves. Russia used the slavery issue as a justification for its southward movement. This was main cause for the British concern. As mentioned above, Central Asia was a foothold into Afghanistan, which led into British India. Thus the Russian expansionist movement toward this region created a security threat for Great Britain. Historians have identified nine reasons that Great Britain had to counter the Russian expansion:

- It would upset the balance of power by making Russia much stronger than the other European powers;
It would culminate in a Russian invasion of British India;

It would encourage India to revolt against Britain;

AZERBAIJAN IS ONE OF THE BIRTH PLACES OF THE OIL INDUSTRY AND ONE OF THE FIRST COUNTRIES IN WHICH PEOPLE LEARNED HOW TO PRODUCE OIL AND TO USE IT FOR MEDICINE AND HOUSEHOLD NEEDS.

It would cause the Islamic regimes of Asia to collapse, which in turn would lead to the outbreak of a general war between the European powers in order to determine which of them would get what share of the spoils;

It would strengthen a country and a regime that was the chief enemy to popular political freedom in the world;

It would strengthen a people whom Britons hated;

It threatened to disrupt the profitable British trade with Asia;

It would strengthen the sort of protectionist, closed economic society which free-trading of which Britain morally disapproved;

It would threaten the line of naval communications upon which Britain's international commercial and political standing was dependent.

Later on, British Foreign Secretary Lord Salisbury and the Prime Minister added an additional reason at the end of the century, concerning the Russian intention to capture Constantinople. Such an act would destroy the reputation of Great Britain as a formidable world power.  

According to Peter Hopkirk, the “Great Game” involved three main stages. The first stage started in the second decade of the nineteenth century with the expansion of Tsarist Empire into the Caucasus and Central Asia. From 1813, Russia gained a number of military successes against Persian Empire that were codified by the signing of the Gulistan and Turkmanchay Treaties in 1813 and 1828 respectively. As the result of the treaties, the territories of present day Armenia and Azerbaijan were ceded to Russia. These events set off alarm bells in Great Britain regarding the protection its colonies in Asia, and London began engage more intensively with political issues in Central Asia during the nineteenth century, which pushed it into the “Great Game” with Russia. The first stage of the “Great Game” ended in 1907 with the Anglo-Russian Treaty. According to this treaty, "Tibet was neutralized; Russia abandoned her interest in Afghanistan and left control of its external policy to Britain; and Persia was divided into three zones, with Russia taking over the substance of the country and England its seacoast".  

In comparison to the first stage of the “Great Game”, which lasted approximately a century, the second stage was much shorter, lasting only a decade, from 1907 until Russia’s Bolshevik Revolution in 1917. During this time, the parties used the same methods as in the first stage: intelligence and espionage activities to manipulate local populations. Coming to the third stage of the “Great Game”, this took place after the Bolshevik Revolution, when Lenin ordered the Bolsheviks to “liberate, by means of armed, revolt, the whole of Asia from imperialist domination”. 21 During the third stage, more powers became involved in the “Great Game” and it shifted from the Central Asia to the western shore of the Caspian Sea. After the Bolshevik Revolution, the situation changed in the South Caucasus and Azerbaijan, and Baku in particular emerged as a strategically vital location for the interests of the great powers. Vladimir Lenin, the leader of the Bolshevik Revolution, emphasized the importance of Baku to the leader of the Georgian Bolsheviks Sergo Orzhonikdze: it is “extremely important to take Baku” 22. Lenin said repeatedly that, “we must assist the Baku workers in overthrowing the capitalists so they can join Russia again!” 23 The motivation, of course, was its oil.

Azerbaijan is one of the birth places of the oil industry and one of the first countries in which people learned how to produce oil and to use it for medicine and household needs. There is information about the production of oil on the Absheron peninsula in many Arabic and Iranian manuscripts. The earliest exploration of oil in the Absheron peninsula dates back to approximately the 7th century BC. 24 However, the mass production of oil in

Baku dates from the second half of the nineteenth century. In the last three decades of the 19th century, Baku’s oil industry began to attract considerable interest from foreign companies and local investors. Baku became the energy-industrial capital of the world with the abolition of the oktupchina lease system in 1872 in Tsarist Russia. Through this, Baku was transformed into a huge industrial centre of Russia and gained a reputation as the “Oil Capital of the World” with investments from foreign oil companies and local oil barons. As mentioned above, as a result of abandoning the lease system, the system was declared free and oil fields were sold to individuals through auctions, involving single payments. The year marked the beginning of oil drilling on a massive scale and the increase of industrial production in the Russian oil sector. The new owners of oil fields immediately applied American techniques and methods to the drilling process of oil extraction, which led to the rapid development of the oil industry. Baku’s crude oil, which was successfully processed in domestic refineries, began to compete in the world market with the illuminating and lubricating products that were exported from United States.  

From 1872, Azerbaijan’s oil industry grew more than 170 fold over the next three decades. In 1897, it was equal to the oil production of the United States, but a year later it had become the world’s biggest producer. By the end of the nineteenth century, fundamental changes had taken place in the Azerbaijani oil industry and it became the largest oil producing country in the world. At the turn of the century, from 1898 to 1902, more than 50% of the world’s oil, and 95% of Russian oil, was produced in Baku.  

However, in the early 20th century, the Azerbaijani oil industry suffered as a result of the political turbulence that spread across Russia, resulting in the Russian revolution of 1905. The international oil crisis from 1901 to 1903, the disastrous war between Russia and Japan in 1904-05, ethnic conflicts throughout Caucasus, increase in world oil production, and then the outbreak of the First World War and revolutionary changes in the Russian government in 1917 were additional factors that led to the decline of oil production in Azerbaijan. Consequently, the number of refineries decreased from 91 to 86, then to 57. The damage to the oil industry of Baku resulting from fires during the 1905 strike was estimated at 19,500,000 roubles.  

After the Russian Revolution of 1917 the political situation changed in Azerbaijan. Baku began to attract the interests of great powers and a power vacuum was created because of the vast energy resources at stake and its

27. Israfioglu, NazimRza, NeftQlobalMunaqi (Oil as a Source of Global Conflicts) (Qrb, 2009), p. 102.
geopolitical situation. The desire to control Baku oil industry caused intense rivalries among Russian, Turkish, German, and British forces. After the revolution, Russia saw Baku’s oil as a vital means of guaranteeing the Bolshevik. During that time, 165 independent oil companies were nationalized in Azerbaijan and more than 1.3 million oil and oil products were transported to Bolshevik Russia. In order to show the importance of Baku for Soviet Russia, Stepan Shaumian, Chairman of the Baku Commune of Commissars, who slaughtered thousands of Azerbaijanis during the 1918 March massacre in order to keep Baku in hand, declared that “Russia suffers very much without Baku’s oil. The international working class of Baku must help build the world’s first Bolshevik state. We must supply them with oil. In turn, the Russians will send us bread and feed all of the poor in Baku”.

During that time, the South Caucasus emerged as a strategically vital point for Great Britain for preserving its interests in Persia, Afghanistan, and most importantly in India. The vast amount of oil in Azerbaijan was also relevant. Therefore, David Fromkin added an eleventh reason to the above mentioned ten reasons: “for British opposition to Russian expansion in Asia emerged only in the first part of the twentieth century, when it was discovered that there was oil in the areas that Russia threatened, and that the possession of oil was of considerable military and economic importance”.

However, the Treaty of Brest-litovsk, signed on 3 March 1918, provided a legal basis for the direct in-

tervention of the Ottoman forces, the ally of Germany, into the Caucasus. According to the Treaty, three strategic regions of the Russian empire, Ardahan, Kars, and Batumi, were merged with the Ottoman Empire. Under Article IV of the Brest-Litovsk Treaty, the Ottoman Empire gained the right to provide military support to the Azerbaijan in order to preserve domestic stability and national security. Following this article, the Ottoman troops together with the newly established Azerbaijani army moved toward to Baku in order to liberate the city from control of Russian Bolsheviks and Armenians, who had been controlling the region since the tragic events of Baku in March 1918. These events increased Britain’s concern about losing the valuable resources and strategic positions of Caucasus to the Turkish-Germany alliance. Britain feared that once Turkey established control in Baku, it would be easy for it to penetrate Persia and Central Asia. For this reason, on 22 May the head of British forces in Persia, Major-General Lionel C. Dunsterville, asked General Marshall, General Officer Commanding-in-Chief of the Mesopotamian Expeditionary Force in Baghdad to allow the mustering of all available troops for the protection of Baku against Ottoman forces. According to Jamil Hasanli, “the British were very much concerned with the Turkish victories in Baku: on the one hand, this meant that the German-Turkish bloc might lay its hands on Baku oil; on the other, they never excluded a possibility that Nuru Pasha might press further on to Central Asia, Afghanistan, and India”. In May 1918, the British forces successfully captured Baku temporarily, but it was difficult to resist the Ottoman troops with the small army they had, and the joint forces of the

Ottoman and Azerbaijan (the Islamic Army) penetrated Baku and captured it in September 1918.\textsuperscript{35} However, with the signing the Armistice of Mudros on 30 October 1918, the Ottoman forces were withdrawn from Transcaucasia and the British Empire seized a chance to control of both Baku and Batumi and all railroads that was under the control of the Ottoman forces, which was considered as an essential line of advance in India. When the British army entered in Baku after withdrawal of the Ottoman forces, General Thomson refused to recognize Azerbaijan as a sovereign state. He argued that, “according to our information there is no republic set up by the will of the Azerbaijani people; there is a government set up by intrigues of the Turkish commanders. Since you insist on the opposite, we shall verify everything on the spot and arrive at a corresponding conclusion”.\textsuperscript{36} Later on, Thomson accepted the democratic credentials of Azerbaijan as a sovereign and independent state and recognized the coalition government under Prime Minister Khoysky as only legal body of the republic. During the Paris Peace Conference, the Great Britain also stressed the geopolitical importance of Azerbaijan and “forced” the recognition of its independence by the representatives of the Conference. Britain “feared the spread of Bolshevism to the Middle and Near East once it had established itself beyond the Caucasian Range”.\textsuperscript{37} However, Azerbaijan as an independent republic would not suit Russia and Bolshevism for moving further to the Transcaucasia, the Middle East, and the Central Asia and will free these regions from the geopolitical blockade of Russia and its allies. Consequently, on January 1920, three months before the penetration of the Soviet forces into the region, the Allied Supreme Council at the Versailles recognized the independence of Azerbaijan.\textsuperscript{38} However, as long as Baku was the main source of oil for the Bolshevik Revolution, Russia had no intention of liberating Azerbaijan. After two years of independence the Red Army occupied Azerbaijan on 28 April 1920. After the so-called “April revolution in Baku,” Lenin wrote, “we all know that our industries stood idle because of the lack of fuel. Nonetheless, today, the proletariat of Baku has toppled the Azerbaijani government and is in charge of running the government. This means that now we own a basic economy that is capable of supporting our industries”.\textsuperscript{39}

**MACKINDER’S HEARTLAND THEORY: GEOGRAPHIC PIVOT AREA OF THE WORLD**

Along with the scholars of the Silk Road and “Great Game”, Sir Halford

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38. Ibid, Ewalt, Donald.  
J. Mackinder (1861-1947) also drew attention to the geopolitical importance of the Caspian Region in his well-known Heartland concept. His theoretical approach to the region dates back through the century, when he introduced Eurasia as the Heartland, considering it as the most significant and pivotal area in terms of geopolitics.\(^{40}\)

Mackinder was a prominent scholar in the Great Britain, who studied the evolution of geography as an academic discipline. Along with his academic activities, he also served as an influential public and political character in England. His concepts provided an explanation for the links between "geography, security, and international politics". \(^{41}\) Mackinder’s work on geopolitics had been introduced with his article, Geographical Pivot of History, in 1904, hailed as a masterpiece. Later works range from the 1905 article, Manpower as a Measure of National and Imperial Strength, where Mackinder brought the vocabulary of manpower to linguistics and geopolitics, to his book Democratic Ideals and Reality in 1919.

Mackinder’s geopolitical concept continuously evolved throughout his work from 1904 till 1919. His most authoritative work is the Heartland Theory, which made a very influential contribution to the geopolitical development. Mackinder introduced his article, Geographical Pivot of History, to London’s Royal Geographic Society in 1904. He posited that the Pivot area of Eurasia that covers much of today’s Russia, mainly Siberia, and Central Asia, and later Central-East Europe\(^{42}\) (Map 2) was the central factor to the balance of power in international relations. According to Mackinder, any

Map 2. Mackinder’s ‘pivot area’, the ‘inner’ and ‘outer crescents’\(^{43}\)

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state that possesses control over the pivot would be advantageous for dictating Eurasia and even could control the world.

Mackinder believed that world consists of naturally split territories that play a special function in international historical processes. He grounded his views on the crucial role of outside pressure on the formulation of European civilizations. In this regard, Mackinder argued that Europe enhanced its strength built on strenuous efforts for continuing invasion of Asia throughout history. Consequently, Mackinder considered the Heartland of Eurasia as the spatial centre.

It is helpful to ponder Mackinder’s methodology for structuring the pivot area. He divided the map of world into two segments: inner and outer crescents. As in shown in Map 2, the inner crescent covers the coastal areas of Eurasia. The outer crescent consists of the geographical space beyond the inner crescent that covers North and Southern America, Great Britain, Southern Africa, Japan and Australia. The inner crescent was regarded as the area in which the most dynamic evolutions of civilizations took place throughout history. In this respect, Mackinder placed his concept of the Heartland within the inner crescent and accordingly gave primary importance to Eastern Europe. Thus, in order to show the geopolitical importance of the Eurasian landmass he aptly put forward his Heartland formula as; “Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; Who rules the World-Island commands the World”. Later on, Mackinder updated his previous works and made some adjustments in order to adopt his the-

44. Ibid. Mackinder, Halford J., 1904.
sis to the contemporary geopolitical processes. In his first paper of 1904 he identified East Europe as an important geographical area to his Pivot, but later in 1919, he also added the Baltic and Black Seas into his Pivot area. Consequently, Mackinder drew the map of the Pivot again after double revisions to his Heartland theory (Map 3).

In this respect, the well-known formula of Mackinder given above can also be rendered as: who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island, and who rules the World-Island commands the World.47

Despite the fact that Mackinder’s thesis has been tested several times by geopolitical realities and found its validity through great events such as the World Wars, the westward expansion of the Soviets and so forth, the Heartland theory has been criticized and even deemed as obsolete by some scholars. American political scientist Nicholas Spykman gave one of the early critiques of Mackinder’s thesis. Although Spykman based his geopolitical enquiry on Mackinder’s Heartland, he introduced a counter theory that called Rimland that was based on the Mackinder’s inner crescent (Map 4). Spykman accused Mackinder for overestimating his Pivot area while neglecting the importance of other areas. Therefore, Spykman propounded a new hypothesis: ”whoever rules the Rimland commands Eurasia; whoever rules Eurasia commands the World”. While emphasising the importance of the coastal and buffer zones, Spykman also argued that Mackinder had to grant the significance of the United States of America. However, due to Spykman’s lack of further scholarly contributions, Mackinder’s theory remained undisputed in geopolitics-oriented research during the twentieth century. The rise of the Soviet Union as a global hegemony in the Eurasian

47. Spykman, Nicholas John, The Geography of the Peace (Harcourt, Brace and Co., 1944), p. 43.
landmass after the Second World War also shows that the structure of the Cold War world matches Mackinder’s concept more closely than Spykman’s counter theory. Considering the validity of the Heartland, Levent Hekimoglu posits that:

“The Heartland thesis has survived not on account of the validity of the underlying premises and the merits of the argument, but because its conclusions recommending the containment of Russia fit snuggly into the Cold War ideational scheme that dominated much of the 20th century”. 48

Hekimoglu finds it lame that Mackinder was convinced of the great economic potential of the Heartland, however; his belief has not been any reason for any atrocity in current Pivot area. 49 Consequently, Mackinder’s blueprint provides a precise basis for thorough research scrutinizing the significance of relations as well as the roles and contributions of the countries located in the Pivot area.

CONTRIBUTION OF KARL HAUSHOFER TO THE GEOPOLITICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE EURASIAN PIVOT

It was Karl Haushofer, the founder of geopolitical studies in Germany, who comprehensively worked on the geopolitical importance of the Eurasian Pivot (Caspian Region) during the twentieth century after Halford Mackinder. His academic contributions to the geopolitics shaped the nature of German geopolitical thought in the first four decades of the twentieth century, until the end of Second World War. His orientation toward political geography was closely linked with his deployment to Japan. As a young field artillery officer, he served in German-military mission to Japan from 1908 to 1910. These two years marked the beginning of his love of the Orient, where he admired the national unity of Japanese, particularly “the discipline of Japanese life and the blind obedience and devotion with which the Japanese people followed their leaders”. 50 During his stay in Japan he got to know many high ranking Japanese politicians who helped him to achieve the alliance between Germany and Japan during the Second World War.

Inspired by the Heartland theory of his English counterpart Mackinder, he was fascinated the strategic significance of the geographical location of Eurasia. In 1912, he submitted his brilliant doctoral thesis on Political Geography, which was later published under the title “Dai Nihon, Betrachtungenüber Groß-Japans Wehrkraft, Weltstellung und Zukunft” (Reflections on Greater Japan’s Military Strength, World Position, and Future), in which he was arguing that the geographical location and the territorial characteristics of a state has an enormous impact on its destiny. Later on he abandoned his military career and

devoted his life to the study of geopolitics, which was introduced as a single discipline with the foundation of the Institute of Geopolitics at the University of Munich in 1924 by Haus- hofer. From that date until his death in 1945 he also published a monthly “Zeitschriftfür Geopolitik” (Geopolitics Journal). After the institutionalization of the National Socialist party regime in Germany, the Nazi regime officially coordinated the study of geopolitics.51

As mentioned before, Haushofer was heavily influenced by the work of the previous geopolitical thinkers, such as Ratzel, Kjellen, but particularly by Mackinder and his geopolitical study of Eurasia. He described “The Geopolitical Pivot of History” of Mackinder as a genius scientific research on geopolitics. In this vein, he writes, “never have I seen anything greater than those few pages of geopolitical masterwork”.52 While adopting the view of Mackinder on the alliance between Russia and Germany, Haushofer suggests “an alliance with the Soviet Union so that the vast resources of Eurasia could be used to support German ambitions on the world scene”.53 However, the crucial difference between Haushofer and Mackinder was that Haushofer added Japan to his Eurasian design for analliance between Germany and Russia. For the first time in world history Haushofer suggested a transcontinental bloc from the Rhine to Yangtze and a triple German-Russian-Japanese alliance, which he called the Eurasian Bloc or Inner Line.54 In this regard, Haushofer published a paper titled “The Continental Bloc: Mittel Europa-Eurasia-Japan” in early 1941, in which he stated that “the largest and most important shift in modern world politics is undoubtedly the formation of the powerful continental bloc, encompassing Europe, Central and East Asia”. 55

According to Haushofer, the formation of the continental bloc was not based on political affinities but on geopolitical determination in order to counter great powers, such as the UK and the USA, which were controlling the Planetary Ocean. Haushofer considered that an alternative to the dominance of the oceanic powers would be a tripartite alliance between Germany, Russia, and Japan.56

In this regard, he says that “With Japan as our partner, with Russia placing her resources at our disposal, the ring around England becomes tighter and tighter. Against the horizon there stands out a new Eurasian bloc in the making. It extends from Spain to Siberia, from Norway to Africa”.57 Haushofer, Karl, “The Continental Bloc: Mittel Europa - Eurasia - Japan”, p. 373. Retrieved from “The Idea of Eurasia” by Max Ostrovsky, p. 15.

56. Ibid, Costachi, Silviu, p. 271.
ofi's Continental Bloc theory is very similar to Mackinder's Pivot, which stated, “who dominates Heartland rules the world”. When combining the Mackinder’s Heartland concept with Haushofer’s Continental Bloc, the Russian geopolitical theorist Alexander Dugin writes,

“On the strategic level it means maximally integrating Eurasian spaces around the “geographic pivot of history,” thereby creating a powerful and strategically united Continental Bloc…. [It is necessary] to spread control of the internal continental spaces of Eurasia (disposed in Russia and around it) as far as its natural frontiers, which coincide with the sea shores…. It means that the foremost aim of the Order of Eurasia is the attainment of complete control over the “shore zones” of the continent, the rimlands and transformation of the whole continent into a sole geopolitical space with the pivot and centre in...the Heartland”.

Haushofer indicates that the Continental Bloc is the only way for the countries composing the bloc to expand from the North to South. According his Pan-regions, Africa would have become the main expansion direction of Germany and Italy; Russia would have been dominant in the Central Asia and Indian Ocean; and the Pacific (Far East, Australia, and New Zealand) was supposed to belong to Japan. Latin America was to be ruled by the USA. As shown in map 6, Haushofer considered Britain and France as part of the Euro-African region that was to dominated by Germany.

However, Haushofer’s concept collapsed with Hitler’s attack on Russia in the summer of 1941, repeating the mistakes that Napoleon and Wilhelm II had made. Because of this, the chance to form a Continental Bloc managed by the three powerful countries of Eurasia was dropped and a strong coalition was formed against the German expansion policy. Haushofer was seeing geopolitics as a best way for avoiding catastrophic wars. Therefore, he was completely against the decision of Hitler to attack the USSR, while ignoring the saying of Haushofer, "neither of the two strong countries of the continent should raise against each other".

In his work “Why Geopolitik”, Haushofer argues that the reason Germany lost the First World War was that the leaders of Germany did not study geopolitics. On this, he argues that,

58. Ibid, Ostrovsky, Max, p. 25.
59. Ibid, Ostrovsky, Max, p. 15.
60. Ibid, Costache, Silviu, p. 272.
“Our leaders must learn to use all available tools to carry on the fight for Germany’s existence—a struggle which is becoming increasingly difficult due to the incongruity between her food production and population density. For our future foreign policy we therefore need Geopolitik. We need the same thorough training in this discipline as developed by England—though not under that name—with one sided purposefulness, as adopted by France, and as it is beginning to be used by Japan”.  

Haushofer’s concept was introduced to the German Geopolitics scene in the wake of Germany’s defeat in the First World War. The intention was to discredit the humiliating conditions of the Versailles Peace treaty imposed on Germany. After the treaty, it was believed that Germany had a need for Lebensraum or additional living space, which was essential for the continued national well-being of the German people. In this regard, Haushofer worked on the Heartland and the need for Lebensraum during the interwar period. He outlines, “International politics was a struggle for survival between competing states. In order to survive, the German state must achieve Lebensraum”.  

According to Haushofer, Germany had to enlarge its existing territory. The way to do this is to be well equipped with knowledge and training of geopolitics. He writes that “we ought to devote particular attention to national self-determination, population pressure, living space, and changes in rural and urban settlement, and we must closely follow all shifts and transfers of power throughout the world”.  

Haushofer’s concept later found favour with the Nazi leaders and was used as justification for the expansion of Germany during the Nazi regime. It was one of the Haushofer’s favourite students, Rudolph Hess, who introduced his teaching into the inner circles of the Nazi leadership. Later Haushofer and Hess became close friends and Haushofer visited him at Landsberg Prison after the failed putsch of 1923, where Hess introduced him to Adolf Hitler. It was said that Professor Haushofer frequently visited Hitler while he was working on Mein Kampf in prison and had close relations with him after he came to power in 1933. On this subject, Zbigniew Brzezinsky elucidates:

“Geopolitics was also invoked by some leading German political geographers to justify their country’s “Drang nachosten”, notably with Karl Haushofer adapting Mackinder’s concept to Germany’s strategic needs. Its much-vulgarized echo could also be heard in Adolf Hitler’s emphasis on the German people’s need for “Lebensraum”.”

63. Ibid, Haushofer, Karl, p. 34.
64. Ibid, Costachie, Silviu, p. 271.
Inspired by Haushofer, Hitler in Chapter XIV of Volume II of Mein Kampf writes that Germany is an “impotent” nation that does not have adequate territorial resources for its people. According to him, the Treaty of Versailles left Germany without adequate territory in comparison other world powers. Therefore, it was a duty of the German people to seek Lebensraum.66 Hitler writes that, “Germany will either be a world power or there will be no Germany. And for world power she needs that magnitude which will give her the position she needs in the present period, and life to her citizens... Neither western nor eastern orientation must be the future goal of our foreign policy, but an eastern policy in the sense of acquiring the necessary soil for our German people.67

Haushofer’s concept became a subject of the great debate after the Second World War and drawn harsh criticism from scholars. The debate was whether he introduced and manipulated the policy of Nazi regime or not. However, it is important to mention that there were significant differences between the geopolitical teachings of Haushofer and the policy of Adolf Hitler. The eastern policy of Hitler is much more radical, as it intended to acquire the necessary land for his people. His vision was to colonize Eastern Europe by new a German Empire. According to his policy, the German “Aryan” race would enslave the Slavic sub nations of the East.68 At the Nuremberg party rally of 1936 the intention of Hitler was specified as “if the Urals with their incalculable wealth of raw materials, the rich forests of Siberia, and the unending cornfields of the Ukraine lay within Germany...the country would swim in plenty”.69 However, Haushofer’s thinking of “Eastern orientation” suggested seeking an alliance with the USSR in order to have access to Heartland, rather to colonize it. Concerning this, David Murphy has made two key observations about the differences between Haushofer’s geopolitics and the policy of National-Socialist Party. First, Haushofer considered Great Britain as an ultimate enemy of Germany and urged Germany to make a deal with Russia. But National-Socialists perceived Russia as an archenemy. Second, for Haushofer, the space was the main determination of the national destiny, but for Hitler race was much more important than space. He notes that it would be a mistake to believe that geopolitics or scholars of geopolitics provided some kind of fundamental basis for Hitler’s ideas, but he was

68. Ibid, Tuathail, Gearóid Ó., p. 22.
69. Ibid, Blouet, Brian, p. 59.
influenced by the ideas of geopolitics and used it to legitimate his policy.\textsuperscript{70}

Regarding to apparent amalgamation of Nazi policy and Haushofer’s concept of geopolitics, Haushofer wrote, “I have never favoured the plan of conquest either in my writings or my lectures.” He notes that after 1933 he worked under pressure and his oral and written ideas were publicized after four rounds of censorship, therefore, all written and printed expression from 1933 on was done under pressure and “must be judged accordingly”. Haushofer wrote: “I always regarded dreams of such annexations as dangerous dreams and therefore disapproved them”.\textsuperscript{71}

Consequently, as Haushofer notes in the previous paragraph, Nazi dreams to annex the East under the revived German Empire, and declaring war against the USSR, ran counter to the geopolitical suggestions of Haushofer. This was a dangerous policy and resulted Germany’s defeat. Hence, Russia annexed “the living space of Germany” to its territory and ruled the Pivot of Eurasia approximately five decades until the end of Cold War.

THE “NEW GREAT GAME” OVER THE CASPIAN REGION

As stated in previous chapter, the Caspian Region has been under the control of the Soviet Union from the end of Second World War till its dissolution at the end of 1980s. During the Cold War, this region was largely ignored by political scholars. No one really cared about this region, either in political or academic terms. However, the dissolution of the Soviet Union led global powers to become involved in a political game over the Caspian Region, the Pivot of Eurasia, which was named by scholars as the “New Great Game”. Whereas the above mentioned Old Great Game of the nineteenth century between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain emerged out of the strengthening of Russian Tsarist empire, the “New Great Game” started with the demise of the Soviet Empire.

In this regard, the geographical location of the Caspian Region and its vast hydrocarbon resources meant that it played a significant role in the “New Great Game”, drawing attention from regional and global players who wanted to increase their shares in the exploitation and transportation of Caspian hydrocarbons. The discovery of large amounts of oil and gas in the Caspian led Western politicians to speak of the Caspian Region as the ”New Middle East”.\textsuperscript{72}

As mentioned before, the geopolitical and geo-economic significance of the Caspian Region played a crucial role in bringing the attention of the regional and global powers to the region, and in fuelling their desire to impose their political will over

\textsuperscript{70} Thimas Murphy, David, The Heroic Earth: Geopolitical Thought in Weimar Germany, 1918-1933 (Kent State University Press, 1997), p. 244-247.


\textsuperscript{72} Kumar, Pankaj, “The Unrealized Dream of Caspian Oil”, International Politics, Vol. 2, No. 4, Summer & Autumn 2009, p. 9.
the Caspian Region countries. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the energy wealth and strategic location of this area increased its strategic importance and generated political and economic competition between global powers, namely; Russia, China, and the USA. This power confrontation reached a new level after the September 11th terrorist attack on US soil. From that point, the United States sought to intensify its military presence in the Caspian Region and began military cooperation with the newly independent Caspian Region states. 73 This attempt was considered by Russia as a direct threat to Russian political and economic interests in its “Near Abroad”. With the intensification of energy, security, and economic interests of the big powers in the Caspian Region, it became the core of the “New Great Game”. 74 As Mehdi Parviz Amineh indicates, “with the end of the Soviet control over CEA and the Caspian Region natural and human resources, there emerged a New Great Game amongst the many players interested in access to the region’s oil and gas reserves...” 75 Despite the differences in the scope, ideas, and the parties of the New Great Game, political analysts have compared this to the great power rivalry and the nineteenth century “Great Game” between the British and Russian empires. 76 Regarding this, Lutz Kleveman in his famous book The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia, writes: “Now, more than a hundred years later, great empires once again position themselves to control the heart of the Eurasian landmass, left in a post-Soviet power vacuum. Today there are different actors and the rules of the new neo-colonial game are far more complex than those of a century ago: The United States has taken over the leading role from the British. Along with the ever-present Russians, new regional powers such as China, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan have entered the new arena...” 77 According to him, “the greatest differences in today’s Great Game are the spoils. While in the Victorian-era struggle, London and St. Petersburg competed over access to the riches of India, the New Great Game focuses

on the Caspian energy reserves, principally oil and gas”.78 Thus, because of their geo-strategic position, the newly independent states of the Caspian Region reconstitute the modern core of Mackinder’s concept, and the political rivalry over the Heartland that he introduced a century ago still exists. However, this time, great powers are not fighting for the control of the Caspian Region due to its geographical position as a gateway to the immense natural resources of Afghanistan and India, but also for the huge hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian Region itself. The essence of this gamble over the Caspian Region is twofold:

ECONOMIC AND ENERGY ISSUES

As mentioned before, the Caspian Region occupies a central position in the Eurasian landmass and this geographical possession is important because it connects traditional East/West and North/South trade routes. At the same time the region possesses vast amounts of natural resources, mainly oil and gas, which are considered as an alternative to the Middle Eastern resources. While stressing the importance of the Caspian Region energy resources, the US Energy Secretary, Bill Richardson notes, “The Caspian Region will hopefully save us from total dependence on Middle East oil”.79 It possesses a high amount of proven and possible energy resources. The estimation is that proven oil is between 10 and 32 billion barrels with 233 billion barrel possible oil reserves.80 For gas, it is estimated that there is 243-248 trillion cubic feet of proven and 293 trillion cubic feet possible gas.81 Therefore, one of the main reasons that the US, Russia, and China are involved in the political rivalry in the Caspian Region is due to the access to the rich energy resources, control oil and gas production and the transportation pipelines that transfer the hydrocarbon resources to the world market.

POLITICAL AND SECURITY ISSUES

Nevertheless, access to the rich energy resources is considered the main reason, but it is not the only motive. All three powers have political and security interests in the Caspian Region. The New Great Game has gained a new facet with the US penetration into the Caspian Region after 9/11. The US sees the Caspian Region as an important area for its geo-strategy, as it is connected with its position in the Middle East. Russia’s concerns are the ethnic and territorial disputes in its “Near Abroad” and the Russian citizens in these countries. China in its turn was worried about the security issue in its Xinjiang province, which has the direct territorial link with the Caspian Region.

However, it should be mentioned that despite the growing commercial and political presence of the USA and China as a leading global powers that play a crucial role in the political and economic affairs of the regional countries, Russia is still a major regional power and has a prominent influence over not only economic and political issues but also from the cultural perspective. Moscow considers this region as its sphere of influence and a buffer zone against threats to its security, and will try to retain its influence over this region using all possible ways.

If the historical significance of the Pivot Area is scrutinized, its appeal to great powers throughout history is illuminated. Starting from the Hun Empire in the 4th-5th century up until the 21st century, the Heartland was at the centre of interests of major geopolitical actors. After the collapse of the Hun and Roman Empires, the heartland lost its geopolitical and geo-economic functions until the emergence of Turkic Khanate, which shaped the Pivot area. Subsequently, the Heartland turned into a battlefield, thus was captured and fell under the control of various ethnicities, nations and regimes. Figure 2 provides a concise illustration of the historical evolution of the pivot area through the invasion of different empires in different periods (See fig. 2).

**CONCLUSION**

An evaluation of the existing literature demonstrates the region's historical and geopolitical importance based the
various historical facts and theoretical approaches, and as such reveals a broad consensus that the geographical pivot history identified by Halford Mackinder overlaps with the new political context, the Caspian Region that arrived on the scene of world historical and political affairs after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. While it still remains under dispute whether the Caspian is a region or not, the present political examination shows that in the near future this area will evolve as a region in the eyes of world scholars because of its place in world affairs, as it is a central part of the Eurasian continent that connect different parts of the world by the East-West and North-South corridors.

The importance of this region has a long history, and various empires
have made great efforts to hold on to it. The peoples of this region lived side by side in nearly all Eurasian empires and so share common historical past. The strategic and political significance of the region also finds a logical framework in Mackinder’s famous Heartland theory. Beginning from nineteenth century the region has been a battleground between Russia and Great Britain, both seeking to be the dominant power. Scholars termed this event the “Great Game”, which resulted in the domination of Eurasian Heartland by Russia nearly two hundred years ago.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union at the end of the twentieth century and the decrease of Russian influence, the new global powers have become involved in a political rivalry in order gain access to its raw materials and impose their political wills over the weak regional countries. Therefore, an analogy has been drawn between the nineteenth century “Great Game” and today’s rivalry between the USA, Russia, and China, as a “New Great Game”. The Caspian Region has been a significant focal point for the political interests of China, Russia, and the United States of America due to its geo-economic and geo-strategic value after the dissolution of the Soviet Bloc in 1990. But it is important to mention that as it shown in Figure 2, no one knows that which global power is going to rule the region in 21st century. The Eurasian continent as a whole has preserved its geopolitical importance.