

**GALATASARAY UNIVERSITY
INSTITUTE OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS**

**RUSSIA’S ALIGNMENT STRATEGIES IN EURASIA:
THEORETICAL EVALUATIONS**



Ph.D. THESIS

Murat GÜNEYLIOĞLU

Thesis Advisor: Doç. Dr. Beyza ÇAĞATAY TEKİN

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ABBREVIATIONS

ABM	: Antiballistic Missile Treaty
ANZUS	: Australia, New Zealand, the United States
ASEAN	: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ATOP	: Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions
BRICS	: Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa
CCS	: Council on Collective Security
CENTO	: Central Treaty Organization
CHS	: Council of the Heads of States
CIS	: Commonwealth of Independent States
CMD	: Council of Ministers of Defense
COW	: Correlates of War
CPEC	: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor
CRDF	: Collective Rapid Deployment Forces
CRRF	: Collective Rapid Reaction Forces
CSCE	: Conference on Security and Co-operation in Europe
CST	: Collective Security Treaty
CSTO	: Collective Security Treaty Organization
EEU	: Eurasian Economic Union
EU	: European Union
EurAsEC	: Eurasian Economic Community
G7	: Group of Seven
G8	: Group of Eight
GATT	: General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade
GCC	: Gulf Cooperation Council
GD	: Georgian Dream
GDP	: Gross Domestic Product
GHJADS	: General Headquarters of the Joint Armed Forces of the CIS
GTEP	: Georgia Train and Equip Program
GUAM	: Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova
GUUAM	: Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova

IAEA	: International Atomic Energy Agency
IMF	: International Monetary Fund
IMU	: Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan
INF	: Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty
ISI	: Inter-Services Intelligence
ISIS	: Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
JADS	: CIS Joint Air Defense System
JCPOA	: Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action
JeM	: Jaish-e-Mohammad
MAP	: Membership Action Plan
MGIMO	: Moscow State Institute of International Relations
MoU	: Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	: Non-Aligned Movement
NATO	: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OECD	: Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development
OSCE	: Organization on Security and Co-operation in Europe
PfP	: Peace for Partnership
PRC	: People's Republic of China
R2P	: Responsibility to Protect
RATS	: Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure
RIC	: Russia, India, China
ROC	: Republic of China
SCO	: Shanghai Cooperation Organization
SEATO	: South East Asia Treaty Organization
THAAD	: Terminal High Altitude Area Defense
UN	: United Nations
UNM	: United National Movement
UNSC	: United Nations Security Council
US	: United States
USSR	: United Soviet Socialist Republics
WEU	: Western European Union

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RÉSUMÉ

L'alliance et l'alignement font partie des concepts centraux de la littérature sur les Relations Internationales et en particulier des études réalistes de la politique internationale. Ces concepts sont aussi fréquemment utilisés dans les débats contemporains parmi les universitaires, les journalistes, les experts et même les personnes sans aucun intérêt professionnel dans le domaine. Bien que certains spécialistes aient affirmé que les alliances perdraient de leur importance dans la politique internationale du XXI^e siècle, ce phénomène conserve toujours son importance vis-à-vis de la dynamique actuelle de la politique internationale, des crises et des conflits. Dans la période d'après-guerre froide, l'Organisation du Traité de l'Atlantique Nord (OTAN) s'est transformée en ce qui concerne les changements importants dans l'environnement de sécurité internationale. Dans la période d'après-guerre froide, l'OTAN s'est transformée en ce qui concerne les changements importants dans l'environnement de sécurité internationale. En outre, le processus d'élargissement de l'OTAN a été l'un des principaux facteurs influençant les développements régionaux en Europe orientale et dans la région de la mer Noire, alors qu'il a entraîné deux crises internationales graves en Géorgie et en Ukraine au cours des deux dernières décennies.

De l'autre côté, la Russie a joué un rôle central dans les processus de formation de l'alignement en Eurasie au XXI^e siècle. En 2002, la Russie et cinq États post-soviétiques ont créé l'Organisation du Traité de Sécurité Collective (OTSC) qui constitue un exemple rare d'alliances militaires multilatérales et institutionnelles dans le monde contemporain. À l'instar de l'alliance de l'OTAN, l'OTSC a également assumé la responsabilité de lutter contre les défis non-traditionnels à la stabilité internationale, y compris le terrorisme, et a mis en place des unités militaires spéciales à cet égard. Outre cette fonction, la Russie a également eu recours à l'OTSC pour délimiter sa sphère d'influence et bloquer la pénétration politique et militaire des États-Unis dans la région post-soviétique. Dans le même temps, la Russie a maintenu son dialogue sur la sécurité et sa coopération avec la Chine sur la base de leurs intérêts communs et de leurs perceptions communes de la menace. En 2001, ces deux grandes puissances ont joué un rôle de co-dirigeant dans la création de l'Organisation de Coopération de Shanghai (OCS) avec quatre États d'Asie centrale. L'OCS a encouragé les consultations actives et la coordination des politiques face aux défis de la sécurité régionale, mais les membres n'ont pas réussi à créer un bloc militaire car ils ont évité de prendre des engagements de sécurité réciproques et de se doter de forces armées conjointes. Les interactions politiques et diplomatiques entre les membres de l'OCS ont joué un rôle important dans l'adoption d'une position commune appelant au retrait des forces armées américaines d'Asie centrale en 2005. L'élargissement de l'OCS à l'Inde et au Pakistan en 2017 a renforcé le poids mondial de l'organisation. Ces deux États ont également formellement adhéré aux principes et normes de l'OCS, tels que la souveraineté, le caractère central de l'ONU et du droit international et la création d'un ordre mondial équitable et polycentrique, préconisés depuis longtemps par la diplomatie russe.

En outre, la Russie a renforcé ses relations d'alignement avec tous ces acteurs au niveau bilatéral, ce qui a ensuite été étendu à des exercices militaires conjoints, non seulement avec ses alliés militaires de la région post-soviétique, mais également avec d'autres membres de l'OCS tels que la Chine, l'Inde et le Pakistan. Depuis le milieu des années 2000, Téhéran a également manifesté un intérêt grandissant pour l'adhésion à l'OCS, ce qui n'a pas été possible en raison des sanctions internationales imposées à l'Iran et de la question nucléaire avec l'Occident. Cependant, la Russie a également développé une coopération informelle en matière de sécurité avec l'Iran sur la base d'intérêts communs et a utilisé l'Iran comme facteur de négociation dans ses relations avec les États-Unis. En outre, l'Iran a été un allié essentiel dans la campagne diplomatique et militaire menée par la Russie pour assurer la survie du régime Assad en Syrie contre les initiatives de changement de régime soutenues par l'Occident. Tous ces développements décrits ci-dessus ont donné lieu à des débats publics et universitaires sur la résurgence du rôle de premier plan et de l'influence de la Russie sur la sécurité internationale. Ce qui est étonnant dans ce débat, c'est que la Russie n'a pas vu ses capacités nationales accroître au cours de cette période. En outre, sa population et ses capacités économiques ont diminué par rapport aux autres grandes puissances telles que les États-Unis ou la Chine. À cet égard, on peut en conclure que la Russie n'aurait pas été capable de jouer un rôle aussi important dans la politique internationale sans ce vaste réseau d'alignements et la diplomatie habile qu'elle a suivie avec ses alliés pour atteindre des objectifs de sécurité communs. Par conséquent, les alliances et les alignements jouent un rôle central dans la politique étrangère de la Russie, ce qui doit être examinée pour mieux comprendre ses comportements de grande puissance dans différents contextes régionaux.

Cette thèse propose une analyse théorique des stratégies d'alignement de la Fédération de Russie en Eurasie avec un accent particulier sur ses relations avec les membres de l'OTSC et de l'OCS. La principale problématique de cette recherche doctorale est liée aux préférences de la Russie concernant les différents accords de coopération en matière de sécurité avec des groupes d'États distincts en ce qui concerne leur niveau de capacités et leur situation géographique. La Russie a toujours eu le désir de rassembler de petits États post-soviétiques dans le cadre d'une alliance militaire asymétrique, tout en évitant de nouer des alliances symétriques avec les principaux États asiatiques (Chine et Inde). La Russie a plutôt préféré des arrangements plus souples de coopération en matière de sécurité avec ces grandes puissances. À cet égard, cette recherche établit une distinction claire entre les alliances militaires et les autres formes d'alignement dans les domaines politique, diplomatique et sécuritaire. Ici, on fait valoir que cette distinction n'est pas seulement significative pour comprendre les différences entre les structures institutionnelles de l'OTSC et de l'OCS et les cadres des relations entre États au sein de ces deux organisations. Sur le plan analytique, il est plutôt important de mettre en avant le positionnement de la Russie dans les systèmes régionaux et internationaux et de mieux comprendre ses objectifs stratégiques. Cette étude associera les stratégies d'alignement de la Russie à différents États de l'Eurasie à ses deux principaux objectifs de politique étrangère. Le premier consiste à préserver son rôle de grande puissance et ses intérêts dans le système international et en particulier dans la région post-soviétique. Le second concerne la formation d'un ordre mondial « multipolaire » au sens du discours de la politique étrangère russe.

Afin de formuler des liens de causalité entre les objectifs stratégiques de la Russie et son comportement d'alignement, cette thèse s'appuie sur un cadre théorique

construit sur certaines approches réalistes de la formation de l'alignement. Tout en examinant les stratégies d'alignement de la Russie et les projections de puissance militaire dans la région post-soviétique, nous ferons référence à la théorie de l'équilibre des menaces (*balance of threat theory*) de Stephen Walt et à la perspective de l'omniéquilibrage (*omnibalancing perspective*) de Steven David. La première théorie met l'accent sur la répartition des menaces entre les acteurs les plus proches dans un contexte géographique en tant que principal facteur déterminant les préférences d'alignement des États. L'étude de Walt sur la formation de l'alignement au Moyen-Orient pendant la guerre froide montre que les superpuissances ont cherché à répondre entre elles des menaces contre leur position régionale en renforçant leur coopération en matière de sécurité avec leurs clients locaux et en tentant d'attirer de nouveaux alliés régionaux. Pour atteindre ces objectifs, Washington et Moscou ont exercé une pression stratégique sur les alliés régionaux de l'autre et les ont forcés à se réaligner, soit en offrant davantage d'aide, soit en subversant des régimes. La perspective de Walt est encore pertinente pour la rivalité géopolitique entre la Russie et le bloc des États-Unis-OTAN dans l'espace post-soviétique. De l'autre côté, la théorie de l'omniéquilibrage de David met l'accent sur les préférences d'alignement des États du Tiers Monde qui doivent souvent prendre en compte le niveau national des menaces à leur sécurité intérieure, telles que les coups d'État, les révolutions, les guerres civiles et les conflits séparatistes. Selon David, les préoccupations des dirigeants du Tiers Monde sur la sécurité de leur régime les incitent donc à s'allier avec ceux qui sont capables et désireux de fournir l'assistance de sécurité nécessaire pour assurer le maintien de leur régime face à divers défis nationaux. La théorie de l'omniéquilibrage semble également s'appliquer à la formation d'une alliance entre la Russie et certains États post-soviétiques, qui se félicite des efforts de la Russie en matière de gestion des problèmes non-étatiques dans la région. Dans la thèse, nous examinons comment la Russie utilise et manipule les menaces extérieures et nationales vis-à-vis des États de la région afin de consolider sa sphère d'influence sur la Communauté des États Indépendants (CEI).

Outre ces deux théories formulées à la fin de la période de la guerre froide, la théorie de l'équilibre doux (*soft balancing theory*) représente une approche plus moderne qui traite principalement des principales dynamiques de la coopération en matière de sécurité entre les grandes puissances. Contrairement aux attentes néoréalistes après la dissolution de la bipolarité, la puissance suprême des États-Unis n'a pas été contrebalancé par une alliance ou une coalition de contrepoids, alors que ses capacités économiques et militaires ont encore été renforcées par rapport aux autres grandes puissances. Face à cette anomalie, certains chercheurs réalistes suggèrent que les initiatives d'équilibre au niveau mondial n'ont pas cessé d'exister; mais a évolué vers une forme plus indirecte et secrète contre les États-Unis en raison de certains facteurs structurels associés à la répartition unipolaire de la puissance et à d'autres variables internationales. Ces facteurs découragent les puissances secondaires de contester ouvertement les capacités nationales et militaires des États-Unis en formant une alliance. Au contraire, ils font appel à la collaboration politique et diplomatique et à la coopération militaire ad hoc les uns avec les autres afin de retarder, frustrer et saper les politiques militaires unilatérales des États-Unis à l'égard de leur voisinage. À cet égard, la théorie de l'équilibre doux semble s'appliquer à la coopération de la Russie en matière de sécurité avec ses principaux alliés au sein de l'OCS, à savoir la Chine et l'Inde, tout en étant également pertinente pour une coopération pragmatique et limitée entre la Russie et l'Iran.

En tant qu'étude théorique, cette thèse testera la validité des principales hypothèses des théories réalistes en ce qui concerne les stratégies d'alignement de la Russie. Toutefois, ce n'est pas l'objectif principal de cette recherche. Nous visons plutôt à élaborer les caractéristiques générales du comportement politique de la Russie en matière d'alignement et utilise ces perspectives théoriques comme principal outil à cet égard. La thèse examinera également les implications régionales et mondiales des stratégies d'alignement de la Russie concernant les deux objectifs majeurs de la politique étrangère susmentionnés. Un tel effort académique est significatif à deux égards. Premièrement, l'élaboration de stratégies d'alignement et de projections énergétiques de la Russie dans la région de la CEI pourrait nous aider à mieux comprendre l'approche de la Russie en matière de politique étrangère et la prévisibilité de son comportement de grande puissance. Deuxièmement, une telle étude pourrait également nous aider à comprendre les principales caractéristiques de la politique étrangère de la Russie à l'égard d'un monde « multipolaire ». La question est de savoir si cette « multipolarité » fait référence à un système international au sein duquel la puissance est distribuée plus ou moins équitablement afin d'assurer qu'aucun État ne puisse contester la sécurité nationale d'autres pays. Ou bien, concerne-t-il davantage les caractéristiques des relations politiques entre les grandes puissances qui pourraient également être décrites avec d'autres termes tels que multilatéralisme, polycentrisme ou concert ? À ce stade, nous décrirons la perspective de la Russie à l'égard du système international du XXI^e siècle et nous nous demanderons si sa stratégie globale d'alignement pourrait contribuer à la formation d'un tel ordre mondial.

L'analyse du comportement de la Russie en matière d'alignement est présentée principalement en deux parties. La première partie commence par un examen des théories réalistes de l'alignement référencées ci-dessus (Chapitre 1). Le chapitre suivant aborde la perspective de la Russie à l'égard du système international et de ses alignements afin de mettre en évidence les liens entre la réflexion de la Russie sur la politique étrangère et notre cadre théorique. La deuxième partie est consacrée aux études de cas sur les relations d'alignement de la Russie avec différents acteurs de l'Eurasie. Le premier chapitre traite des pays de la CEI, tandis que le second chapitre se concentre sur les membres de l'OCS autres que les États post-soviétiques. En conclusion, nous examinons toutes les conclusions de la recherche et évaluons les principaux effets des stratégies d'alignement de la Russie sur la politique régionale dans la région post-soviétique et à travers la transformation des relations entre les grandes puissances sur le plan mondial.

ABSTRACT

Alliance and alignment are among central concepts in International Relations literature and particularly in realist studies of international politics. These concepts are also frequently used in contemporary debates among academics, journalists, experts, and even people without any professional interest in the field. Although some scholars have argued that alliances would lose its significance in international politics of the 21st Century, this phenomenon still preserves its significance vis-à-vis the current dynamics of international politics, crises, and conflicts. In the post-Cold War period, North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has transformed itself concerning significant changes in the international security environment. Through adopting new strategic concepts, NATO has assumed a responsibility to struggle against non-traditional challenges such as transnational terrorism and regional conflicts. Furthermore, the NATO enlargement process has been a primary factor influencing regional developments in Eastern Europe and the Black Sea region, while it has led to two serious international crises in Georgia and Ukraine in the last couple of decades.

On the other side, Russia has played a central role in alignment formation processes in Eurasia in the 21st Century. In 2002, Russia and five post-Soviet states established the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), which represents a rare example of multilateral and institutional military alliances in the contemporary world. Like the NATO alliance, the CSTO has also assumed a responsibility to struggle against non-traditional challenges towards international stability, including terrorism, and it has established special military units in this respect. Besides this function, the CSTO has also been used by Russia for delineating its sphere of influence and blocking the US political and military penetration towards the post-Soviet region. At the same time, Russia has maintained its security dialogue and cooperation with China based on their common interests and joint threat perceptions. In 2001, these two great powers played a co-leadership role in the creation of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) together with four Central Asian states. The SCO has promoted active consultations and policy coordination vis-à-vis regional security challenges, but the members have stopped short of creating a military bloc as they avoided undertaking alliance commitments for each other's security and building joint armed forces. The political and diplomatic interactions between the SCO members have played an important role in adopting a common position calling for the withdrawal of the US military forces from Central Asia in 2005. The enlargement of the SCO towards India and Pakistan in 2017 has enhanced the global weight of the organization. These two states have also formally adhered to the SCO's main principles and norms, such as sovereignty, the centrality of the United Nations and international law, and the creation of an equitable and polycentric world order, which have been long advocated by Russian diplomacy.

Besides, Russia has enforced its alignment relations with all these actors at the bilateral level, which further expanded into joint military exercises not only with its military allies in the post-Soviet region but also other SCO members such as China,

India, and Pakistan. Since the mid-2000s, Tehran has also shown a growing interest in joining the SCO, which has not been possible due to international sanctions over Iran and its nuclear problem with the West. Yet, Russia has also developed informal security cooperation with Iran based on their common interests and utilized Iran as a bargaining factor in its relations with the USA. Furthermore, Iran has been a crucial ally in Russia's diplomatic and military campaign to ensure the survival of the Assad regime in Syria against Western-supported initiatives for a regime change. All those developments outlined above have led to public and academic debates about the resurgence of Russia's great power role and influence in international security. What is puzzling in this debate is that Russia has not enjoyed a growth in its national capabilities during this period. Furthermore, it has been suffering a decline regarding its population and economic capabilities vis-à-vis other major powers such as the US or China. In this respect, one may conclude that Russia would not have been able to enhance its role in international politics to such an extent without this wide network of alignments and the skillful diplomacy it has followed together with its allies to reach common security goals. Therefore, alliances and alignments play a central role in Russia's foreign policy, which needs to be examined for a better understanding of its great power behavior under different regional contexts.

This dissertation provides a theoretical analysis of the Russian Federation's alignment strategies in Eurasia with a special focus on its relations with the members of the CSTO and the SCO. The main problematic of this doctoral research is related to Russia's preferences for different arrangements of security cooperation with distinct groups of states concerning their level of capabilities and geographical location. Russia has always been eager to collect small post-Soviet states within an asymmetrical military alliance, while it has avoided establishing symmetrical alliances with major Asian states (e.g., China and India). Rather, Russia has preferred more flexible arrangements of security cooperation with these major powers. In this respect, this research makes a clear distinction between military alliances and other forms of alignments in the political, diplomatic, and security realms. Here it is argued that this distinction is not only significant for understanding the differences between institutional structures of the CSTO and the SCO and the frameworks of interstate relations within these two organizations. It is rather analytically important to put forward Russia's positioning of itself in the regional and international systems and to understand its strategic goals more clearly. This study will associate Russia's alignment strategies towards different states in Eurasia with its two major foreign policy goals. The first one is to preserve its great power role and interests in the international system and particularly in the post-Soviet region. The second one refers to the formation of a 'multipolar' world order in the sense identified by Russian foreign policy discourse.

In an effort to formulate causal connections between Russia's strategic objectives and its alignment behavior, this dissertation relies on a theoretical framework constructed upon certain realist approaches towards alignment formation. While examining Russia's alignment strategies and military power projections in the post-Soviet region, we will make references to Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory and Steven David's omnibalancing perspective. The former theory emphasizes the distribution of threats among proximate actors within a geographical context as the main factor shaping alignment preferences of states. Walt's study on alignment formation in the Middle East during the Cold War puts forward how the superpowers have sought to respond threats from each other against their regional position by

enforcing their security cooperation with local clients and attempting to attract new regional allies. In order to achieve the latter, Washington and Moscow have put strategic pressure on the other one's regional allies and forced them to realign either by offering more assistance or subversion of regimes. Walt's perspective still makes some relevance to the geopolitical rivalry between Russia and the US-NATO bloc over the post-Soviet space. On the other side, David's omnibalancing theory focuses on alignment preferences of Third World states that often need to consider also the domestic level of threats to their internal security, such as coup d'états, revolutions, civil wars, and separatist conflicts. According to David, therefore, Third World leaderships' concerns on their regime security induce them to ally with whoever is able and willing to provide necessary security assistance to ensure the maintenance of their rule against various domestic challenges. Omnibalancing theory also seems applicable to alliance formation between Russia and some post-Soviet states that welcomes Russia's leadership in dealing with non-state challenges in the region. In the dissertation, we examine how Russia utilizes and manipulates external and domestic-level threats vis-à-vis regional states in order to consolidate its sphere of influence over the CIS (Commonwealth of Independent States).

Besides these two theories formulated at the end of the Cold War period, soft balancing theory represents a more up-to-date approach that primarily deals with main dynamics of security cooperation between major powers. In contrast with neorealist expectations after the dissolution of bipolarity, the US overwhelming power has not been balanced by a counterweight alliance or coalition, while it further increased its economic and military capabilities vis-à-vis other great powers. In the face of this anomaly, some realist scholars suggest that balancing initiatives at the global level have not ceased to exist; but evolved into a more indirect and covert form against the US due to certain structural factors associated with the unipolar distribution of power and other international variables. Those factors discourage secondary powers to overtly challenge the US national and military capabilities through forming an alliance together. Rather, they appeal to political and diplomatic collaboration and ad hoc military cooperation with each other in pursuit of delaying, frustrating, and undermining the US unilateral military policies towards their neighborhood. In this regard, soft balancing theory appears as applicable to Russia's security cooperation with its major power allies in the SCO, namely China and India, while it also makes relevance to pragmatic and limited cooperation between Russia and Iran.

As a theory-oriented study, this dissertation will test the validity of main assumptions of these realist theories with respect to Russia's alignment strategies. Yet, this is not the main objective of this research. Rather it aims at elaborating general characteristics of Russia's alignment behavior and utilizes these theoretical perspectives as main tools in this respect. The dissertation will also examine regional and global implications of Russia's alignment strategies concerning its two major foreign policy objectives mentioned above. Such an academic effort is significant in two respect. First, the elaboration of Russia's alignment strategies and power projections in the CIS region could enhance our insight into Russia's foreign policy thinking and the predictability of its great power behavior. Secondly, such an analysis could also help us comprehend the main characteristics of Russia's approach towards a 'multipolar' world. Does that 'multipolarity' refer to an international system where power is distributed more or less equally to ensure that no state could challenge the national security of other countries? Or does it concern more on characteristics of political relations among great powers, which could also be described with some other

terms like multilateralism, polycentrism, or concert? At this point, we will describe Russia's perspective towards the international system in the 21st Century and question whether Russia's overall strategy of alignment could contribute to the formation of such a world order.

The analysis of Russia's alignment behavior is presented mainly in two parts. Part One starts with an examination of realist theories of alignment referenced above (Chapter One). The following chapter turns to Russia's perspective towards the international system and alignments in order to expose the links between Russia's foreign policy thinking and our theoretical framework. On the other side, Part Two is devoted to the case studies over Russia's alignment relations with different actors in Eurasia. Chapter One deals with the CIS countries, while Chapter Two moves our focus to the SCO members apart from the post-Soviet states. In conclusion, we discuss all the research findings and examine main impacts of Russia's alignment strategies on regional politics in the post-Soviet area and the transformation of major power relations at the global level.



ÖZET

İttifak (*alignment*) ve askeri ittifak (*alliance*) kavramları, uluslararası ilişkiler literatüründe ve özellikle uluslararası politika üzerine realist çalışmalarda kullanılan en temel kavramlar arasında yer almaktadır. Bu iki kavram, akademisyenler, uzmanlar, gazeteciler ve hatta alana yönelik herhangi bir profesyonel ilgisi bulunmayan kişiler arasındaki güncel tartışmalarda da sıklıkla kullanılmaktadır. Her ne kadar bazı araştırmacılar askeri ittifakların 21. Yüzyıl uluslararası siyasetindeki önemini yitireceğini iddia etmiş olsalar da, bu kavram günümüzde halen uluslararası politika, krizler, çatışmaların temel dinamikleri açısından önemini korumaktadır. Soğuk Savaş sonrası dönemde NATO uluslararası güvenlik ortamındaki önemli değişikliklere göre kendini yeninden biçimlendirmiştir. Bu bakımdan NATO ilan ettiği yeni stratejik konseptler doğrultusunda, uluslararası terörizm ve bölgesel çatışmalar gibi geleneksel olmayan tehditlere karşı mücadele etme sorumluluğunu üstlenmiştir. Ayrıca NATO genişleme süreci Doğu Avrupa’da ve Karadeniz’deki bölgesel gelişmeleri etkileyen başlıca faktörlerden biri olmakla birlikte, Gürcistan ve Ukrayna’da iki ciddi uluslararası krize yol açmıştır.

Diğer taraftan Rusya 21. Yüzyılda Avrasya'daki ittifak oluşum süreçlerinde merkezi bir rol oynamıştır. 2002 yılında, Rusya ve beş eski Sovyet ülkesi günümüz dünyasında çok taraflı ve kurumsal askeri ittifakların nadir bir örneğini temsil eden Kolektif Güvenlik Antlaşması Örgütü'nü (KGAÖ) kurmuşlardır. NATO örneğinde olduğu gibi, KGAÖ ittifakı da terörizm başta olmak üzere uluslararası istikrara yönelik geleneksel olmayan tehditlere karşı mücadele etme sorumluluğunu üstlenmiş ve bu konuda özel askeri birlikler kurmuştur. Bu işlevinin yanı sıra, Rusya KGAÖ'yü kendi etki sahasının sınırlarını çizmek ve ABD'nin eski Sovyet coğrafyasına siyasi ve askeri nüfuz etmesini engellemek için kullanmıştır. Aynı zamanda Rusya, Çin ile olan güvenlik işbirliği ve diyalogunu ortak çıkarlar ve tehdit algılamaları çerçevesinde sürdürmüştür. 2001 yılında bu iki büyük güç, dört Orta Asya ülkesi ile birlikte Şanghay İşbirliği Örgütü'nün (ŞİÖ) oluşturulmasına liderlik etmişlerdir. ŞİÖ bölgesel güvenlik sorunlarıyla ilgili olarak üye ülkeler arasında aktif danışma süreçleri ve politika koordinasyonunu teşvik etmiştir. Ancak üyeler birbirlerinin güvenliği için askeri ittifak taahhütleri altına girmekten ve ortak silahlı kuvvetler oluşturmaktan kaçınmış; bu bakımdan askeri bir blok oluşturma hedefinden uzak durmuşlardır. Bununla birlikte ŞİÖ üyeleri arasındaki siyasi ve diplomatik etkileşimler, 2005 yılında ABD askeri varlığının Orta Asya'dan çekilmesi gerektiğini savunan ortak bir pozisyonu benimsenmelerinde önemli bir rol oynamıştır. 2017 yılında ŞİÖ'nün Hindistan ve Pakistan'ı içine alarak genişlemesi, örgütün küresel ağırlığını arttırmıştır. ŞİÖ'ye katılan her iki devlet de örgütün benimsediği temel ilke ve normlara bağlı kalacaklarını resmi olarak kabul etmiş; egemenlik, Birleşmiş Milletler ve uluslararası hukukun merkezi rolü, adil ve çok merkezli bir dünya düzeninin kurulması gibi uzun yıllardır Rus diplomasisi tarafından savunulan değerleri benimsemişlerdir.

Bunun yanı sıra, Rusya tüm bu aktörlerle ittifak ilişkilerini ikili düzeyde de güçlendirmiştir. Sonuç olarak Rusya'nın bu aktörlerle güvenlik işbirliği eski Sovyet

alanındaki askeri müttefiklerine ek olarak, Çin, Hindistan ve Pakistan gibi diğer ŞİÖ üyesi devletlerle de ortak askeri tatbikatlar düzenlemeye kadar uzanmıştır. 2000'lerin ortasından bu yana İran ŞİÖ'ye katılma konusunda giderek artan bir ilgi göstermiş olsa da, İran'ın üyeliği üzerinde uygulanan uluslararası yaptırımlar ve Batı ile olan nükleer sorunu nedeniyle mümkün olamamıştır. Buna karşılık Rusya ortak çıkarları çerçevesinde İran'la resmi bir anlaşmaya dayanmayan güvenlik işbirliğini sürdürmüş ve İran'ı ABD ile ilişkilerinde bir koz ve pazarlık faktörü olarak kullanmıştır. Ayrıca İran, Rusya'nın Suriye'deki Esad yönetimini Batı'nın desteklediği bir rejim değişikliğine karşı ayakta tutabilmek için başlattığı diplomatik ve askeri girişimlerde çok önemli bir gayri resmi müttefiki olmuştur. Yukarıda özetlenen tüm bu gelişmeler, Rusya'nın uluslararası güvenlik alanında yeniden yükselişe geçen büyük güç rolü ve etkileri üzerine güncel ve akademik tartışmaların başlamasına neden olmuştur. Bu tartışmada ilginç olan nokta, söz konusu dönemde Rusya'nın ulusal güç kapasitesinde ciddi bir gelişme gözlenmediği gerçeğidir. Dahası, ABD ve Çin gibi diğer büyük güçlere kıyasla Rusya nüfusu ve özellikle ekonomik kapasitesi bakımından önemli bir düşüş yaşamaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Rusya'nın geniş ittifak ağı ve ortak güvenlik hedefleri çerçevesinde müttefikleriyle birlikte izlediği başarılı diplomasisi olmasaydı; uluslararası politikada oynadığı rolü bu derecede güçlendirmesi mümkün olamazdı gibi bir sonuca varılabilir. Bu nedenle, askeri ittifaklar ve diğer ittifak düzenlemeleri Rus dış politikasında merkezi bir rol oynamaktadır. Dolayısıyla Rusya'nın farklı bölgesel alanlarda büyük güç davranışının daha iyi anlaşılması için ittifak düzenlemelerinin incelenmesi gerekmektedir.

Bu tez çalışması, Rusya Federasyonu'nun Avrasya'daki ittifak stratejileri üzerine teorik bir analiz sunmakta ve bu bağlamda öncelikle Rusya'nın KGAÖ ve ŞİÖ üyeleri ile ilişkilerine odaklanmaktadır. Araştırmanın temel sorunsalı, Rusya'nın coğrafi konumları ve ulusal güç kapasitelerini dikkate alarak çeşitli devlet grupları ile birbirinden farklı nitelikler taşıyan güvenlik işbirliği düzenlemelerini tercih etmesi ile ilgilidir. Rusya her zaman, 'küçük güç' seviyesindeki eski Sovyet ülkelerini asimetrik bir askeri ittifak içinde toplamak konusunda istekli olmuştur; ancak Çin ve Hindistan gibi büyük Asya devletleriyle kurulabilecek simetrik bir askeri ittifaktan kaçınmıştır. Rusya büyük güçlerle daha esnek güvenlik işbirliği düzenlemelerini tercih etmiştir. Bu bağlamda, tez araştırması askeri ittifaklar (*alliance*) ile siyasi, diplomatik ve güvenlik alanlarındaki diğer ittifak biçimleri (*alignment*) arasında açık bir ayrım yapmaktadır. Söz konusu ayrım sadece KGAÖ ve ŞİÖ'nün kurumsal yapıları ve iki örgüt bünyesindeki devletlerarası ilişkilerin çerçeveleri arasındaki farklılıkların anlaşılması açısından önemli değildir. Yaptığımız bu ayrım analitik açıdan Rusya'nın kendisini bölgesel ve uluslararası sistemde nasıl konumlandığını ortaya koymak ve stratejik hedeflerini daha net bir biçimde anlayabilmek için oldukça önemlidir. Çalışma, Rusya'nın Avrasya'daki farklı devletlere yönelik ittifak stratejilerini, Moskova'nın iki temel dış politika amacı ile ilişkilendirecektir. Bunlardan ilki, Rusya'nın uluslararası sistemde ve özellikle eski Sovyet coğrafyası çerçevesinde büyük güç rolünü ve çıkarlarını korumaktır. İkincisi, Rusya'nın dış politika söylemi tarafından tanımlandığı şekliyle 'çok kutuplu' dünya düzeninin kurulmasıdır.

Rusya'nın stratejik hedefleri ile ittifak davranışı arasındaki neden sonuç ilişkilerini ortaya koymak amacıyla, tez çalışması ittifak oluşumları hakkında bazı realist yaklaşımlar üzerine inşa edilmiş bir teorik çerçeveye dayanmaktadır. Rusya'nın eski Sovyet bölgesindeki ittifak stratejileri ve askeri güç projeksiyonlarını incelerken, Stephen Walt'un tehdit dengesi teorisi (*balance of threat*) ve Steven David'in toplu dengeleme kuramına (*omnibalancing*) referansta bulunacağız. Birinci teori tehditlerin

coğrafi bir kapsam dahilinde birbirine yakın aktörler arasındaki nasıl dağıldığına vurgu yaparak, bunun devletlerin ittifak tercihlerini belirleyen ana faktör olduğunu öne sürmektedir. Walt'un Soğuk Savaş sırasında Orta Doğu'daki ittifak oluşumları üzerine yaptığı çalışması, süper güçlerin bölgesel konumlarına karşı birbirinden algıladıkları tehditlere karşı mevcut yerel müttefikleri ile güvenlik işbirliğini güçlendirerek ya da yeni bölgesel müttefikler kazanmaya çalışarak nasıl cevap vermeye çalıştıklarını ortaya koymaktadır. Bu bağlamda, Washington ve Moskova diğerinin bölgesel müttefiklerine karşı stratejik baskı uygulamış; ayrıca daha fazla güvenlik desteği önererek ya da rejim değişikliği vasıtasıyla bu ülkelerin ittifak bağlantılarını değiştirmeye çalışmıştır. Walt'un perspektifi, Rusya ve ABD-NATO bloku arasında eski Sovyet bölgesi üzerine devam eden jeopolitik rekabet karşısında halen geçerliliğini korumaktadır. Öte yandan David'in toplu dengeleme teorisi, Üçüncü Dünya ülkelerinin ittifak tercihlerine odaklanan bir yaklaşım olup, bu ülkelerin askeri darbeler, devrimler, iç savaşlar ve ayrılıkçı çatışmalar gibi iç güvenliklerine yönelik tehditleri de göz önünde bulundurmak zorunda kaldıklarını öne sürmektedir. Bu bağlamda, rejim güvenliğine ilişkin kaygılar Üçüncü Dünya liderlerini çeşitli iç tehditlere karşı rejimlerinin korunması yönünde destek sağlama kapasitesi ve iradesine sahip olan güçlerle ittifak kurmaya itmektedir. Toplu dengeleme teorisi, Rusya'nın bölgede devlet dışı tehditlerle mücadelede oynadığı liderlik rolünü memnuniyetle karşılayan eski Sovyet ülkeleri ile Rusya Federasyonu arasında oluşan ittifakları açıklamak için kullanılabilir. Tez çalışmamızda, Rusya'nın bu coğrafyadaki etki alanını pekiştirmek için, dış ve iç politika düzeyindeki çeşitli tehdit unsurlarını yerel devletler karşısında nasıl kullandığını ve manipüle ettiğini inceleyeceğiz.

Soğuk Savaş döneminin sonunda doğru ortaya atılan bu iki teorinin yanı sıra, yumuşak dengeleme (*soft balancing*) kuramı, temel olarak büyük güçler arasındaki güvenlik işbirliğinin ana dinamiklerini ele alan daha güncel bir yaklaşımı temsil etmektedir. İki kutuplu sistemin dağılmasından sonra neorealist beklentilerin aksine, ABD'nin güç üstünlüğü ona yakın ağırlıkta bir askeri ittifak veya koalisyon ile dengelenememiş ve hatta ilerleyen yıllarda Amerika ekonomik ve askeri kapasitesini diğer büyük güçler karşısında daha da arttırmıştır. Bu anormallik karşısında, bazı realistler küresel düzeyde dengeleme davranışının ortadan kalkmadığını; ancak sistemde gücün tek kutuplu dağılımıyla ilgili bazı yapısal faktörler ve diğer uluslararası değişkenler sebebiyle ABD'yi dengeleme girişimlerinin daha dolaylı ve örtülü biçime doğru evirildiğini öne sürmüşlerdir. Bu faktörler, ikincil büyük güçlerin birlikte askeri bir ittifak oluşturarak, ABD'nin ulusal ve askeri gücüne karşı doğrudan meydan okumaktan kaçınmalarına sebep olmaktadır. Bunun yerine, büyük güçler aralarında siyasi, diplomatik ve amaca özel (*ad hoc*) sınırlı bir askeri işbirliğine başvurmakta; böylece ABD'nin kendilerine komşu bölgelerde tek taraflı olarak izlediği askeri politikalarını erteleme, zora sokma ve bu politikaların altını oyma hedefleri doğrultusunda ortaklaşa hareket etmektedirler. Bu bağlamda, yumuşak dengeleme teorisi, Rusya'nın ŞİÖ'deki büyük güç müttefikleri Çin ve Hindistan'la geliştirdiği güvenlik işbirliği karşısında anlam kazanmaktadır. Ayrıca teori Rusya ve İran arasındaki pragmatik ve sınırlı işbirliği ilişkisine de uygulanabilir görünmektedir.

Teorik bir çerçeveden yola çıkan bir çalışma olarak, tezimiz ilgili realist kuramların temel varsayımlarının geçerliliğini Rusya'nın ittifak stratejileri karşısında test etmiş olacaktır. Fakat araştırmanın temel amacı bu değildir. Çalışmamız daha çok Rusya'nın ittifak davranışının genel özelliklerini incelemeyi amaçlamakta ve teorik yaklaşımları bunun için temel bir araç olarak kullanmaktadır. Tez ayrıca, Rusya'nın ittifak stratejilerinin bölgesel ve küresel alanında ortaya koyduğu etkileri yukarıda

belirtilen Rusya'nın iki temel dış politika amacıyla ilişkileri açısından inceleyecektir. Böyle bir akademik girişim iki açıdan önemlidir. İlk olarak, Rusya'nın eski Sovyet bölgesindeki ittifak stratejilerinin ve güç projeksiyonlarının incelenmesi, Rusya'nın dış politika düşüncesi ve onun büyük güç davranışının öngörülebilirliği konusunda sahip olduğumuz bilgi düzeyine katkı sunabilir. İkincisi, bu analiz Rusya'nın 'çok kutuplu' dünyaya yaklaşımının temel özelliklerini anlamak için de faydalı olabilir. Buradaki 'çok kutupluluk,' uluslararası gücün hiçbir devletin diğer ülkelerin ulusal güvenliğini tehdit edememesi durumunu garanti altına alacak şekilde az ya da çok eşit olarak dağıldığı bir uluslararası sistemi mi ifade etmektedir? Yoksa bu kavram büyük güçler arasındaki politik ilişkilerin temel özellikleriyle bağlantılı olarak çok taraflılık, çok merkezlilik veya uyum (*concert*) gibi başka terimlerle de tanımlanabilecek bir biçimde mi kullanılmaktadır? Bu noktada, Rusya'nın 21. Yüzyıl'daki uluslararası sisteme bakış açısını açıklamaya çalışacağız ve Rusya'nın genel ittifak stratejisinin böyle bir dünya düzeninin oluşumuna katkıda bulunup bulunmayacağını sorgulayacağız.

Rusya'nın ittifak davranışının analizi, esas olarak iki ana kısım halinde sunulmaktadır. Birinci kısım, yukarıda adı geçen realist ittifak kuramlarının incelenmesi ile başlamaktadır (birinci bölüm). Bunu izleyen ikinci bölüm, Rusya'nın uluslararası sisteme ve ittifaklara bakış açısına odaklanacak ve Rus dış politika düşüncesiyle teorik çerçevemiz arasındaki bağlantıları ortaya koymaya çalışacaktır. Öte yandan, ikinci ana kısım, Rusya'nın Avrasya'daki farklı aktörlerle ittifak ilişkileri konusunda örnek olay incelemelerine ayrılmıştır. Birinci bölüm eski Sovyet ülkelerini ele alırken, ikinci bölüm bunların dışında kalan ŞİÖ üyelerine odaklanmaktadır. Sonuç bölümünde, tüm araştırma bulguları tartışılacak ve Rusya'nın ittifak stratejilerinin eski Sovyet alanındaki bölgesel politikalar ve küresel düzeyde büyük güç ilişkilerinin dönüşümü üzerinde ne gibi etkiler ortaya koyduğu incelenecektir.

INTRODUCTION

Alignment can be defined as “*a formal and informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.*”¹ It can take many forms such as a formal written treaty including military commitments, which is necessary for an alliance.² In the absence of such a treaty, there are some other indicators for an alignment such as tacit agreements, verbal assurances, and joint military exercises.³ Traditional studies describe the term alliance as one of the most significant concepts in International Relations literature. George Liska, for example, suggests that: “*it is impossible to speak of international relations without referring to alliances.*”⁴ George Modelski, on the other hand, has portrayed alliance as “*one of dozen or so key terms of international relations.*”⁵ According to Ole Holsti, “*alliances are apparently a universal component of relations between political units, irrespective of time and place.*”⁶ In Ken Booth’s words, “*alliances have been pervasive features in both the theory of international politics and the practice of foreign policy.*”⁷

However, at the beginning of the 21st Century, a new debate emerged on ‘the end of alliances,’ including scholars who suggested that there have been some critical changes in the nature of military alliances and that those arrangements have lost their significance in international politics.⁸ First of all, some scholars argued that modern

¹ Stephen M. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987 p. 12.

² Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1991, p. 29.

³ Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure and Collapse”, **Survival**, Vol: 39, No: 1, 1997, p. 157.

⁴ George Liska, **Nations in Alliances: The Limits of Interdependence**, Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1968, p. 3.

⁵ George Modelski, “The Study of Alliances,” **The Journal of Conflict Resolution**, Vol. 7, No. 4, 1963, p. 773.

⁶ Quoted in Stephen M. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 1.

⁷ Ken Booth, “Alliances,” John Baylis et al. (ed.), **Contemporary Strategy I**, New York: Holmes & Meier, 1987, p. 258.

⁸ See Rajan Menon, “The End of Alliances,” **World Policy Journal**, Vol. 20, No. 2, 2003; Kurt M Campbell, “The End of Alliances? Not So Fast,” **Washington Quarterly**, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2004; Dingli Shen, “Can Alliances Combat Contemporary Threats?,” **Washington Quarterly**, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2004; and Bruno Tertrais, “The Changing Nature of Military Alliances,” **Washington Quarterly**, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2004.

alliances created for deterrence and defense against Cold-War era threats have lost their relevance in the new global system that emerged after the dissolution of the bipolar world.⁹ The rise of non-state threats in the global system has fundamentally changed perceptions by states on primary threats to their national security and international stability. This led to the questioning of the capability of military alliances to struggle effectively against non-traditional threats including global terrorism and organized crime.¹⁰ Last but not least, scholars contributing this debate emphasized that international and ad hoc coalitions have become much more prevalent in the new era giving the fact that the US tends to rely on coalitions of the willing rather than permanent alliances in its military campaigns after the Cold War.¹¹

Nonetheless, some scholars underline that alliances are still important in the global strategy of the United States which owns by far the most extensive and developed network of military alliances not to mention NATO as the largest institutionalized defense pact.¹² This alliance system continues to function to a great benefit of Washington, as it controls rivals of the US by deterring expansionist threats in offshore regions and provide bases for American military power projections. Also, military alliances control Washington's allies themselves by ensuring some influence on their foreign and defense policies and preventing those states from joining alliances with alternative centers of power.¹³ The same suggestions seem to be valid considering Russia's alliance system, albeit in a smaller geographical context in Eurasia. As examined in detail in this study, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Russia-led military alliance including some post-Soviet states serves to Russian interests in a strategic region nearby through similar functions it does have.

A second fact underlining the enduring relevance of military alliances is that they have gone through a transformation process to adapt new realities and problems in international security. While NATO has adopted new strategic concepts to struggling against a wide spectrum of possible threats, including regional conflicts and

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 142; Menon, "The End of Alliances," pp. 16-17.

¹⁰ See Dingli Shen, "Can Alliances Combat Contemporary Threats?"

¹¹ Bruno Tertrais, "The Changing Nature of Military Alliances," p. 148; Kurt M Campbell, "The End of Alliances? Not So Fast," pp. 157-158.

¹² Bruno Tertrais, "The Changing Nature of Military Alliances," pp. 136-137.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 136; Martin Murphy, "The Importance of Alliances for Us Security," 2017 Index of US Military Strength, The Heritage Foundation, Vol. 27, 2017, pp. 25-26. Retrieved from: <https://index.heritage.org/military/2017/essays/importance-alliances-u-s-security/> (26.09.2018).

transnational threats terrorism, the CSTO declared its responsibility to combat such threats in its area of membership. The CSTO also established Collective Rapid Reaction Forces to deal with regional crises and transitional treats, which is modeled on NATO's Response Force.¹⁴ Given such "*new tasks that have been identified, it is impossible to consider alliances irrelevant today or in the near future;*"¹⁵ it is obvious that "*alliances will look and act differently than they used to, but they are not dead yet.*"¹⁶

Besides the transformation of existing military alliances, there are also some significant changes in patterns of alignment formation within the current international system. With the end of the bipolar system and Cold War hostilities, states are expected to rely more on negotiation rather than coercion and to manage their relations. In such a "*world, increased opportunities for interaction and greater flexibility with regard to the choice of partners in regional and global politics should favor cooperative and regulatory frameworks in order to further common interests and to avoid crises.*"¹⁷ Under this conjuncture, states tend to form looser form alignments which are sometimes called as strategic partnership.¹⁸ This kind of alignments do not focus on conventional security goals such as deterring or fighting a hostile state, and they are usually organized around general security purposes related to common interests, values, and principles ordering the international system. This paradigmatic shift in alignments began to receive serious scholarly attention Russia-Chinese rapprochement in 1996, which later developed into wider security cooperation based on a common understanding of a multipolar international system.¹⁹ Although this kind of alignments

¹⁴ Alexander Cooley, "Whose Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 30, 2017 p. 5. Retrieved from: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/6302017_AlexanderCooley_WhoseRules.pdf (15.09.2018).

¹⁵ Shen, "Can Alliances Combat Contemporary Threats?," p. 178

¹⁶ Kurt M Campbell, "The End of Alliances? Not So Fast," p. 162.

¹⁷ Georg Strüver, "International Alignment between Interests and Ideology: The Case of China's Partnership Diplomacy," GIGA Working Papers, No. 283, 2016, p. 4. Retrieved from: <https://www.econstor.eu/bitstream/10419/130607/1/857233033.pdf> (18.09.2018).

¹⁸ See Thomas S Wilkins, "'Alignment', Not 'Alliance'—the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: Toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment," **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 38, No. 1, 2012, p. 67. Although strategic partnership is a prevalently used concept in international politics, its precise definition and meaning remain unclear. Thomas Wilkins defines this term "*as structured collaboration between states (or other 'actors') to take joint advantage of economic opportunities, or to respond to security challenges more effectively than could be achieved in isolation.*" **Ibid.** As strategic partnership is a very broad concept covering economic and social aspects of international affairs, it is not used in this study which focuses on interstate cooperation on security issues. Such a cooperation could be better described with alignment as a more traditional concept.

¹⁹ **Ibid.**, pp. 67-68.

do not define any enemy state, the parties may involve in active security cooperation about issues of common concern, for example, terrorism, separatism, or religious fundamentalism. However, such cooperation entails low commitment costs, since it is not based on a specific alliance treaty that binds the participants to rigid courses of action. This permits parties to maintain a greater degree of autonomy and flexibility in their foreign policy and military strategy.²⁰

This kind of autonomy concerns that have increased in the post-Cold War period and the tendency to avoid crises with other states seem to influence not only alignment behavior of major powers but also alignment formation on different levels and within various regional contexts. As military alliances undertake new tasks to combat against contemporary global threats, they usually need the cooperation of some other states outside their area of membership, which are located in critical zones nearby regional conflicts and sources of transnational threats. Besides its allies in NATO, the United States is involved in security cooperation to various degrees with countries in different regions such as Afghanistan, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Kuwait, Morocco, Tunisia, Indonesia, Malaysia.²¹ Most of these alignments have their roots in Cold-War times, which were established against the threat of communism and geopolitical expansion by the Soviet Union. In the absence of such an external threat, there have been some attempts to make use of these alignments to struggle against various kinds of threats and challenges to what the US believes would constitute a stable and legitimate international order.²²

In the last decade, the United States has intensified security cooperation with its regional allies in the face of instability in the Middle East. With the rising civil war in Syria, Russia also reasserted its regional influence through political and military coordination with some states such as Iran, Iraq and the Syrian regime on the basis of some initiatives to stabilize the region and combat against non-state actors associated with terrorism.²³ Such regional alignments led by the US and Russia pursue alternative

²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 67-68.

²¹ Murphy, "The Importance of Alliances for Us Security," p. 21.

²² Strüver, "International Alignment between Interests and Ideology: The Case of China's Partnership Diplomacy," p. 5. See also Murphy, "The Importance of Alliances for Us Security," p. 27.

²³ See Ellie Geranmayeh and Kadri Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," European Council on Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, September 2016. Retrieved from: https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ecfr_186_-the_new_power_couple_russia_and_iran_in_the_middle_east_pdf.pdf (26.09.2018).

plans to stabilize the region that conflict with each other and reflect some traditional geopolitical concerns. Yet, these informal ties of security cooperation without an alliance treaty provide greater flexibility to the US and Russia and enable them to avoid a direct conflict for the sake of fulfilling mutual defense commitments.

The review on the end of alliances debate and recent developments show that military alliances and other looser forms of alignments between states continue to play significant roles in the realm of international security. Alignment formation processes at the level of great powers deeply influence the evolution of great power relations and future characteristics of the international system. On the other side, alignment formation in different regional contexts is a determining factor how regional problems and conflicts would be resolved. In addition, the transformation of military alliances and alignment behavior by individual states change dynamics of conflicts and cooperation in the international system. Some analysts argue that in recent years there emerged a new Cold-War among the same group of states that had opposed each other in the first Cold War.²⁴ However, it remains questionable whether this is a useful analogy to analyze the current international system, where the fear of interstate armed conflicts decreased, a wide range of global threats gained prevalence and great powers are more eager to negotiate with each other to pursue their common interests and to avoid crises between them.²⁵ In this respect, theoretical studies on such factors that alter alignment behavior of states can contribute analyses on the structure of the current international system emerging in the post-Cold War world. Last but not least the developments examined above put forward the fact that Russia has established itself as one of the central actors concerning alignment formation in Eurasia through the last couple of decades

²⁴ While constructing this analogy, such analysts emphasize the deepening security cooperation between Russia and China, the geopolitical tensions between NATO and Russia, and the rising arms race between the US and other great powers. See Michael Lind, "America vs. Russia and China: Welcome to Cold War II," *The National Interest*, April 15, 2018, <http://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-vs-russia-china-welcome-cold-war-ii-25382> (18.09.2018); Michael Klare, "The New Cold War is Here and Now 3 Major Powers Are Involved," *The Nation*, March 8, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/the-new-cold-war-is-here-and-now-three-major-powers-are-involved/> (18.09.2018).

²⁵ For some counter arguments criticizing the new Cold War analogy, see Stephen Walt, "I Knew the Cold War. This Is No Cold War.," *Foreign Policy*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/03/12/i-knew-the-cold-war-this-is-no-cold-war/> (18.09.2018); Odd Arne Westad, "Has a New Cold War Really Begun? Why the Term Shouldn't Apply to Today's Great-Power Tensions," *Foreign Affairs*, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2018-03-27/has-new-cold-war-really-begun> (18.09.2019).

This doctoral dissertation examines the Russian Federation's alignment strategies in Eurasia with respect to some alignment theories which have their roots in realist school. The study mainly focuses on Russia's relations with the members of the Collective Security Treaty Organization and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. In 2002, Russia led the establishment of the CSTO together with its five allies in the post-Soviet region, which emerged as a rare example of multilateral military alliances in the contemporary era. Beside its functions on addressing regional security threats, the CSTO alliance is used by Russia for power projection and counterbalancing unilateral US policies in the post-Soviet region.²⁶ At the same time, Russia has also enforced its security cooperation and dialogue with China and Central Asian states under the framework of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization which was established in 2001. After four years the SCO members took a common position to call the US to withdraw its military forces from Central Asia, a goal that had been sought by Russia since about the Iraq war.²⁷ These successful attempts by Russia to balance the US political and military engagement into Eurasia later expanded towards the Middle East. In this regard, Moscow has managed to avert the American plans to subvert the Bashar Al-Assad regime in the Syrian civil war. Russia's cooperation with Iran which is an observer state in the SCO and some other regional actors has been crucial to achieve its military goals and to reassert its diplomatic and political influence in Middle Eastern politics.²⁸

All these developments summarized above enhance a widespread conviction that Russia as a resurgent great power has managed to expand its global influence at the expense of the United States and other Western countries in recent years.²⁹ It is obvious that Russia wouldn't have been able to increase its role in world politics in the absence of this wide network of alignments and the skillful diplomacy it has followed together with its allies to reach common security goals. In this period, there has been no serious growth in Russia's economy and national capabilities compared to other

²⁶ See Elena Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 68, No. 9, 2016, p. 1544.

²⁷ Alexander Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," **China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly**, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2009, p. 97.

²⁸ See Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East".

²⁹ See Paul Stronski and Richard Sokolsky, "The Return of Global Russia: An Analytical Framework," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 14, 2017, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_320_web_final.pdf (26.09.2018).

great powers such as the United States and China. In this respect, alignment relations seem to play a very crucial role in Russia's foreign policy towards different regions. Therefore a close examination of security cooperation arrangements between Moscow and its allies could contribute a better understanding of Russia's foreign policy strategy. While examining Russia's alignment strategies towards different states in Eurasia this study will also put forward their connections with Russia's major foreign policy goals, namely preserving its great power status in the international security realm and formation of a 'multipolar' world in the sense identified by Moscow.

Research Problem

The transformation process in the international system after the end of the Cold War coincided with the emergence of a complex network of alignment relations in Eurasia. First of all, Russia attempted to reassert its military control in its near abroad through signing of the Collective Security Treaty (CST), a military defense pact, with several post-Soviet states in 1992. Ten years later, the parties of this agreement Russia, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Belarus, and Armenia decided to institutionalize this alliance treaty through the establishment of the Collective Security Treaty Organization. The rise of radical Islam and terrorist threats in the region played a significant role in the institutionalization of security cooperation between Russia and its regional allies.³⁰ In the following years, color revolutions supported by the US democracy promotion strategy led to further security cooperation between Russia and the governments of allied states. In this regard, the CSTO has already established or is in the process of building, collective rapid reaction forces, collective air defense, peacekeeping forces, a crisis response center, and a partnership institute, which have strengthened the military dimension of the organization.³¹

On the other side, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and China decided to create a regional multilateral forum at their first meeting in Shanghai in May 1996, which primarily aimed at promoting border security through establishing confidence-building measures between those states. In 2001, with the joining of

³⁰ Adam Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," **Whitehead J. Dipl. & Int'l Rel.**, Vol. 8, 2007, pp. 172-173.

³¹ Marcel de Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," **The Journal of Slavic Military Studies**, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2017, p. 12.

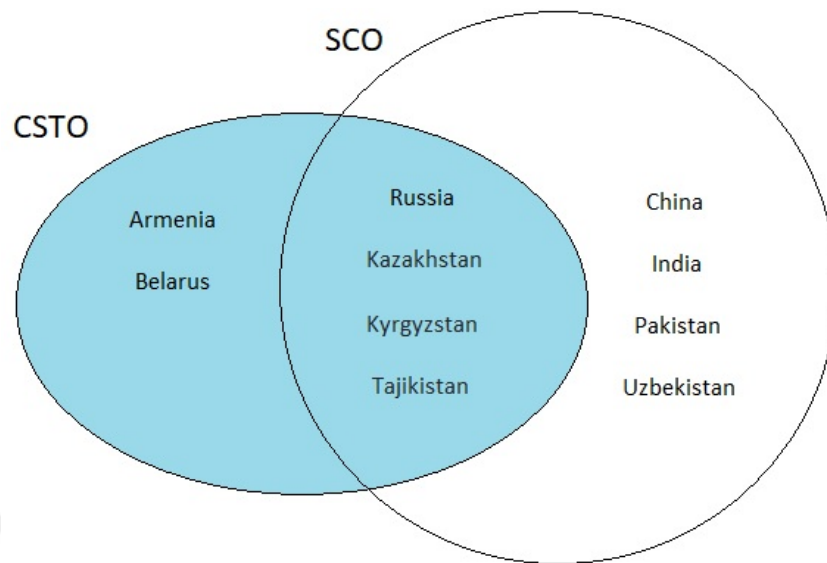
Uzbekistan, this group was transformed into an international institution named as Shanghai Cooperation Organization.³² In the following decades, the members have moved the SCO's core focus to fight against what they defined as three evils (terrorism, religious extremism, and secessionism) and all forms of transnational threats on common border areas. This increased diplomatic transactions between member states and gave way to an increasing number of military exercises together.³³ Yet, the members of the SCO stopped short of transforming their security cooperation into a formal military alliance. On the other side, the SCO has provided an international platform for diplomatic cooperation between Russia and China which gained momentum after the US invasion in Iraq and color revolutions in the post-Soviet space.³⁴ There are some concerns that the 2017 enlargement of the SCO towards India and Pakistan may complicate decision-making processes and endanger internal coherence of the organization. However, the admission of these states increased the global weight of the organization. As some analysts suggest, both India and Pakistan have great potential to contribute the practical security cooperation to stabilize the region within the enlarged geographical context of the SCO.³⁵

³² Chien Peng Chung, "China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," **Problems of Post-Communism**, Vol. 53, No. 5, 2006, p. 3.

³³ Marc Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," Helge Blakkisrud and Elana W. Rowe (ed.), **Russia's Turn to the East**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 125-127.

³⁴ T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," **International security**, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2005, pp. 63-70; Weiqing Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," **International Politics**, Vol. 50, No. 5, 2013, pp. 664-685.

³⁵ See Igor E. Denisov and Ivan A. Safranchuk, "Four Problems of the SCO in Connection with its Enlargement," **Russian Politics & Law**, Vol. 54, No. 5-6, 2016, pp. 494-515.

Figure 1 - Membership to the CSTO and the SCO

In the 21st Century, Russia has generally attempted to balance the US military engagement in Eurasia by consolidating its military presence and alliances in the CIS region and enhancing a multilateral dialogue with its Asian partners in the SCO. However, there was an exceptional period at the beginning of the 2000s when Russia supported the US war on terror and Washington's military campaign in Afghanistan through opening its air space, sharing intelligence about international terrorists and agreeing on the opening of the US military bases in Central Asia.³⁶ In 2002, this cooperation led to the establishment of the NATO-Russia Council, as a platform for dialogue and consultations between Russia and the Alliance members. However, the limited and ad hoc security cooperation between Russia and the US did not last long, as the relations between two states again deteriorated due to the Iraq war and color revolutions emerging in the CIS. Yet, the rationale of this cooperation including Russia's concessions on the US military presence in Central Asia represents another important part of the research problem. Therefore, the Russian approach towards the United States in this period also needs to be examined by this study considering Russia's foreign policy objectives at the regional and the international system level.

To sum, Russia has played a central role in the formation of different security cooperation arrangements in Eurasia that emerged with overlapping memberships and

³⁶ See Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," *International Security*, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2010, p. 88.

functions (Figure 1). The role of this complex network of alignments in Russian foreign policy and their implications on the regional and the international system are the main issues focused by this study. There is another interesting fact about Russian alignment strategies in Eurasia is that since the 1990s Russia has been willing to collect small post-Soviet states in a formal military alliance. However, Russia avoided signing that kind of binding alliance treaties with its other partners in Asia which have greater capabilities such as China and India. Instead, Russia has sought to enhance and enlarge multilateral frameworks of consultation and cooperation to deal with sources of instability in the region together with such significant powers. According to the argument of this study, these different attitudes towards certain actors in Eurasia and the complex framework of security alignments (i.e., our problematic) coherently serve for Russia's two main foreign policy objectives noted above. Because it would be very hard to examine such a connection without a theoretical framework, the research for this study has started with a survey on different theories of alignment and their relevance to Russia's foreign policy perspective.

Literature Review

There is a wide literature of theoretical studies focusing on alignment formation between states.³⁷ Therefore, it is not possible to examine all these competing approaches with their significant assumptions in detail within the context of this study. This part shortly reviews significant contributions to the literature on realist alignment theory and explains the reasons why balance of threat, omnibalancing, and soft balancing perspectives are chosen to study our case among the others. Then studies applying these theories to different cases of alignment formation in Eurasia are reviewed in order to put forward this study's links to the existing literature and its original differences.

Theoretical Studies on Alignment

In International Relations literature, the terms alliance and alignment have been mostly conflated with interstate partnerships having primary motivation on security

³⁷ For one of the most inclusive reviews on realist alignment theory, see Kajsa Ji Noe Oest, *The End of Alliance Theory?: A Literature Review of Realist Alliance Theory*: Institut for Statskundskab, 2007. Arbejdspapir, No. 3, 2007. Retrieved From: http://polsci.ku.dk/arbejdspapirer/2007/ap_2007_03.pdf (05.04.2017).

cooperation, while security is defined with issues of military concern.³⁸ As a result, theoretical studies on alignment formation has been dominated by various realist explanations, especially during the Cold War years.³⁹ Scholars like George Liska, Robert Rothstein, and Hans Morgenthau put forward some early studies examining alignment formation in history with reference to the balance of power concept.⁴⁰ Classical realists attempted to explain balance of power politics with reference to human nature without denying the role of anarchy, i.e. the absence of higher authority over states in the international system.⁴¹ This view was modified by Kenneth Waltz who suggested that it is the structure of the anarchic system and not the human nature or political skills of statesmen who led to the historical survival of balance of power politics.⁴² As the founder of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz's influenced most of the realist works which have been more or less rigorously structural since the end of the 1970s.⁴³

Accordingly, all realist theories on alignments emerged thereafter have their intellectual roots in Waltz's version of balance of power theory and the balancing

³⁸ See Colleen Chidley, "Towards a Framework of Alignment in International Relations," **Politikon**, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2014, p. 141.

³⁹ Oest, **The End of Alliance Theory?: A Literature Review of Realist Alliance Theory**, pp. 26-27. Chidley criticizes this theoretical standpoint suggesting that IR scholars need to develop a model or a framework of study to put forward for partnerships and arrangements that do not meet the criteria of security co-operation such as India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) Dialogue Forum and the Brazil-Russia-India-China-South Africa (BRICS). Chidley, "Towards a Framework of Alignment in International Relations," p. 141. Yet, since this study focuses on the CSTO and security cooperation dimension within the SCO, it positions itself within the realist research tradition.

⁴⁰ George Liska represents his book on *Nations in Alliances* as a systemized discussion on historical cases but not as an alignment theory. George Liska, **op.cit.**, p. vii. However the First Chapter titled as "Alignments and Realignment" include some propositions evoking theoretical logic of balance of power and balance of threat theories in a premature and less systemized form. **Ibid.**, pp. 12-60. Rothstein's study put forward different characteristics of alignment behavior between small powers which generally concern on local balance and great powers that align with regard to balance of the whole system through different case studies between 1815 and 1965. Robert L Rothstein, **Alliances and Small Powers**, New York: Columbia University Press, 1968. He also stopped short to declare a general theory suggesting that "*alliances have proved very resistant to theorizing.*" **Ibid.**, p. 57. On the other hand, Hans Morgenthau's *Politics among Nations* examines alignment formation in the modern history of Europe within the framework of classical balance of power theory. Hans Morgenthau, **Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace**, New York: Alfred A. Knopf 1948. Morgenthau's theoretical suggestions are dealt with in detail later in Chapter One.

⁴¹ Jack Donnelly, "Realism," Scott Burchill, et al. (ed.), **Theories of International Relations (3rd Ed.)**, New York Palgrave Macmillan, 2005, p. 31. In this regard, Keith Shimko suggests that Morgenthau and other classical realists did not emphasize explanatory power of anarchy on state behavior. "*Anarchy was relevant in the sense that it failed to provide constraints in the form of a higher authority to restrict man's baser desires, which are reflected in state behavior, to dominate others. Anarchy does not cause, and does not lead to, the struggle for power in Morgenthau's analysis*". Keith I. Shimko, "Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism," **The Review of Politics**, Vol. 54, No. 2, 1992, p. 293.

⁴² Michael Sheehan, **The Balance of Power: History & Theory**, New York: Routledge, 1996, p. 195.

⁴³ Donnelly, "Realism," p. 34. See also Shimko, "Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism," p. 294.

proposition within.⁴⁴ They cite Waltz's main assumptions, though some of them redefine balancing behavior and motivations by states associated with it. That is why Chapter One of this study reviews this theory in detail. To note here briefly, Waltz suggests that states form alignments by joining the weaker side in order to balance a stronger state or coalition of states in the system.⁴⁵ So that states restore the balance of power which stabilizes the system and ensures that no state will establish hegemony and dominate the others. In hierarchic political systems such as domestic politics, actors may choose bandwagoning by jumping to the powerful side (i.e. the strongest political party or presidential candidate) to increase their gains without placing their individual security in jeopardy. However, in an anarchic system, bandwagoning undermines the security of actors by strengthening a state which may later turn on themselves in the absence of a central authority for protection. This danger accounts for structural constraints by anarchy on state behavior.⁴⁶

Stephan Walt's balance of threat theory represents the next milestone in the development of realist alignment theory which has influenced all the theoretical discussion thereafter.⁴⁷ This theory is described as a refinement of Waltz's balance of power theory, as Walt works within the neorealist paradigm accepting its main premises.⁴⁸ Walt's central argument in balance of threat theory is that states balance

⁴⁴ See John A Vasquez, "The Realist Paradigm and Degenerative Versus Progressive Research Programs: An Appraisal of Neotraditional Research on Waltz's Balancing Proposition" John A Vasquez and Colin Elman (ed.), **Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate**, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, pp. 23-48; and Randall L. Schweller, "New Realist Research on Alliances: Refining, Not Refuting, Waltz's Balancing Proposition," John A Vasquez and Colin Elman (ed.), **Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate**, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, pp. 74-79. For Waltz's balance of power theory see Kenneth N Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, New York: McGraw-Hill Inc, 1979.

⁴⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 127.

⁴⁶ **Ibid.**, pp. 125-128.

⁴⁷ See Stephen M. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**.

⁴⁸ For the connection between Walt's alignment theory and neorealism see Michael Barnett, "Alliances, Balances of Threats, and Neorealism: The Accidental Coup," John A Vasquez and Colin Elman (ed.), **Realism and the Balancing of Power: A New Debate**, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 2003, p. 224; and Robert O Keohane, "Alliances, Threats, and the Uses of Neorealism," **International Security**, Vol. 13, No. 1, 1988, pp. 173-175. Neorealism starts with three crucial realist assumptions: "*that states are the key actors in world politics; that they seek power, either as an end or as a means to other ends; and that they rationally seek to advance their interests.*" Then neorealists emphasize the structural constraints by anarchy and distribution of power that lead states to follow self-help strategies relying on their own sources and various arrangements with other states to ensure their security and survival. **Ibid.**, pp. 172-173; Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, p. 111. On the other side, Mitsutomi summarizes four main assumptions of neorealism as follows: "(1) the *primary political unit of an era* is the base unit of the system; (2) the structure is ordered according to the principle of anarchy and power; (3) the architecture of the system is defined at any given point in time according to the number of great powers that populate the system; and (4) all state actors are rational actors." Yuichiro Mitsutomi, **Continuity**

against perceived threats rather than power alone. In this respect, Walt redefines balancing as allying against the most threatening state and bandwagoning as allying with the major source of threat. External threats are a function of four factors: aggregate power, geographic proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions.⁴⁹ Walt's analysis on alignment formation in the Middle East in the Cold War years put forward the fact that regional states have primarily balanced proximate threats by local powers through aligning with the United States and the Soviet Union, i.e. superpowers in distance. These superpowers, in turn, have been sensitive to threats by each other against their regional position. In response to such threats, they have balanced each other by seeking additional allies or consolidating their existing alignments in the region.⁵⁰ In this respect balance of threat provides more powerful insights to geopolitical competitions between great powers within a regional context, as the theory adds geography and threat perceptions to the analysis on alignment formation.

Steven David's study on alignment formation in the Third World emerged one of the most outstanding critiques of Walt, which introduced omnibalancing as an alternative theory in the literature.⁵¹ As a theory associated with neoclassical realism, omnibalancing does not disregard domestic level dynamics but focus on their interaction with the system level while analyzing alignment decisions.⁵² David

and Change: Structural Realism and International Stability in the Information Age, Unpublished Master Dissertation, Washington: George Washington University, 2011.

⁴⁹ Stephen M. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, pp. 22-26.

⁵⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 153-165.

⁵¹ See Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," **World Politics**, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1991; and Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**.

⁵² For this categorization see Steven E. Lobell, "Threat Assessment, the State, and Foreign Policy: A Neoclassical Realist Model," Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (ed.), **Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009 43. While neorealism offers theoretical explanations for international outcomes, neoclassical realists offer theories of foreign policy also paying regard to unit level variables and distinct characteristics of states (great powers, small states, developing countries, failed states etc.). *Ibid.* At the same time, neoclassical realists embrace many foundational premises of realism/neorealism including the conflictual nature of politics, the importance of relative power distribution, the primacy of anarchy as a systemic variable etc. Jeffrey W. Taliaferro, Steven E. Lobell, and Norrin M. Ripsman, "Introduction: Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy," Steven E. Lobell, Norrin M. Ripsman, and Jeffrey W. Taliaferro (ed.), **Neoclassical Realism, the State, and Foreign Policy**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 19. (For more information see the whole volume). David acknowledges the convergence between such assumptions and omnibalancing theory, but asserts that regarding the Third World politics "*realism must be broadened to examine internal threats in addition to focusing on external threats and capabilities (that is, structural arguments), and that the leader of the state rather than the state itself should be used as the level of analysis.*" David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 10.

criticizes the state-centric perspective in both Waltz's and Walt's theories ignore "*the unstable, dangerous and often fatal nature of domestic political environment that characterizes the Third World.*"⁵³ In this regard, the most pressing threats that Third World leaders face may not necessarily be external but also internal (e.g., civil wars, military coups, secessionist movements). David concludes that Third World leaderships tend to form alignments to balance various threats on different levels on the basis of the rational calculation of their "*leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power.*"⁵⁴

Randall Schweller proposes another alternative theory called balance of interest based on his critique on Walt's balance of threat theory.⁵⁵ First, Schweller challenges the neorealist assumption that the first concern of all states is achieving greater security. He contends Walt's theory sees "*the world solely through the lens of a satisfied, status-quo state.*"⁵⁶ As another neoclassical realist paying regard to unit-level variables, Schweller points to the fact that there have also been some revisionist states in history.⁵⁷ They have sought to improve their positions in the system and some territorial gains through aligning with another expanding revisionist power. Accordingly he challenges Walt's definition of bandwagoning as a capitulation to an external threat, claiming that alliance choices "*are often motivated by opportunities for gain as well as danger, by appetite as well as fear*"⁵⁸ In this respect, balance of interest theory contends that satisfied powers who are willing to preserve the order "*will join the status-quo coalition, even when it is the stronger side; dissatisfied powers, motivated by profit more than security, will bandwagon with an ascending revisionist state.*"⁵⁹

⁵³ Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," p. 235

⁵⁴ Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 6.

⁵⁵ Randall L. Schweller, "Bandwagoning for Profit: Bringing the Revisionist State Back In," **International Security**, Vol. 19, No. 1, 1994.

⁵⁶ According to Schweller, Walt takes a similar status quo perspective with Kenneth Waltz who suggests that the first concern of all states is to maintain their security not to maximize power. **Ibid.**, p. 85-86.

⁵⁷ Rose categorizes Schweller's studies in the neoclassical realist research program including his article on balance of interest theory. Gideon Rose, "Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy," **World politics**, Vol. 51, No. 1, 1998, p. 164.

⁵⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 79

⁵⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 88. In general form, balance-of-interest theory suggest that "*the stability of the system depends on the balance of revisionist and conservative forces. When status-quo states are far more powerful than revisionist states, the system will be stable.*" **Ibid.**, p. 104. Talking about the world in the mid-1990s, Schweller suggests that "*all major powers are coming to hold a common view of what constitutes an acceptable status quo,*" and the international system is likely to go from balance to 'concert.' **Ibid.**, p. 106

These discussions on realist alignment theory and alternative models offered by scholars make relevance to different aspects of our research problem. Balance of power theory argues that states need to balance relatively powerful actors in the international system to guarantee their own security. But it remains highly questionable whether Russia and other great powers seek to balance the United States' material capabilities by aggregating their power within a counterweight alliance that would ensure their security and survival. On the other side, balance of threat theory appears as a useful approach to examine geopolitical competition between rival power centers through regional alignments. In other words, it sheds light on Russia's regional alignment strategy resisting the military and political penetration by the US and the NATO alliance. In addition, omnibalancing theory underlines a dynamic of security cooperation between Russia and its allies in the CIS, as they appreciate Russia's security support against non-state regional threats and its contribution to their regime security. Without focusing on these dynamics, it would not be possible to comprehend the main rationale of these alignments between Russia and the post-Soviet states.

Like balance of power theory, Schweller's balance of interest theory seems to be problematic to apply to our case. First of all, there is an ongoing contention on which side carries out revisionist policies in Eurasia, as both the US-NATO alliance and Russia accuse each other of forcing strategic changes in military, political and territorial status quo through the last decades.⁶⁰ With the annexation of Crimea from

⁶⁰ In Russian perspective the United States behaves as a revisionist power in Eurasia with regard to the NATO enlargement, democracy promotion strategy in the CIS, the US-led military operations to Kosovo and Iraq. See Alexander Korolev, "Theories of Non-Balancing and Russia's Foreign Policy," **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Vol. 41, No. 6, 2018, pp. 9-10 and Thomas Grant, **Aggression against Ukraine: Territory, Responsibility, and International Law**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan 2015, pp. 171-197. On the other hand, some prominent American realists view the American grand strategy as revisionist. John Mearsheimer and Stephen Walt suggest that instead of trying to uphold the balance of power in key regions, the United States pursue a "liberal hegemony" strategy which is revisionist at its core. This strategy commits American might "*not only to solve global problems but also to promote a world order based on international institutions, representative governments*" and human rights, assuming that the US "*has the right, responsibility, and wisdom to manage local politics almost everywhere*," John J Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior US Grand Strategy," **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 95, No. 4, 2016, p. 71. The Authors also underline how this strategy led to failed democracy-building initiatives based on regime-change in Afghanistan, Iraq, Libya and Syria. Accordingly, Christopher Layne describes American grand strategy as revisionist to the core which aims at preserving American hegemony at all costs. This strategy includes using military force to ensure a liberal and 'open' international system when it becomes necessary. Quoted in Brian C Schmidt, "The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present by Christopher Layne," **International Affairs**, Vol. 82, No. 5, 2006, p. 1031. If we associate Russia's alignment strategies with its aim at defending the status quo against the expansion of the US-NATO military engagement, balance of interest theory would have no superior explanatory power over the

Ukraine, such Western claims on the Kremlin's strategic ends have gained significant credibility. However, it is hard to argue that Russia seeks alignments with external powers dissatisfied with the status quo, which would support Moscow's revisionist expansion in its neighborhood. Russia did not receive foreign military assistance or open political support for its actions in Ukraine giving the ambivalent stances by its allies towards the annexation and their hesitance to recognize Crimea as a part of Russia.⁶¹ For all these reasons, this study does not choose to apply balance of interest theory whose main contribution is to explain alignment behavior with regard to state motivations for such gains in the international system.

In the 1990s, there have been some other contributions to the realist alignment theory by scholars who have remained outside of the disputes over balancing and bandwagoning. For example, James Morrow focused on trade-offs between members of military alliances to analyze different motivations by states to enter into such an arrangement.⁶² According to his model when two major powers enter into an alliance both sides increase their security by aggregating their capabilities together, while they sacrifice from their autonomy as two states harmonize their policies and undertake certain commitments for each other's security. Yet, there is a different trade-off for asymmetrical alliances which are formed between major and minor powers: Weaker side gain more security through military commitments made by its major allies and the stronger side gain more autonomy through the concessions provided by its minor allies such as military bases and changes in their domestic and foreign policy. Morrow points out that asymmetrical alliances are easier to form than symmetrical ones, as both sides gain some benefit in different terms. In addition, great powers always concern on their

other approaches emphasizing balancing against such threats i.e. balance of threat and soft balancing theories. In this case their explanations will converge with Schweller's theory.

⁶¹ Thomas Grant suggests that a notable example for this ambiguity was China's position. On the one hand, China abstained from voting for the UN Security Council Resolution reaffirming territorial integrity of Ukraine and declaring that the referendum on Crimea's union with Russia can have no validity. On the other hand on Beijing formally declared that China "*always respects all countries' sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity. The Crimean issue should be resolved politically under a framework of law and order. All parties should exercise restraint and refrain from raising the tension.*" Grant, **Aggression against Ukraine: Territory, Responsibility, and International Law**, p. 68. According to the Author India has also taken a balanced and reserved position, as its Prime Minister "*emphasized the consistent position India had on the issues of unity and territorial integrity.*" **Ibid.**, p. 70. The attitude of Russia's allies in the post-Soviet region towards the Ukraine Crisis is examined in Part Two, Chapter One. China's and India's view of Ukraine crisis and their reactions are elaborated in the following chapter.

⁶² James D. Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," **American Journal of Political Science**, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1991.

foreign policy autonomy and avoid to make concessions unless they are seriously threatened.⁶³ This directly makes relevance to one aspect of our problematic that Russia has been willing to establish formal military alliances only with small post-Soviet surrounding itself. Morrow's model is elaborated in the primary section of the First Chapter that categorizes alignments since it is an approach examining differences between symmetrical and asymmetrical alliances rather than explaining alignment formation in general.

Glenn Snyder's *Alliance Politics* is another principal theoretical study focusing on internal dynamics of military alliances.⁶⁴ Snyder suggests his book as an effort to fill the gap in theory on alliances, which combines neorealism, game theory, bargaining theory and some other social psychological and sociological approaches on coalition formation.⁶⁵ According to Snyder structural factors such as the distribution of capabilities and conflicts determine prospective alliances to their members, but who allies with whom under is ultimately decided by a bargaining process based on the value given by the parties for the alliance and other alternatives.⁶⁶ This meta-theoretical analysis supported by mathematical models goes beyond the realist research tradition. Snyder's theory also put forward plenty of variables that are difficult to take account together, while analyzing Russia's alignments with a wide range of state-actors under examination. For all these reasons, Snyder's approach is not taken a reference point by this study, although it also starts with neorealist premises on structural factors.

Towards the end of the 1990s, academic debates on realist alignment theories began to dwindle, which was later followed by the aforementioned discussion on the end of alliances. This was due in part to the fact that other great powers have failed to establish a counterweight coalition to balance the US power in an increasingly unipolar world contrary to predictions of neorealism. Following the Iraq war, however, rising security cooperation between some actors disturbed by unilateral American policies (e.g. Russia, China, India, Iran) induced some realists to develop a new theory of soft

⁶³ See *ibid.*, p. 913-916.

⁶⁴ Glenn H Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, New York: Cornell University Press, 1997.

⁶⁵ See *ibid.*, Chapter 2, pp. 43-78.

⁶⁶ Randall L. Schweller, "Alliance Politics by Glenn H. Snyder," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 113, No. 3, 1998, p. 513.

balancing to explain constraining actions against the United States.⁶⁷ According to these scholars, balancing actions against the US as the most powerful state in the global system has been evolved into a more indirect and covert form that goes beyond the rigid balancing proposition posed by Waltz.⁶⁸ In this regard, soft balancers do not directly challenge to US power and military capabilities by forming a counterweight coalition but cooperate with each other aiming at delaying, frustrating, and undermining aggressive unilateral military policies followed by Washington.⁶⁹

Soft balancing argument is rooted in balance of threat theory, and it embraces some central assumptions in neorealist thinking e.g. states balance against powers with hegemonic aspirations to avoid damaging results under anarchy.⁷⁰ However, scholars explain the evolution of counterbalancing to soft balancing with reference to certain factors that reduce threat perceptions by great powers towards their survival and territorial integrity in the contemporary era.⁷¹ In this respect, soft balancing theory has the potential to contribute our analysis on security alignments between Russia, China, and India as the most significant Asian powers. In addition, a comparative examination on balancing propositions in Waltz's theory and soft balancing approach could help us to comprehend the transformation of alignments in the contemporary era and the limits of security cooperation between these actors within the framework of the SCO.

In fact, during the last two decades, most of the realist theoretical work on alignment has turned to examine the evolution of balancing behavior by current great powers. For example, Christopher Layne put forward the term 'opaque balancing' referring to great power strategies to strengthen their economic capacity in cooperation with the US and each other, which is to be converted into military capabilities in the longer term.⁷² Later he introduced the 'leash-slipping' concept that makes relevance

⁶⁷ Stephen G Brooks and William C Wohlforth, **World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy**, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, pp. 60-97.

⁶⁸ Lorenzo Cladi and Andrea Locatelli, "Bandwagoning, Not Balancing: Why Europe Confounds Realism," **Contemporary Security Policy**, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2012, pp. 268-269.

⁶⁹ Robert A Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," **International security**, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2005, p. 10; Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," **World Politics**, Vol. 61, No. 01, 2009, p. 104.

⁷⁰ See Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy**, p. 61; and Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," pp. 13-15.

⁷¹ T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," pp. 47-53.

⁷² The main rationale in opaque balancing is curtaining the aim at balancing the US to avoid becoming a target of American enmity at initial stages. Christopher Layne, **The Peace of Illusions: American Grand Strategy from 1940 to the Present**, New York: Cornell University Press, 2007, pp. 145-146. Layne's emphasis on economic relations, however, takes the focus outside of the context of this study.

to alignments between secondary powers which do not perceive an increased threat to their physical security but aim at increasing their autonomy vis-à-vis the US by combining their capabilities together.⁷³ Birthe Hansen developed a more compressive theoretical model for unipolarity within the neorealist framework, which suggests that unipolar distribution of power ruled out balancing through great power alignments at the global level.⁷⁴ According to this model, states tend to free-ride enjoying the general stability of the system supported by the strong involvement of the superpower. When there emerge threats and challenges to international stability and their national security, states are inclined to flock around the United States which is the strongest state in the system. All these theoretical studies shed light on different aspects of alignment behavior under the unipolar system. Yet, soft balancing approach seems to have an upper hand in explaining Russia's alignment with major powers, as it focuses on active diplomatic and military cooperation which aims at undermining the US military engagement in Eurasia. In this regard, some scholars already give Russia's security cooperation with China and India as examples for soft balancing acts.⁷⁵

Regional Applications: Alignment Formation in Eurasia

There are some example studies in the literature which apply the theories chosen for the analysis above to the specific cases of alignments in Eurasia. For example, William Wohlforth tests balance of power theory in the post-Soviet region and concludes that there is little evidence of balancing by regional states against the Russian Federation.⁷⁶ Some scholars utilize balance of threat theory to analyze

⁷³ The examples given by Layne include historical allies of the United States like Great Britain and France, since leash-slipping is motivated more on autonomy concerns rather than opposing threats from the US. Accordingly Layne identifies the initiatives to create European Security and Defense policy by EU members as the most recent example for leash-slipping against the United States. Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion Revisited: The Coming End of the United States' Unipolar Moment," **International security**, Vol. 31, No. 2, 2006, pp. 30-36.

⁷⁴ Hansen argues that great powers are only expected to balance the superpower's external resources with their internal capabilities or to conduct "issue-specific balancing" against dimensions of US policies. The Author notes that he prefers to use this concept for what is termed as soft balancing. Birthe Hansen, **Unipolarity and World Politics: A Theory and Its Implications**, New York: Routledge, 2011, p. 28.

⁷⁵ See Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," pp. 61-64; Chaka Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2012; Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and Us Policy toward China," **Security Studies**, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2008, pp. 368-369.

⁷⁶ Additionally Wohlforth underlines that there is no convincing evidence for balancing of power by Russia at the international system level. William C. Wohlforth, "Revisiting Balance of Power Theory

alignment formation in the South Caucasus region which includes small states perceiving high-level of threat from neighboring countries. While admitting the explanatory power of Walt's theory in this regional context, they add some unit-level variables into their analyses on individual states to reach more reliable conclusions.⁷⁷ Omnibalancing theory is also used to examine alignment behavior by individual post-Soviet states. First, Miller and Toritsyn applied the theory to the post-Soviet states in general and to Ukraine and Uzbekistan in particular.⁷⁸ Besides traditional domestic threats such as military coups, assassination attempts, and civil wars, the authors added a new variant of internal threat into their theoretical perspective i.e. galvanizing opposition force that resulted in color revolutions in some post-Soviet states. There are other scholars who applied omnibalancing theory to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, focusing on the sources of insecurity such as Islamic opposition, religious extremism and the Tajik civil war.⁷⁹ Soft balancing theory, on the other side, is generally used to examine strategic relations between Russia, China and India, and the SCO's activities in regional security.⁸⁰ In this respect, scholars attempt to expose the connections

in Central Eurasia," T.V. Paul, James J Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (ed.), **Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004.

⁷⁷ James MacDougall applies balance of threat theory to explain alignment preferences of Georgia, Armenia and Azerbaijan, combining it Dan Reiter's learning theory that focuses on the effect of historical experiences on alignment decisions. James C. MacDougall, **Post-Soviet Strategic Alignment: The Weight of History in the South Caucasus**, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Washington: Georgetown University, 2009, p. 31. Accordingly, Gvalia et al. identify neorealist approaches like balance of power and balance of threat as inadequate in their analysis on Georgia's alignment behavior in comparison with Azerbaijan. They suggest that a small state balance against powerful and threatening actors but only when there is elite consensus in favor of this option regarding their ideas about the identity and purpose of the state. Giorgi Gvalia et al., "Thinking Outside the Bloc: Explaining the Foreign Policies of Small States," **Security Studies**, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2013. On the other side, S. Neil Macfarlane refers to balance of threat theory as a useful approach in this study analyzing the relationship between security problems/dilemmas in the Caucasus and the engagement of neighboring states towards this region. S. Neil Macfarlane, "Regional Powers and Security in the Caucasus," Meliha B Altunışık and Oktay F Tanrisever (ed.), **The South Caucasus—Security, Energy and Europeanization**, New York: Routledge, 2018.

⁷⁸ Eric A Miller and Arkady Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back in: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," **Security Studies**, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2005. In a later study published as a book, Miller presents a more elaborate research on Ukraine and Uzbekistan through an omnibalancing perspective, which takes economic dependence to Russia into account as another variable. Eric A. Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2006.

⁷⁹ See Matteo Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignment in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," **International Political Science Review**, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2007, pp. 253-271; Kirill Nourzhanov, "Omnibalancing in Tajikistan's Foreign Policy: Security-Driven Discourses of Alignment with Iran," **Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies**, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2012, pp. 363-381.

⁸⁰ See Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'"; Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization"; and He and Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and Us Policy toward China". There are also some studies arguing that

between threat perceptions by these states from the US unilateral policies in nearby regions and their security cooperation practices. They also examine how this security cooperation undermines the US military engagement in the Eurasian region.

On the other side, some scholars working with realist theories of alignment place Russia in the epicenter of their analyses, focusing directly on its strategic behavior as this study does. Thomas Ambrosio refers to balance of power, balance of threat, and balance of interest theories to explain what he problematizes as balancing/bandwagoning dichotomy in Russian foreign policy.⁸¹ He identifies two exceptional bandwagoning period when the Russian Federation joined the hegemonic coalition around the US and further reinforced the unipolarity (1992-1993 and 2001-2003). Then Ambrosio turns to the domestic level to explain the quick shifts to balance the United States again. As the dominant political culture views a global role for Russia subordinate to the American interests as unacceptable, the costs of bandwagoning have been too high for foreign policy elites. Therefore, Russian turned to balance again after these brief periods, through their attempts to form an anti-hegemonic coalition against the US primacy⁸²

Andreas Bock et al. have a narrower focus in their study which particularly examines the Russian approach towards the Ukraine crisis in the balance of threat perspective. The Authors underline Russian threat perceptions from the US and NATO military policies in its neighborhood. Challenging the conventional wisdom in the West, they argue that it was Russia's need to balance those threats rather than its neo-imperialist ambitions that drove the decision to annex Crimea.⁸³ Recently, Alexander

some post-Soviet states have adopted soft balancing strategy against Russia during definite time periods. For Moldova's soft balancing against Russia see Cristian Cantir and Ryan Kennedy, "Balancing on the Shoulders of Giants: Moldova's Foreign Policy toward Russia and the European Union," **Foreign Policy Analysis**, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2015. For another analysis on Kazakhstan's 'economic soft balancing' against Moscow see Lyailya Nurgaliyeva, "Kazakhstan's Economic Soft Balancing Policy Vis-À-Vis Russia: From the Eurasian Union to the Economic Cooperation with Turkey," **Journal of Eurasian Studies**, Vol. 7, No. 1, 2016.

⁸¹ Thomas Ambrosio, **Challenging America's Global Preeminence: Russia's Quest for Multipolarity**, New York: Routledge, 2005.

⁸² In this regard Ambrosio develops a balance of elites argument: Political elites consider what is to be gained vis-a-vis domestic competitors by choosing one behavior over another (i.e. balancing and bandwagoning). He combines this argument with structural theories and suggests that it is the interaction between systemic international environment and the domestic political culture which determines decisions for balancing and bandwagoning. **Ibid.**

⁸³ Andreas M Bock, Ingo Henneberg, and Friedrich Plank, "'If You Compress the Spring, It Will Snap Back Hard': The Ukrainian Crisis and the Balance of Threat Theory," **International Journal**, Vol. 70, No. 1, 2015. Balance of threat theory is also used to examine domestic politics in Russia by Robert Person who challenges the view that Putin is an autocrat whose main aim is to maximize his power.

Korolev challenged the assumption by various scholars including soft balancing theorists that the unipolar distribution of power discourages conventional balancing against the US supremacy.⁸⁴ Instead of Russia's alignment strategies, however, Korolev elaborates Russian approach and military policies towards three example cases, the Russia-Georgia war, the Ukraine Crisis, and the Syrian proxy war.

In point of fact, all these analyzes represent significant contributions to the literature, which will be utilized by this doctoral dissertation as well. The first group of studies focuses on specific cases of alignment between Russia, post-Soviet states, and the major Asian states to explore real factors determining alignment formation in the Eurasian region such as external threats, domestic level threats and the US engagement towards the region. However, as these studies do not focus on Russia, they do not elaborate how all various kinds of threats function in Russia's strategic perspective. Accordingly, such studies do not examine how those threats are strategically dealt with by Moscow in order to secure a great power position over the CIS and a high seat among the other major powers in the global system. The second group of studies uses alignment theories to examine Russia's behavior directly, which is more close to the approach by this study. However, they either focus on bilateral relations between Russia and the United States or some specific cases in which Russia challenged the US and its allies to preserve its regional interests.

In this regard, none of these analyses elaborate Russia's alignment behavior, in general, considering the network of security cooperation arrangements with different states in Eurasia. This doctoral dissertation deals with those arrangements altogether including military alliances and other looser forms of institutionalized/bilateral security cooperation. It seeks to explore Russia's rationale to join different sorts of security cooperation arrangements with individual states in Eurasia. What this study argues is that these arrangements are all complementary to each other as crucial instruments in Russia's foreign policy strategy. Through various kind of security alignments, Russia seeks to maximize its autonomy in pursuing its strategic interests in Eurasia and to settle itself as an indispensable great power in world politics.

According to him, Putin primarily aims at maintaining the security of his government against various threats by domestic actors such as foreign sponsored NGOs, political and economic opposition forces in Russia. Robert Person, "Balance of Threat: The Domestic Insecurity of Vladimir Putin," **Journal of Eurasian studies**, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2017.

⁸⁴ Korolev, "Theories of Non-Balancing and Russia's Foreign Policy".

Examining those alignments together, this study puts forward the main characteristics of Russia's alignment behavior and its implications on the regional and international system as well.

Aims and Scope

Studies applying alignment theories to specific regions or actors have generally two main objectives. First, scholars test main assumptions by theories in the face of international and regional developments. They point to the strengths and weaknesses of alternative theories and put forward their comparative advantages over each other to explain the cases under examination. Secondly, these studies use theoretical frameworks to explore the most important factors driving alignment preferences and dynamics of security cooperation between allies. As this study draws on a theoretical background consisting of realist approaches to alignment formation, it is unavoidable to discuss the explanatory power of theories indicating their advantages and disadvantages with regard to our case. However, this is not the main objective. As a detailed analysis on Russia, this study particularly aims at utilizing theories instrumentally to comprehend the rationale of Russia's alignment behavior and strategic goals associated with it. The alignments formed by Russia, in turn, shape the dynamics of regional security in Eurasia. In addition to that Russia's alignment preferences give clues about the ideal international system sought by Moscow, which is defined as multipolarity in the official foreign policy discourse. Examining the nexus between all these issues, this study aims at answering some critical questions such as:

- How are various threats faced by Russia and other post-Soviet states are confronted and manipulated by Moscow to consolidate its dominant position in the regional security? What are the links between those threats and regional alignment formation?
- What are the functions of regional alignments in the CIS in Russia's power projections in the post-Soviet space? What kind of a great power behavior should we expect from Russia considering the framework of regional security cooperation?
- What are the motivations of Russia to enter into security cooperation with China, India and other members of the SCO through such an institutional setting? What are the factors defining the content and limits of security cooperation within the SCO?

- What are the characteristics of the ‘multipolar’ international system defined as an ideal by Moscow? How could Russia’s alignment strategies contribute to the transformation towards such an international system?

Examining Russia’s alignment relations with a wide range of actors requires setting certain limitations to determine the scope for this doctoral study. First of all, this study mainly focuses on issues and developments related to international security and regime survival.⁸⁵ Besides military cooperation between states, diplomatic collaboration processes are covered to the extent they make relevance to such security issues. However, economic statecraft is largely excluded from the analysis. Secondly, the term Eurasia determines the geographical scope of the study. This concept is used with respect to Russian geopolitical thinking that makes a separation between small and greater Eurasia. While the former refers to the post-Soviet region (except the Baltic Republics), the latter covers the entire landmass of the world’s largest continent combining Europe and Asia together.⁸⁶ When dealing with Russia’s alignment strategies in small Eurasia, the study mainly focuses on Russia’s security cooperation with the CSTO members. Russian approach towards the other post-Soviet states is also examined to elaborate how the Kremlin reacts against balancing initiatives by small regional states with reference to alignment theories.⁸⁷ On the other side, the most important allies of Russia in the greater Eurasian region take their membership in the SCO, while Moscow shows an interest in furthering cooperation with the observer

⁸⁵ Realist theories in general embraces the notion that there exists a hierarchy of issues in world politics, where questions of security and survival (high politics) dominate economic and social affairs (low politics). Robert O Keohane and Joseph S Nye, **Power and Interdependence**, Boston: Pearson Longman, 1977, pp. 19-20. See also David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 10

⁸⁶ See Dmitri Trenin, "Russia’s Evolving Grand Eurasia Strategy: Will It Work’," Carnegie Moscow Center, July 20, 2017, <http://carnegie.ru/2017/07/20/russia-s-evolving-grand-eurasia-strategy-will-it-work-pub-71588> (27.09.2017); and Tatiana Shackleina, "A Russian Perspective on Twenty-First-Century Challenges," Norma C Noonan and Vidya Nadkarni (ed.), **Challenge and Change: Global Threats and the State in Twenty-First Century International Politics**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2016, p. 61.

⁸⁷ There are some exceptional former Soviet Republics that are not covered by this study. Beside the Baltic States holding their NATO membership, Turkmenistan which maintains a permanent neutrality status is also excluded from the analysis. This status was recognized under the international law through a UN General Assembly Resolution. United Nations, A/RES/50/80, December 12, 1995, <http://www.un.org/documents/ga/res/50/a50r080.htm> (26.09.2018). Thanks to the relative stability of Turkmenistan in the Central Asian region, Ashgabat could keep itself out of post-Soviet alignment and security structures and adopted a regime security strategy based on increasing wealth in the country through diversified economic ties with foreign powers rather than security cooperation arrangements. See Utku Yapıcı, "From Positive Neutrality to Silk Road Activism? The Continuities and Changes in Turkmenistan’s Foreign Policy," **Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies**, Vol. 20, No. 3, 2018.

states and dialogue partners.⁸⁸ In this respect, when moving beyond the CIS, this study focuses on Russia's security cooperation with the non-post-Soviet members of the SCO. As an observer state with aspirations for full membership to the SCO, Iran is also included in the analysis, because Russia-Iran alignment is defined as a typical case by soft balancing scholars.⁸⁹ Lastly, the application part of this study focuses primarily on the events and developments since the 2000s, though the chapter examining the evolution of Russian strategic thinking goes further back into history. The reason for this is the fact that Russia's post-Cold War international position was by and large consolidated under the leadership of President Putin. Russia's alignments in Eurasia were also institutionalized in the same period, with the establishment of CSTO and SCO as the main international organizations responsible for regional security.

Definitions: Great Powers, Major Powers and Regional States

Setting operational definitions is a preliminary task for studies examining some phenomena with reference to theoretical frameworks. This is especially important for a study focusing on alliances and alignments, such controversial concepts that are widely used in International Relations literature. Scholars tend to use these terms very broadly and sometimes interchangeably with little or no effort to clarify them. To avoid such a methodological flaw, the first section of Chapter One undertakes the task to define these two main concepts and categorize various types of alignments making relevance to the case of Russia. Some other important concepts such as unipolarity, multipolarity, existential and secondary security threats are defined respectively while examining main assumptions of alignment theories. However, there are three other important concepts for which one cannot find operational definitions in most of the studies on realist alignment theory: great powers, major powers, and regional states.⁹⁰

⁸⁸ In the 2016 SCO Summit, Russian President Vladimir Putin claimed that the small Eurasia project evolves into greater Eurasia touching upon the partnership between the members of Eurasian Economic Union (which also take part in the CSTO) and the members, observers and dialogue partners of the SCO. See Shackleina, "A Russian Perspective on Twenty-First-Century Challenges," p. 61.

⁸⁹ See Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy**, p. 77; Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 106; and Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," pp. 42-43. Iran applied to join the SCO as a full member in 2008 and in 2010 but became unsuccessful at both attempts. Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy," **Australian Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 69, No. 1, 2015, p. 92.

⁹⁰ For example, Waltz does not offer a certain definition for great powers in his *Theory of International Politics*, although he argues that "a general theory of international politics is necessarily based on the great powers." Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, p. 73. According to Waltz, "one finds general

To define these concepts here will be helpful to understand the difference between asymmetrical and symmetrical alliances. Furthermore, to identify characteristics that make up a great power is crucial to comprehend Russian strategic moves to consolidate such an identity and position in the international system.

There are various definitions for great powers in International Relations literature. Many of them have their focus on material capabilities. As Paul Schroeder puts it, “*the usual definition of a great power is a country that can rely primarily on its own resources for the defense of its interests and existence.*”⁹¹ Accordingly, John Mearsheimer suggests that “*to qualify as a great power, a state must have sufficient military assets to put up a serious fight in an all-out conventional war against the most powerful state in the world.*”⁹² In addition to that, some scholars underline the role and activities great powers undertake in the realm of international security.⁹³ Jack S. Levy defines a great power, “*as a state which plays a major role in international politics with respect to security-related issues.*”⁹⁴ He also offers some operational indicators for great powers:

*“Possession of a high level of power capabilities; participation in international congresses and conferences; de facto identification as a great power by an international conference or organization; admission to a formal or informal organization of powers (such as the Concert of Europe); participation in great power guarantees, territorial compensations, or partitions; and generally treatment as a relative equal by other great powers, in terms of protocol, alliances, and so on.”*⁹⁵

agreement about who the great powers of a period are, with occasional doubt about marginal cases.”
“The question is an empirical one, and common sense can answer it.” Ibid., p. 131.

⁹¹ Paul W. Schroeder, **Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 41.

⁹² Mearsheimer clarifies his argument maintaining that “*the candidate need not have the capability to defeat the leading state, but it must have some reasonable prospect of turning the conflict into a war of attrition that leaves the dominant state seriously weakened, even if that dominant state ultimately wins the war. In the nuclear age great powers must have a nuclear deterrent that can survive a nuclear strike against it.*” John J. Mearsheimer, **The Tragedy of Great Power Politics**, New York: WW Norton & Company, 2001, p. 5.

⁹³ See Jack S. Levy, “Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495-1975,” **Journal of Conflict Resolution**, Vol. 25, No. 3, 1981, p. 585; Christina Stolte, **Brazil’s Africa Strategy: Role Conception and the Drive for International Status**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, p. 17; and Paul A. Papayoanou, “Great Powers and Regional Orders: Possibilities and Prospects after the Cold War,” David A. Lake and Patrick M. Morgan (ed.), **Regional Orders: Building Security in a New World**, Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University, 1997, p. 125.

⁹⁴ Jack S. Levy, “Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495-1975,” p. 585.

⁹⁵ **Ibid.**

Such indicators expose the fact that besides having substantial material capabilities, a great power needs to project some political and military power outside of its borders to keep its high profile in international politics. This would ensure its participation in international congresses, conferences and great power guarantees on security-related issues.⁹⁶ Secondly, Levy points to another factor underlining a great power status that is recognition of such status in other great powers' images and perceptions. This recognition brings about treatment as a relative equal by other great powers in terms of general attention, respect, protocols, negotiations, etc.⁹⁷ Since the end of the Cold War, the Russian Federation has insisted on an equal partnership status with the US in managing international security as one of the great powers having special responsibilities for the security of its own region. As elaborated in the study, Russia's aspirations for such a recognition have deep impacts on its approach towards regional politics in the CIS and great power relations in the global system.

Nevertheless, there is a scholarly consensus on the great power status of both Russia and China, regarding their appropriate military capabilities and permanent memberships in the UN Security Council.⁹⁸ Furthermore, they are both included system-level calculations about the present and near-future distribution of global power, which represents another distinguishing characteristic for great powers.⁹⁹ However, India's great power status has long been discussed by scholars, thus remained less clear.¹⁰⁰ Besides, India is a poor and developing country in economic terms, it remains significantly underrepresented in principal institutions which define

⁹⁶ In this regard, Buzan and Waever suggests that great powers "*will generally think of themselves as more than regional powers and they will usually be capable of operating in more than one region.*" Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 35.

⁹⁷ Jack S. Levy, **War in the Modern Great Power System: 1495-1975**, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983, p. 17.

⁹⁸ For scholars denoting Russia and China as great powers see e.g. John J. Mearsheimer, **The Tragedy of Great Power Politics**, pp. 362, 373-374; Stephen M. Walt, Great Powers Are Defined by Their Great Wars, *Foreign Policy*, September 21, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/21/great-powers-are-defined-by-their-great-wars/> (22.09.2018); William C Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," **World politics**, Vol. 61, No. 1, 2009, p. 98; Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 36.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 35-36.

¹⁰⁰ George Perkovich, "Is India a Major Power?," **Washington Quarterly**, Vol. 27, No. 1, 2003; John D Ciociari, "India's Approach to Great-Power Status," **Fletcher F. World Aff.**, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2011; Mir Sadat, "America Needs India to Become a Great Power," *The National Interest*, December 25, 2017, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/america-needs-india-become-great-power-23782> (22.09.2018).

great power status.¹⁰¹ At the same time, however, India has a strong army equipped with nuclear weapons, which ranks among the top four militaries of the world. This army possesses the world's second-largest active-duty military personnel (approximately 1.4 million).¹⁰² Furthermore, India has a huge population which is expected to overtake that of China by 2024.¹⁰³ If one considers its actual military capabilities and power potential, it seems not appropriate to identify India only as a regional power that takes place in South Asia. In this respect, this study designates India as a major power with regard to its relative national capabilities.¹⁰⁴ It also makes relevance to Morrow's model of asymmetrical alliances which associates such kind of military alliances with those formed between major and minor powers.

All the other states examined as allies of the Russian Federation by this study, such as post-Soviet States and the SCO members apart from China and India, are small powers which operate on a limited regional scale. As Buzan and Waever note, capabilities of regional powers may *"loom large in their regions, but do not register much in a broad-spectrum way at the global level."*¹⁰⁵ Regional states or regional powers are excluded from system-level calculations about balance of power and polarity. Accordingly, they are much less concerned about great power competition at the global level but focus on ensuring their security against regional threats by other local actors.¹⁰⁶ When interests of great powers are at stake in a particular region, regional powers may get caught up in a global competition, *"as happened during the*

¹⁰¹ Ciociari, "India's Approach to Great-Power Status," p. 62, 84. In fact, India represents the seventh largest economy in the world considering its Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2017. However it takes 152th place in the GDP per capita list by country following Nigeria and Djibouti. IMF World Economic Outlook (April 2018) <http://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/datasets/WEO> (22.09.2018). As Sadat notes while India is not a member of the Group of Seven (G7) and the UN Security Council, it is also excluded from the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which is Asia's most important economic organization. Sadat, "America Needs India to Become a Great Power".

¹⁰² **Ibid.** See also "2018 Military Strength Ranking", Global Firepower, 2018, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.asp>; and, "Total Available Active Military Manpower by Country," Global Firepower, 2018, <https://www.globalfirepower.com/active-military-manpower.asp> (22.09.2018).

¹⁰³ "World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision," The United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, June 21, 2017, <https://www.un.org/development/desa/publications/world-population-prospects-the-2017-revision.html> (22.09.2018).

¹⁰⁴ This is an overarching term which is widely used by realist scholars to identify leading powers in the international system which fall short of the US national capabilities but still share significant amount of global power such as China, Russia and India. In this respect they are also called as second-tier and secondary powers. See Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," pp. 53-54; Wohlforth, "Unipolarity, Status Competition, and Great Power War," pp. 53-54; and Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," pp. 102-103.

¹⁰⁵ Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 37.

¹⁰⁶ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 158.

Cold War to Vietnam, Egypt, Iraq, and others.”¹⁰⁷ In the face of such threats, regional states inherently seek alignments and alliances with other states including great powers, as they usually lack necessary capabilities to guarantee their own security.

Methodology and the Plan of the Study

The first task of this dissertation is to represent the theoretical framework that will guide the analysis, as it is a theory-oriented study based on a certain set of assumptions. The First Chapter of Part One examines balance of power, balance of threat, omnibalancing and soft balancing theories together with their relevance to Russia’s alignment behavior. In this respect, the chapter discusses the advantages and disadvantages of each perspective, considering different cases of alignments formed by Russia. Chapter Two focuses on Russia’s strategic perspective towards interstate alignments and the international system. The main task of this chapter is to put forward points of convergence and divergence between our theoretical framework and Russian foreign policy thinking. While Chapter One underlines the main variables that influence alignment formation between states (distribution of power, threat perceptions, autonomy concerns, local security dilemmas, etc.), Chapter Two examines how they function in Russia’s foreign policy perspective. Accordingly, after defining some significant concepts making relevance to alignment theories such as great powers, unipolarity, and multipolarity, we will examine the meanings attributed to them by the Russian foreign policy discourse.

Chapter Two starts with a short review of the Cold War period to explore the impacts of historical experiences on Russia’s alignment strategies in the contemporary era. Then it turns to the evolution of Russian foreign policy during the 1990s and the Putin period. In this regard, this chapter exposes how Russia’s approach towards alignments and the international system have increasingly converged with our theoretical framework through the last couple of decades by underlining the role of international developments in around Russia. This study concentrates on system-level variables due to its theoretical orientation, although domestic factors also play significant roles in Russia’s alignment preferences. The methodological approach here is parsimonious likewise the neorealist research tradition which focuses on system-

¹⁰⁷ Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, p. 37.

level variables to put forward the constraints they impose on state behavior.¹⁰⁸ To explore Russia's perspective more clearly, the study touches upon domestic disputes between rival foreign policy schools such as Atlanticism and Eurasianism. However, the construction of Russia's official position is examined through an 'outside-in' analysis which underlines the impact of international developments like NATO expansion and regional conflicts in Russia's neighborhood.

Following such a comparative examination on realist alignment theories and Russian strategic perspective, Part Two applies our theoretical framework to different cases of alignments formed by Russia in the Eurasian region. Chapter One elaborates Russia's security cooperation with the post-Soviet states focusing primarily on the CSTO members. It explores how Russia provides security assistance to regional states through such an institutionalized alliance which in turn consolidates Russia's military dominance over the region. Then the chapter analyzes Russia's attitude towards other post-Soviet states which try to balance Russia's influence over the region by seeking alignments with outside powers. At the end, this chapter will put forward main characteristics of Russia's great power behavior in its near abroad with reference to our theoretical framework. Russia's alliance network and military power projections serve for its military dominant position or so-called 'hegemony' over the region. However, there are also some limits for Russia's predominance over regional politics and security, which will also be examined by this study.

Part Two, Chapter Two moves beyond the CIS region and examines Russia's security cooperation with the SCO members apart from the post-Soviet states. In this regard, Russia's approach towards security cooperation with China, India, and Pakistan are elaborated in comparison with Russia's alignment strategies towards the CIS. The implications of the SCO on Russia's influence and special interests in the post-Soviet region will also be explored. While elaborating the content and limits of Russia's security cooperation with China and India, the emphasis will be on autonomy concerns and local security dilemmas between these actors, which have historical origins examined in Part One. Russia's positive attitude towards the SCO enlargement into India and Pakistan will also be analyzed with regard to Russia-China and Russia-

¹⁰⁸ For the parsimony in the neorealist research tradition see Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, p. 99; and Steven Forde, "International Realism and the Science of Politics: Thucydides, Machiavelli, and Neorealism," **International Studies Quarterly**, Vol. 39, No. 2, 1995, p. 142.

India alignment relations. All of these analyses, in turn, will expose how Russia's alignment strategies contribute to multilateral and polycentric management of international security, which is associated with multipolarity in Russian discourse. Lastly, the chapter examines Russia's alignment with Iran, an observer state in the SCO with aspirations for full membership, considering its place in Russia's soft balancing strategy and power projections beyond the post-Soviet area.

In conclusion, we evaluate general characteristics of Russia's alignment behavior considering the applied analysis on different cases. We discuss how structural factors such as geography, regional distribution of power in the CIS and other parts of the world, and Russia's relative power vis-à-vis other major powers influence Russia's alignment strategies. In addition, we examine regional implications of Russia's alliance system and power projections within the CIS concerning its sphere of influence over the near abroad. The study ends with global implications of Russia's alignment strategies with regard to its impact on the transformation of great power relations in the international system.

This study mainly relies on secondary sources on Russia's foreign relations available in English. In addition, it makes references to official documents on Russian foreign and military policies, international treaties with commitments on security cooperation, and as well as public declarations by senior Russian officials. In order to explore the Russian perspective more clearly, the author often turns to academic sources written by Russian scholars (in English), especially in the Second Chapter of Part One focusing on the Russian perspective. Certainly, there are some shortcomings in this study. First of all, the whole research has been designed on a theoretical framework mainly developed in the United States by American realist scholars. In fact, those theories were developed also considering example cases of alignments formed by the Soviet Union and Russia. That is why they provide powerful insights into Russia's alignment behavior. However, to study these cases appealing to the Western academic sources has some serious limits. They generally focus on the phenomenon of 'the Russian threat' and how it could be dealt with, rather than Russia's strategic rationale and objectives in its alignment behavior.

In order to deal with this handicap, some part of the research for this doctoral dissertation has been conducted at Moscow State Institute of International Relations

(MGIMO) in Russia. During an eight-month period, the author joined academic activities such as seminars and conferences and performed interviews with Russian experts at MGIMO and some other institutions in Moscow.¹⁰⁹ The Interviews were conducted through open-ended questions that had been prepared before about significant issues covered by the study such as Russia's threat perceptions and its approach towards great power relations. However, those interviews were practiced on a semi-structured basis, which enabled the researcher to guide and re-direct the course of the interview by asking additional questions and expressing some comments. Therefore, it became possible to receive some remarks checking the validity of the study's assumptions and get a deeper knowledge about the Russian perspective and interpretation of international politics.

All scholarly suggestions, official documents, and declarations based on Russian sources reviewed through the positivist methodology to put forward the Russian perspective towards the international system and alignment relations. Yet, there are some limitations in this approach that is not based on critical reasoning on Russia's official foreign policy discourse.¹¹⁰ The information produced by Russian sources is analyzed and filtered through our theoretical framework to exclude mere political propaganda from the analysis. The study acknowledges Russia's threat perceptions and associates them with subsequent actions by the Kremlin when Russia behaves in accordance with assumptions by our theoretical framework. Of course, official representatives of the United States and NATO often affirm that they do not have aggressive intentions towards Russia and seek to ensure Eastern Europe's

¹⁰⁹ The list of interviews conducted in Moscow can be found at the end of the bibliography section.

¹¹⁰ Alternatively some scholars suggest that the Russian government fosters and manipulates the perception that Russia is surrounded by enemies to mobilize domestic support. This in turn affects Russian approach towards the neighboring states allied with Western powers like Georgia and Ukraine and the Kremlin utilizes conflicts with those states to divert public attention from domestic problems such as economic conditions and debates on democratic illegitimacy of the Russian government. Michael Aiken, "From Russia With No Love," *Diplomatic Courier*, June 14, 2014, <https://www.diplomaticcourier.com/from-russia-with-no-love/> (23.09.2018). See also Mikhail Troitskiy, "Russia and the West in the European Security Architecture: Clash of Interests or a Security Dilemma?," *OSCE Yearbook*, Hamburg: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2015, p. 70; and Mikhail Filippov, "Diversionary Role of the Georgia–Russia Conflict: International Constraints and Domestic Appeal," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 10, 2009. The author of this study acknowledges the argument that domestic concerns of the Russian government have an impact on its foreign policy and such an explanation can be considered as complementary to realist and geopolitical explanations. See *ibid.* p. 1826. Yet, the realist approach adopted by this study has some merits in its own right as it puts forward the role of system level factors and developments in the evolution of Russian foreign policy since 1990s. In this regard, the realist perspective may help to avoid an oversimplified explanation which attributes conflictual relations between the Western powers and Russia to the make-up of the current Russian government and domestic problems it faces.

stability and prosperity in partnership with Moscow.¹¹¹ However, as John Mearsheimer, one of the leading realists suggests, “*it is the Russians, not the West, who ultimately get to decide what counts as a threat to them.*”¹¹² In this regard, this study tries to decompose Russia’s threat perceptions with their implications on its political and security interests in its neighborhood, as one of the great powers which seeks to increase its security, power and influence in international politics. Hopefully, our analysis may contribute to academic efforts to comprehend Russia’s great power behavior in the Eurasian region by the international relations scholarship.



¹¹¹ For example see “NATO-Russia Relations: The Facts,” https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_111767.htm (23.09.2018).

¹¹² John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 93, 2014, p. 82.

PART I - THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND RUSSIAN STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE: A COMPARATIVE EXAMINATION

CHAPTER ONE - THEORIES OF ALIGNMENT: COMPETING PERSPECTIVES AND THEIR APPLICABILITY

*It is impossible to speak of international relations without referring to alliances.*¹¹³

I. The Main Concepts: Alliance and Alignment

This chapter aims to introduce main theoretical approaches improved by realist scholars to explain alignment formation and/or alignment behaviors of particular states. The following pages represent a theoretical framework that will guide the analysis of Russia's alignment strategies throughout the study. Besides examining significant propositions of the theories, this chapter also includes a discussion about the applicability of those perspectives to our case. Before moving to theories of alignment, this first section reviews different definitions of alliance and alignment in the literature. Then we represent an alignment typology which makes relevance to Russia's security cooperation with different state actors in Eurasia including both regional post-Soviet states and major powers in Asia.

A. Definitions and Categorization of Alignments

For many international relations scholars, the term alliance is among the most significant concepts in International Relations literature. Realist theoretical studies on alliances are in common in focusing on the dimension of security cooperation in international politics.¹¹⁴ However, there exists no unifying definition of the concept of

¹¹³ George Liska, **Nations in Alliances: The Limits of Interdependence**, p. 3.

¹¹⁴ In the traditional realist perspective, security is defined as one state's position vis-à-vis others. This position is determined by a state's relative capabilities; an increase in capabilities means an increased level of security and vice versa. Birthe Hansen, **Unipolarity and the Middle East**, Richmond: Curzon Press, 2000, p. 55. Capabilities here are defined as "size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence." Kenneth N.

alliance. As scholars employ different definitions of the main concept, cases covered by their studies become varied. On the one hand, there are scholars whose definitions refer to written military commitments and thus limit alliances to formal treaties. For example, Glenn Snyder in his landmark study on *Alliance Politics* defines alliance as “*formal associations of states for use (or nonuse) of military force in specified circumstances, against states outside their own membership.*”¹¹⁵ Robert Osgood offers another definition that “*a formal agreement that pledges states to co-operate in using their military resources against a specific state or states and usually obligates one or more of the signatories to use force, or to consider (unilaterally, or in consultation with allies) the use of force, in specified circumstances.*”¹¹⁶

Another similar and detailed definition by Paul Schroeder is that:

*“[A]n alliance is a treaty binding two or more independent states to come each other’s aid with armed force under circumstances specified in the casus foederis article of the treaty. Whether offensive and defensive, limited or unlimited, equal or unequal, bilateral or multilateral, alliances must involve some measure of commitment to use of force to achieve a common goal.”*¹¹⁷

There are some notable commonalities in the narrow definitions quoted above. First, they all emphasize that there needs to be a formal commitment in alliances. Second, this commitment must include the use of military force. Lastly, the object of the security cooperation is explicitly directed against states outside of the alliance.

Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, New York: McGraw-Hill Inc, 1979, p. 131. In the Waltzian neorealist perspective, alignments are viewed as a tool for states to accumulate their capabilities against a rising power which may threaten their security and survival considering the anarchical nature of international politics. On the other side, many scholars define security with reference to threats. To put it simply, traditional security studies defines the concept as “*the absence or containment of a threat.*” Marc Williams, “International Political Economy and Global Environmental Change,” Marc Imber and John Vogler (eds.), **Environment and International Relations: Theories and Processes**, London: Routledge, 2006, p. 47. Even though foundational studies on the alignment theories do not include their operational definitions for security, balance of threat, omnibalancing and soft balancing perspectives all seem to adhere the definition of security with reference to threats. Balance of threat focuses on interstate cooperation against external threats to state security, while omnibalancing emphasizes domestic-level threats to political and individual survival of Third World leaders. See Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, and Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, Baltimore, John Hopkins University Press, 1991. Lastly, soft balancing theory makes reference to the indirect threats by the unipolar leader i.e. the US, to non-existential security of second ranked powers with potential to harm their capacity of autonomous foreign policy making and their regional security interests. See Robert A Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” pp. 7-45.

¹¹⁵ Glenn H. Snyder, **Alliance Politics**, p. 4.

¹¹⁶ Robert E. Osgood, **Alliances in American Foreign Policy**, Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins Press, 1968, p.17.

¹¹⁷ Paul W. Schroeder, **Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004, p. 195.

On the other hand, there are some other scholars who oppose this kind of a narrow definition. Stephen Walt critically approaches to the definition of alliance with reference to formal agreements. According to Walt, many contemporary states are unwilling to sign formal security treaties with their allies. If the analysis is limited to formal alliances, that would exclude many important cases.¹¹⁸ To avoid such defections, Stephen Walt offers a broader definition that takes alliance as “*a formal and informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more sovereign states.*”¹¹⁹ Walt’s definition includes both “*formal alliances where the commitment is enshrined in a written treaty and informal ad hoc agreements based either on tacit understandings or some tangible form of commitment, such as verbal assurances, or joint military exercises.*”¹²⁰ Besides, Walt uses the terms alliance and alignment interchangeably in his study on balance of threat theory.¹²¹ The wide definition of alliance is also accepted by the scholars who criticize Walt’s theory and suggest their alternative approaches.¹²² More recently Patricia Weitsman has similarly described alliances as “*bilateral or multilateral agreements to provide some element of security to the signatories.*”¹²³

As we turn to our case, however, it may be methodologically incorrect to embrace a broad definition of alliance and to use the term alliance and alignment interchangeably in order to identify all forms of rising security cooperation between Russia and other regional actors in Eurasia. On the one hand, the Russian Federation is a party of a formal military defense treaty i.e. CSTO together with a group of post-Soviet states. This organization is apparently a Cold-War-style permanent defense pact. On the other hand, Russia has been developing some loose form of multilateral arrangements for security cooperation with China and some other Asian powers. These arrangements also include “*some tangible form of commitment, such as verbal assurances, or joint military exercises,*” and “*provide some element of security to the*

¹¹⁸ Walt gives a significant example that there has been never a formal treaty between the US and Israel. However, no one could question the level of commitment between these states. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 12.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

¹²⁰ Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure and Collapse”, **Survival**, Vol: 39, No: 1, 1997, p. 157.

¹²¹ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 12

¹²² See Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, “Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-73,” **International Organization**, Vol. 45, No. 3, 1991 p. 370; and Steven R. David “Explaining Third World Alignment,” p. 234.

¹²³ Patricia A. Weitsman, **Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, p. 27.

signatories.” However, putting those arrangements into the same category with the CSTO and designating them all as an alliance/alignment might be criticized for mixing apples and oranges.

Fortunately, there are some other scholars who make a distinction between the terms alliance and alignment, whose approach could contribute us to comprehend the niceties in the Russian case. After defining alliance with reference to formal treaties, Glenn Snyder notes that:

*“Alliances, however, are only the formal subset of a broader and more basic phenomenon, that of ‘alignment.’ Alignment amounts to a set of mutual expectations between two or more states that they will have each other’s support in disputes or wars with particular other states (...) Formal alliances strengthen existing alignments or perhaps create new ones.”*¹²⁴

Emphasizing ‘disputes’ and ‘wars’ together, Snyder’s definition indicates the term alignment refers to cooperation between states in the realm of security against adversaries, but in an informal way. George Liska also shares this view that the concept of alignment subsumes alliances, as he suggests that: *“Alliances merely formalize alignments based on interests or coercion.”*¹²⁵

In addition to that, Michael Don Ward takes a step further towards a broader definition including economic and cultural parameters. He suggests alignment as: *“a more extensive concept than alliance since it does not focus solely on the military dimension of international politics. Degrees of alignment in political, economic, military and cultural spheres present a multifaceted sculpture of national and supranational postures.”*¹²⁶ This definition, however, remains too broad regarding the context of this study analyzing how Russia’s alignment strategies pursue its security interests vis-à-vis other powers involved in Eurasian international politics. Therefore, the focus of this study will be over military and political alignments with regard to security issues that service Russia’s specific national interest.

¹²⁴ Glenn H. Snyder, “Alliance Theory: A Neorealist First Cut,” **Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 44, No. 1, 1990, p. 85.

¹²⁵ George Liska, **op.cit.**, p. 3.

¹²⁶ Michael Don Ward, **Research Gaps in Alliance Dynamics**, Denver: Graduate School of International Studies, University of Denver, 1982, p. 7.

James MacDougall, in his study on post-Soviet strategic alignment in the South Caucasus, turns to the Russian language and indicates the Russian concepts overlapping the terms alliance and alignment. He suggests that:

*“In Russian, alliance may be variously understood through terms such as soyuz (alliance/union), blok (bloc), and dogovor (treaty). However, alignment, denoting a less formal cooperation than use of the term alliance would suggest, is understood more often in Russian through the term orientatsiya (orientation) and oftentimes by describing the two nations involved as strategic partners or being involved in a strategic partnership. By way of example, one noted Russian analyst of the Caucasus, describing what he perceived as pro-Western policies in Azerbaijan and Georgia and pro-Russian policies in Armenia, explained these policies could be understood under the rubric of “orientation politics.””*¹²⁷

These suggestions demonstrate that Russian term *orientatsiya* has a similar meaning to that of the concept of alignment. Thus the Russian language also seems to make a distinction between the phenomenon of alignment (*orientatsiya*) and alliance. According to MacDougall, Armenia’s policies towards Russia can be identified with this term even though two states maintain also a formal alliance in the framework of the CSTO.¹²⁸ In this respect, the Russian term *orientatsiya* is used as a broader concept subsuming formal alliance treaties. It is another reason why this study embraces the narrow definition of alliance and takes this term as a subset of the concept of alignment.

Besides examining the definitions, we also need to categorize alignments to enforce the conceptual and theoretical background of our study. There are some studies by prominent IR scholars classifying the different forms of alliances and putting forward an alliance typology. As a part of the Correlates of War (COW) project, Melvin Small and David Singer developed a formal alliances data set covering the years between 1815-1939.¹²⁹ Then the data set was extended to 2012 by the other scholars involved in the project as they have gone on to review international treaties

¹²⁷ The Author gives the example in the last sentence quoting remarks by Alexander Iskandarian, Director of the Center for Caucasian Studies at an international conference. James C. MacDougall, **Post-Soviet Strategic Alignment: The Weight of History in the South Caucasus**, p. 32.

¹²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹²⁹ See J. David Singer and Melvin Small, “Formal Alliances, 1815-1939: A Quantitative Description,” **Journal of Peace Research**, Vol. 3, No. 1, 1966, pp. 1-32; and Melvin Small and David Singer, “Formal Alliances, 1816-1965: An Extension of the Basic Data,” **Journal of Peace Research**, Vol. 6, No. 3, 1969, pp. 257-282.

that include obligations for security cooperation.¹³⁰ The COW project defines three types of alliances regarding distinct treaty obligations: Defense pacts, neutrality/non-aggression pacts, and ententes.¹³¹ Another group of scholars led by Brett Ashley Leeds from Rice University has developed the Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions Project (ATOP) that includes data more useful for qualitative researches. The ATOP database contains detailed information about international treaties and formal declarations by individual states adopted between 1815-2003 and including some sort of obligation on security cooperation.¹³² The ATOP expands the typology and offers five categories for what they call as alliance: Defense pact, offense pact, neutrality pact, nonaggression pact, and consultation pact.

However, both of these projects embrace a very broad definition of the term alliance. In addition to that, they put all historical forms of ‘alignment’ including no formal military commitment into the category of ‘alliance’ rather than vice versa.¹³³ The ATOP codifies an operational definition of alliance that is:

*“[A]lliances are written agreements, signed by official representatives of at least two independent states, that include promises to aid a partner in the event of military conflict, to remain neutral in the event of conflict, to refrain from military conflict with one another, or to consult/cooperate in the event of international crises that create a potential for military conflict”*¹³⁴

As seen above the ATOP database designates the treaties that renounce the use of military force between the parties as an alliance, in line with Small and Singer’s approach. Yet, there is a difference that the COW project who take neutrality/non-aggression pacts under the same category.¹³⁵ In the contemporary world where war between developed states has disappeared, many states adopt formal declarations and agreements as confidence-building measures including the principle of eliminating the possibility of the use of force against each other. Even in the Cold War, states from

¹³⁰ Correlates of War Project, <http://www.correlatesofwar.org/data-sets/formal-alliances2004> (04.04.2016).

¹³¹ See Douglas M. Gibler and Meredith R. Sarkees, “Measuring Alliances: The Correlates of War Formal Interstate Alliance Dataset, 1816–2000,” *Journal of Peace Research*, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2004, p. 215.

¹³² See “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions,” <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.04.2016) and Brett A. Leeds, “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions (ATOP) Codebook,” Version 3.0, July 12, 2005, p. 5. Retrieved from: <http://atop.rice.edu/download/ATOPcdbk.pdf> (05.04.2017).

¹³³ Thomas S. Wilkins, “‘Alignment’, not ‘Alliance’ – the Shifting Paradigm of International Security Cooperation: toward a Conceptual Taxonomy of Alignment,” p. 57.

¹³⁴ Leeds, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

¹³⁵ See Gibler and Sarkees, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

opposite blocs signed this kind of international accords together like the Helsinki Final Act. If we define this international agreement that promotes the principle of non-aggression as an alliance as the databases do, we would adopt a view of international politics where we can find any state as aligned with any other.¹³⁶ In such a world the term alliance may lose its meaning. Neutrality pacts as historically important agreements are usually more specific than non-aggression pacts. While the latter outlaws use of force between its members, in general, the former also codifies obligation to remain neutral if any party is attacked.¹³⁷ As Small and Singer suggest, in the nineteenth century when interstate wars are prevalent, neutrality pacts generally included a more serious commitment than an entente. However, in the twentieth century, ententes which obligate its members to consult with each other in case of a military crisis that necessitates the use of force began to imply a more serious commitment than neutrality pacts.¹³⁸ This argument seems to be valid today, as the consultation commitment implies much more willingness for security cooperation in the international politics, where war among developed states has disappeared, but crises of international security still matter. Therefore this study excludes both non-aggression pacts and neutrality pacts from the analysis, which merely renounce the use of force between the parties.

However, other forms of agreements are much more relevant to our case and need to be described respectively in order to overcome the problem of categorization. First of all defense pacts are central to our analysis, considering the alliance between Russian and members of the CST/CSTO. In defense pacts, the signatories obligate *“themselves to intervene militarily on behalf of one another if either were attacked.”*¹³⁹ Article 4 of the CST codifies the obligation for all the parties to provide necessary assistance including military one, in case of an act of aggression to any member

¹³⁶ In fact, the scholars in the ATOP Project see the possibility that to define non-aggression pact as an alliance may result in erroneous conclusions. They suggests that the *“decision to include nonaggression pacts was made to ensure compatibility between the ATOP dataset and the dataset on military alliances provided by the Correlates of War Project (...) Because the COW Project explicitly includes nonaggression pacts in their definition of alliances (...) we include them in the ATOP dataset as well. Because we believe that agreements that promise nonaggression but no active cooperation in the face of conflict with third parties are not clearly compatible with our conceptual definition, we provide users the choice of including or not including nonaggression pacts as they see fit.”* Leeds, *op.cit.*, p. 5.

¹³⁷ Gibler and Sarkees, *op.cit.*, p. 215.

¹³⁸ Small and Singer, “Formal Alliances, 1816-1965,” p. 280, endnote 10.

¹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

state.¹⁴⁰ This commitment provides the precondition to establish an alliance regarding narrow definitions by Snyder, Osgood, and Schroeder.¹⁴¹ As Small and Singer argue, regarding the obligations undertaken a defense pact imposes greater commitments than all of the other forms of security cooperation in the typology concerned.¹⁴²

Offense pacts (or aggression pacts), on the other hand, are agreements that include commitments for “*active military support under conditions not directly in response to an attack on an ally’s sovereignty or territorial integrity.*”¹⁴³ Unlike defense pacts that are generally based on long term common interests and permanent institutions, coalitions are short time alliances established for a specific objective.¹⁴⁴ Alliances formed during war are more associated with aggression pacts. On the other side, war-time alliances are often called as coalitions, a concept that is more widely used in the contemporary world. After the Cold War, coalition warfare became again a current issue in international security along with the US-led military interventions e.g. Kosovo and Iraq.¹⁴⁵ However, since Russia keeps itself away from those initiatives and does not have a tradition of coalition warfare with support of allied states after the Cold War this category seems not to be properly relevant to our case.

Ententes include a lesser commitment that calls its members to consult and to coordinate their actions in the event of international crises including military aggression. Since this commitment falls short of active military assistance ententes are excluded by the narrow definition of alliance. Glenn Snyder makes a clear distinction between ententes and alliances.¹⁴⁶ According to him an entente symbolize reduction of the amount of conflict between the parties, so it tacitly raises the expectations of mutual support and further cooperation. Yet, in ententes reducing level of conflict is not enough to transform the members’ basic relationship into an alliance. Robert Kann in his classical study comparing *Alliances versus Ententes*, emphasizes members of an entente recognize “*the fact that agreements between them will make sense only if they*

¹⁴⁰ “Basic Facts,” Official Website of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, http://www.odkb.gov.ru/start/index_aengl.htm (28.11.2016).

¹⁴¹ Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, p. 4; Osgood, *op.cit.*, p. 17; Schroeder, *op.cit.*, p. 195.

¹⁴² Small and Singer, “Formal Alliances, 1816-1965,” p. 263.

¹⁴³ Leeds, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

¹⁴⁴ Wilkins, *op.cit.*, p. 64.

¹⁴⁵ See Patricia A. Weitsman, “Wartime Alliances versus Coalition Warfare,” *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, 2010, pp. 29-53.

¹⁴⁶ Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, pp. 11-12.

serve their common interest."¹⁴⁷ He identifies ententes as more flexible associations between states than alliances. Secrecy, ideological issues, and most importantly formally defensive character are not well delineated as being in alliance treaties.¹⁴⁸

The ATOP database prefers to use the concept of consultation pact instead of entente to describe formal treaties and official declarations that include obligations for consultation among the members.¹⁴⁹ The ATOP codes an agreement as a consultation pact only if the consultation obligation is (i) specific to militarized crises, and (ii) implies a goal of policy coordination. The scholars do not pay attention to a general promise to consult on various issues affecting interests of signatories. The agreement must specify that the signatories will consult upon the security issues regarding the goal of policy coordination.¹⁵⁰ Considering these conditions the ATOP database indicates that Russia signed treaties that resulted in forming consultation pacts with two significant actors within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization i.e. India (on January 28, 1993) and China (on July 16, 2001).¹⁵¹ On the other side, the 2006 Shanghai Summit declared that "*in case of emergencies that threaten regional peace, stability and security, SCO member states will have immediate consultation on effectively responding to the emergency to fully protect the interests of the SCO and the member states.*"¹⁵² This formal announcement enables us to classify also the SCO itself within the category of consultation pact.

¹⁴⁷ Kann gives two historical examples: Franco-British Entente Cordiale of 1904 and Franco-British Russian Triple Entente of 1907. See Robert A. Kann, "Alliances versus Ententes," **World Politics**, Vol. 28, No. 4, 1976, p. 612.

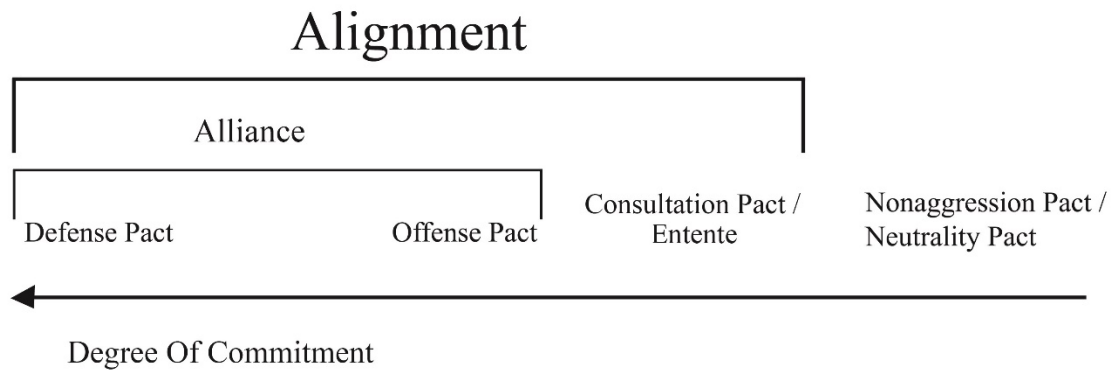
¹⁴⁸ Sangit Sarita Dwivedi, "Alliances in International Relations Theory," **International Journal of Social Science & Interdisciplinary Research**, Vol.1, No. 8, 2012, p. 225.

¹⁴⁹ Brett A. Leeds et al., "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions, 1815-1944," **International Interactions**, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2002, p. 250, endnote 8.

¹⁵⁰ Leeds, *op.cit.*, p. 21.

¹⁵¹ "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions," <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.04.2017).

¹⁵² See "Full Text of the Declaration on 5th Anniversary of the SCO," <http://www.china.org.cn/english/features/meeting/171589.htm> (15.11.2016).

Figure 2 - The typology of alignment (with formal obligations) ¹⁵³

Combining the categories offered by the COW and the ATOP projects, we can construct an alignment typology shown in figure 2. Note that our typology defines alliance narrowly separating it from the broader term of alignment and excludes nonaggression/neutrality pacts. The degree of commitment grows when moving towards the left side of the typology. However, those are alignment forms based on formal treaty obligations. States can develop alignments undertaking strong commitments for their allies' security even they are not codified in a formal treaty. Therefore the informal dimension of interstate alignments should not be discarded in the studies on alignment.¹⁵⁴

B. Beyond the Typology: Asymmetrical and Symmetrical Alliances

Matching the different cases of Russian alignment to the relevant categories of the typology of alignment exposes that the states with that Moscow has signed formal alliances are regional small states in the Post-Soviet geography. On the other side, it has avoided entering an alliance together with more powerful Asian states and reinforced security cooperation with them through more flexible arrangements. To elaborate Russian alignment behavior more comprehensively, thus one should go beyond the alignment typology and define two other significant concepts. These are asymmetrical alliances established between major powers and small states and

¹⁵³ Adapted from Kajsa Ji Noe Oest, "The End of Alliance Theory?," p. 18.

¹⁵⁴ For example the US has much stronger ties of bilateral security cooperation with Israel in comparison to its relations with some other NATO member allies. Russia also carried its alignment e.g. with Assad's Syria to the level of active military assistance including the use of force in the absence of a bilateral defense pact.

symmetrical alliances which are formed among powers with approximate national capabilities.

As examined in the next section, as a foundational approach in the neorealism, balance of power theory suggests that states form alliances against powerful states to eliminate imbalances in power. However, regarding national capabilities of small post-Soviet states, Russia's alliance with the members of CSTO has only a marginal effect in the global balance of power with huge US preponderance. Thus balance of power logic could not point to the real strategic reasons behind such an asymmetrical alliance.

Paul Schroeder's study on the history of alliances offers an explanation for the functions of this kind of asymmetrical alliances.¹⁵⁵ Schroeder's study -which applies a narrow definition of alliance- focuses on significant historical alliances formed between 1815 and 1945. He observes that even though military cooperation against powerful opponents was indicated in *casus foederis* article of alliance treaties, some alliances had primary objects or aims which are quite distinct from those specified in the treaty.¹⁵⁶ All alliances in some measure functioned as pacts of restraint that restrained and controlled the actions of the members of alliance themselves.¹⁵⁷ Furthermore, some states formed alliances with no desire for gain more capability against a powerful threat. In certain cases, the formation of alliance, in fact, served to weaken a power's military position rather than strengthen it. In this respect, the desire to exercise control over an ally's policy was the main reason for a state to enter the alliance. Therefore Schroeder concludes that even though alliances are technically defined as mutual security pacts with military obligations, they "*functionally serve many diverse purposes and are best considered as general tools of management and control in international affairs.*"¹⁵⁸

¹⁵⁵ See Schroeder, *op.cit.*, p. 195-222.

¹⁵⁶ The most prominent alliances in this sense were the Holy Alliance between Russia, Prussia and Austria and the Quadruple Alliance (including those three states and Britain) founded in 1815 after the Napoleonic Wars. Ensuring the mutual security against the French aggression was one of the main purposes of those alliances. Yet, according to Schroeder, there were some other functions of these alliances which was no less important, i.e. mutually restraining the members' unilateral action and the allied management of the international system against the forces of liberalism and revolution. *Ibid.*, p. 199.

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-199.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.* p. 221.

If alliances are general tools of management and control in international politics, then which factors may make Russia avoid to sign alliance treaties with some other powerful actors in the Asian Continent? Michael Altfeld's study on *The Decision to Ally*, offers an explanation for this question.¹⁵⁹ According to Altfeld, military alliances bring increased security for its members but in exchange for decreased autonomy in their foreign policy. He suggests that "*potential alliances which fail to increase both partners' security levels almost never form*", as the states will not find a convincing reason for sacrificing from their autonomy.¹⁶⁰ James Morrow criticizes and modifies Altfeld's argument, in his study on *Alliances and Asymmetry*.¹⁶¹ Morrow suggests that for major powers alliances may either increase security or autonomy. While the former is valid for symmetrical alliances they form with other major powers, the latter is observed in most asymmetrical alliances with small regional states.

James Morrow employs the narrow definition of alliance and distinguishes alliances from alignments, and expels the latter from the analysis since they include no formal commitment.¹⁶² Autonomy which is a central concept in his perspective is defined simply as external self-assertion. In other words, autonomy means a state's ability to determine its own policies. The more a state's ideal point (that reflects national preferences over significant international issues) is close to its actual position (that specifies national strategies to achieve those preferences), the greater autonomy the state does have.¹⁶³ Each time a state abandons actions to reach its ideal point and make concessions in its position to gain support for its security from its allies, the distance between its ideal point and its position grows thus its autonomy decreases. Morrow assumes that all nations possess high levels of autonomy before forming an alliance with other states, but they have different levels of security that vary according to their national capabilities.

Minor powers have low levels of security but high levels of autonomy. To increase their security against immediate threats, they try to form alliances at the cost of some autonomy. However, the situation is different for major powers. Because they

¹⁵⁹ See Michael F. Altfeld, "The Decision to Ally: A Theory and Test," **Western Political Quarterly**, No. 37, 1984, pp. 523-544.

¹⁶⁰ **Ibid.**, p. 537-548.

¹⁶¹ Morrow, **op.cit.**

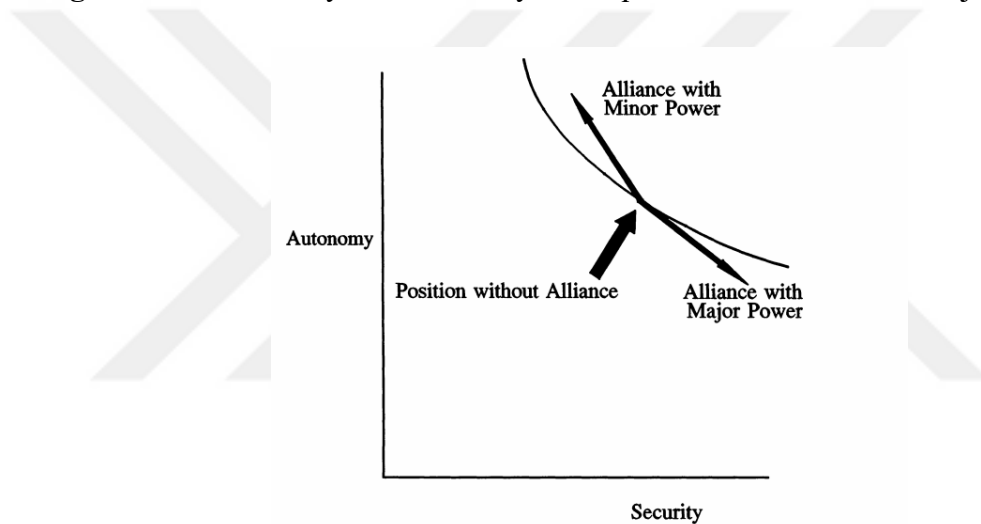
¹⁶² **Ibid.** p. 906.

¹⁶³ **Ibid.** p. 907.

have both high level of autonomy and security. Therefore for major powers, there is no overriding interest to raise either autonomy or security. Morrow concludes that:¹⁶⁴

“Consider what types of alliances are attractive in this situation. A major power can offer a potential ally a large increase in its security, but it demands a high price in autonomy to form an alliance. (...) Alternatively, it could form an alliance with a minor power that reduces its security but raises its autonomy through concessions made by the minor power to secure the alliance. These concessions could include military bases that provide strategic location for the projection of power or agreements that allow the major power to intervene in the minor power's domestic politics in the future.”

Figure 3 - The security and autonomy consequences of alliances for major powers¹⁶⁵



The consequences of different types of alliances for a major power are shown in figure 3. An asymmetrical alliance with minor powers increases the autonomy of a major power through such concessions made by its small state ally. Yet, the security of that major power *“decreases both because its new position may provoke new challenges from other nations and because the nation will take actions to defend its ally's security interests that it would not defend without the alliance.”*¹⁶⁶ Morrow defines alliances between major and minor powers as asymmetric, as the parties expect different benefits from the alliance: autonomy vs. security. In addition, he suggests that asymmetries in capabilities are usually found in asymmetric alliances. Morrow contends that such alliances are easy to form because at the end both sides receive

¹⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 913-914.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 915.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 910.

some benefit in different ways. However, opportunities to form symmetric alliances among major powers are rare because they require a great harmony of interest. Symmetric alliances are unlikely to be formed unless such a harmony appears among major powers and their security seriously threatened. One of the central claims of Morrow's study is that asymmetric alliances are more common and last longer than symmetric alliances. His quantitative study to test this argument produces confirming results as some previous studies on asymmetric alliances do.¹⁶⁷

Lastly but not less important, regarding the alliances formed up to the date of the study, Morrow gives the Warsaw Pact as an example of asymmetric alliance which provided Moscow with control over domestic and foreign policies of the Eastern European member states.¹⁶⁸ Today, the alliance between Russia and the small states in the CSTO seems to have some similar functions regarding Moscow's strategic interests.¹⁶⁹ Furthermore, Russia's military engagement towards the region through alliances deters outside powers to intervene in regional conflicts and thus further increases freedom of action against its strategic rivals. As a result, Moscow can maintain its ideal national position effectively over critical issues such as the NATO enlargement and regional conflicts in the post-Soviet space, while it generally refuses to make concessions.

After defining our central theoretical concepts alliance and alignment, putting forward an alignment typology and examining differences between asymmetrical and symmetrical alliances, now we can turn to theories of alignment. The following sections introduce realist theories on alignment formation in order to build a theoretical framework to examine Russia's alignment strategies.

¹⁶⁷ Morrow suggests that "*existing research provides some results supporting these hypotheses. Midlarsky finds that alliances with great differences in capabilities last longer than those with small differences. Altfeld found that symmetric alliances among major powers were formed to gain security for all parties.*" *Ibid.* p. 906. The details of sources: Manus I. Midlarsky, *The Onset of World War*, Boston: Unwin Hyman, 1988 and Altfeld, *op.cit.*

¹⁶⁸ Morrow, *op.cit.*, p. 905, fn. 1. Morrow also states that US used the network of asymmetric alliances founded after the World War II in its strategy to extend its international influence. Washington provided its allies with security from their neighbors in exchange for some control over the allies' policies and utilizing their strategic locations, which advanced its interests further. *Ibid.* p. 930.

¹⁶⁹ For an elaborate analysis sharing this argument see Alexander Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," pp. 83-102.

II. Balance of Power Theory: Kenneth Waltz and his Critics

A. International Structure, Anarchy, and Balancing Behavior: The Neorealist View

Balance of power is a key concept in international relations that has given birth to significant assumptions and theories on international affairs such as war, peace, international security, foreign policy-making as well as alignment formation. It has been accepted as reality for political scientists, and its wide-spread usage through history inevitably exposed a lot of definitions for the concept.¹⁷⁰ The different uses of this concept causes confusion and makes it very difficult to examine alignment formation with reference to balance of power. However, when we narrow the scope to realist and neo-realist schools in which balance of power theory has been improved and enriched, it is possible to comprehend its main assumptions on alignment formation.

Classical realists are in common to make references to balance of power concept very often in their attempts to explain international politics. At the center of those explanations, there is human nature while they combine it with arguments on international anarchy.¹⁷¹ In the classical realist perspective, anarchy also plays a role as it fails to provide constraints in the form of a higher authority which would “*restrict man's baser desires, which are reflected in state behavior, to dominate others.*”¹⁷² Based on these assumptions, Hans Morgenthau builds a classical version balance of power theory in his book entitled *Politics among Nations*.¹⁷³ According to Morgenthau objective laws rooted in human nature induce statesmen to engage in a continuous struggle with others to expand their own power. “*The aspiration for power on the part of several nations each trying either to maintain or overthrow the status quo, leads of necessity to a configuration that is called the balance of power and to policies that aim*

¹⁷⁰ Michael Sheehan quotes some classical definitions that date back to the history from 18th Century to 1977. The concept was defined in several meanings including an equal distribution of power, actions for maintaining power equilibrium between neighboring states, an international arrangement that denies domination by a particular state, individual and jointly efforts by states against powerful and threatening actors. See Michael Sheehan, **Balance of Power: History and Theory**, New York: Routledge, 1996, pp. 2-3.

¹⁷¹ See Jack Donnelly, "Realism," p. 31; and Steven Forde, "Classical Realism," Terry Nardin and David R. Mapel (ed.), **Traditions of International Ethics**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992, p. 64.

¹⁷² Keith I Shimko, "Realism, Neorealism, and American Liberalism," p. 293.

¹⁷³ See Hans J. Morgenthau, **Politics among Nations: The Struggle for Power and Peace**, pp. 125-166.

at preserving it.”¹⁷⁴ There are four different methods of balance of power which diminish the weight of the heavier scale or increase the weight of the lighter one.¹⁷⁵ First ‘divide and rule’ strategy covers the actions aiming at dividing rival nations and alignments between them. Secondly ‘territorial compensations’ have been often used to maintain the balance between European states during the 18th and 19th Centuries. Thirdly, ‘armaments’ or arms races are typical instruments to keep the balance of power between states. However, “*the historically most important manifestation of the balance of power ... is to be found, not in the equilibrium of two isolated nations, but in the relations between one nation or alliance and another alliance.*”¹⁷⁶ In this respect, ‘alliances’ and alignments are identified as useful means for defending independence of states against their rivals with imperialistic goals or a particular nation which have designs for world domination.¹⁷⁷

As the founder of neorealism, Kenneth Waltz modified classical balance of power theory into a more structural version, which influenced all discussions on realist alignment theory thereafter. Waltz does not attribute the emergence of balances of power to motives and intentions of states or policies they followed with the aim at restoring the equilibrium: “*Balances of power tend to form whether some or all states consciously aim to establish and maintain a balance, or whether some or all states aim for universal domination.*”¹⁷⁸ In this respect, Waltz recognizes the central role of international anarchy which compels states to behave in certain ways if they are to survive. Here anarchy does not refer to endless wars, conflicts, and chaos at the international system level. It is actually defined with reference to “*the absence of government*” and “*the absence of a central monopoly of legitimate force.*”¹⁷⁹ In order to achieve their objectives and maintain their security, states in a condition of anarchy “*must rely on the means they can generate and the arrangements they can make for themselves. Self-help is necessarily the principle of action in an anarchic order.*”¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 125.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 134-142.

¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 137-142.

¹⁷⁸ Kenneth N Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 119.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 102; Kenneth N Waltz, "The Origins of War in Neorealist Theory," *The Journal of Interdisciplinary History*, Vol. 18, No. 4, 1988, p. 618.

¹⁸⁰ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 111.

In such a self-help system, states worry about their survival against possible predatory actions by powerful actors. This danger conditions their behavior to balance. According to Waltz, balancing behavior falls into two categories: internal and external balancing. Internal actions cover one state's actions to increase its own national economic and military power. On the other hand, external actions are about alignment strategies.¹⁸¹ When inequalities in the distribution of power cannot be removed only by internal acts, the best option to create the system equilibrium is to use fluid alignments. Once balance of power is re-established, it helps to maintain international peace and stability.¹⁸²

In this respect, Waltz defines alliances and alignments as significant components of international security, suggesting that “*in quest for security alliances may have to be made.*”¹⁸³ Yet, Waltz does not refer to formal treaties including military assistance obligation as a precondition of alliance, thus he adheres to the wide definition of the phenomenon.¹⁸⁴ While elaborating balance of power politics, Waltz uses the concepts of alliance and alignment interchangeably.¹⁸⁵ On the other side, Waltz takes power not as a relational concept (i.e. ability to control other's behavior) but considers national capabilities states possess.¹⁸⁶ For him, a state's power depends on how it scores “*on all of the following items: size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capability, military strength, political stability and competence.*”¹⁸⁷

¹⁸¹ Waltz states that in strategic game of alignment the aim is to strengthen one's own alignment and/or weaken and defect an opposing one. *Ibid.*, p. 118.

¹⁸² Michael Sheean, *Balance of Power: History and Theory*, pp. 55-56.

¹⁸³ Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 166.

¹⁸⁴ Kajsa Ji Noe Oest, “The End of Alliance Theory?”; and Kenneth N. Waltz, “The Emerging Structure of International Politics,” *International Security*, Vol. 18, No. 2, 1993, pp. 74-46.

¹⁸⁵ Although Waltz does not explicitly declare, one can see that he uses the terms interchangeably by reviewing *The Theory of International Politics*. For example, Waltz suggests that in a multipolar system “*flexibility of alliances keeps relations of friendship and enmity fluid and makes everyone's estimate of the present and future relation of forces uncertain.*” In the same paragraph he goes on stating that “*students of international politics have thought that the uncertainty that results from flexibility of alignment generates a healthy caution in everyone's foreign policy.*” Sometimes Waltz uses the term bloc in a similar meaning, yet regarding a larger cohesive grouping including multiple alignments between states. See Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 167-168.

¹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 131. In this respect, neorealist balance of power theory deals with capabilities also at the system level: “*Power is estimated by comparing the capabilities of a number of units. Although capabilities are attributes of units, the distribution of capabilities ... is not a unit attribute, but rather a system-wide concept.*” Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, p. 98.

While defining alignment strategies, Waltz uses two different terms i.e. balancing and bandwagoning.¹⁸⁸ Balancing occurs when weaker states join an alignment together against powerful states or coalitions. Conversely, bandwagoning refers to grouping around a more powerful state and joining the stronger alignment. Waltz's main assumption in his version of balance of power theory is that: "*Secondary states if they are free to choose, flock to weaker side, for it is the stronger side that threatens them. On the weaker side they are both more appreciated and safer.*"¹⁸⁹ Even though joining the stronger side would increase one's own power more, Waltz suggests, the security, not the power is the highest end in anarchic structure. For that reason, the system induces balancing behavior.

Although anarchy plays the central role in Waltz's theory, as the ordering principle of the system, it is not the only factor that defining characteristics of the international structure. According to Waltz, the structure of an international system is also defined by the distribution of capabilities across units. The structure changes with changes in the distribution of power, which leads to different "*expectations about how the units of the system will behave and about the outcomes their interactions will produce.*"¹⁹⁰ An international system may be multipolar, bipolar or unipolar regarding the distribution of capabilities among the most consequential actors. By definition, polarity depends on the number of powers within the international system, whose relative capabilities clearly overshadow the others.¹⁹¹ However, the only factor considered here is the distribution of capabilities in the system, rather than relations of political influence or the ability of leading powers to solve problems with respect to their interests.¹⁹²

According to Waltz, polarity of a given international system have significant implications on balancing behavior by great powers. This, in turn, affects the stability

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 126-127.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 97; see also p. 101.

¹⁹¹ See Kenneth N Waltz, "The Stability of a Bipolar World," *Daedalus*, Vol. 93, No. 3, 1964, p. 887; and Waltz, *Theory of International Politics*, pp. 161-163.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130. Accordingly, it is not the patterns of alignment that define the polarity but the distribution of power among the members of the international system. "*An international-political system in which three or more great powers have split into two alliances remains a multipolar system - structurally distinct from a bipolar system, a system in which no third power is able to challenge the top two.*" *Ibid.*, 98. "*The world was never bipolar because two blocs opposed each other, but because of the preeminence of bloc leaders.*" *Ibid.*, p. 130.

and durability of the system. Waltz defines bipolarity as the most stable system, where two principal powers balance each other “*by "internal" instead of "external" means, relying on their own capabilities rather than on the capabilities of allies.*”¹⁹³ In such a world, it is easier to calculate the relative power of each side so that states can avoid wars caused by uncertainty and miscalculation. On the contrary, there are many difficulties in multipolar systems, where more than two states threaten each other and alignments are uncertain. “*Uncertainties about who threatens whom, about who will oppose whom, and about who will gain or lose from the actions of other states accelerate as the number of states increases.*”¹⁹⁴ The existence of three or more powers keeps relations of friendship and enmity fluid and makes present and future estimates on distribution of power much uncertain. Under these conditions actions by any of those actors may endanger the security of others.¹⁹⁵

Although Waltz did not examine the implications of unipolarity on balancing in his *Theory of International Politics* and other coeval studies, he contributed to discussions about balance of power in the emerging international system following the end of the Cold-War. Considering the assumptions underlying his balance of power theory, Waltz asserted that “*in the light of structural theory unipolarity appears as the least durable of international configurations.*”¹⁹⁶ He noted two main reasons for that. First, dominant powers tend to take on too many tasks beyond their own borders, which is associated with the ‘imperial decay’ phenomenon based on the misuse of concentrated power. This weakens such powers in the long term. Second, faced by unbalanced power some states try to bring the international distribution of power into balance through increasing their own capabilities or allying with others. Waltz suggests that other powers will balance the United States even though it behaves with

¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 168.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

¹⁹⁵ See *Ibid.*, pp. 164-168. Christensen and Snyder utilize Waltz’s arguments about uncertainties of multipolarity in their study elaborating ‘chain-ganging’ and ‘buck-passing’ as two patterns of behavior destabilizing the balance of power system. On the one hand, the high degree of security interdependence in a multipolar system lead some states to “*chain themselves unconditionally to reckless allies whose survival is seen to be indispensable to the maintenance of the balance.*” Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, “Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity,” **International Organization**, Vol. 44, No. 2, 1990, p. 138. On the other hand, the approximate equality of great powers motivates some states “*pass the buck, counting on third parties to bear the costs of stopping a rising hegemon.*” *Ibid.* As examined by Waltz, while the former was the pattern of behavior that led to the World War I, the latter was observed before the World War II. Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, pp. 67, 165-169.

¹⁹⁶ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Intimations of Multipolarity,” Birthe Hansen and Bertel Heurlin (ed.), **The New World Order**, London: Macmillan Press, 2000, p. 1.

“moderation, restraint and forbearance.” Aside from specific policies a dominant power follows or specific threats it poses, systemic imperatives by unbalanced power *“leaves weaker states feeling uneasy and gives them reason to strengthen their positions.”*¹⁹⁷ In this respect, Waltz’s balance of power theory defines unbalanced power as inherently threatening and expects other great powers to ally with each other in order to restore the global equilibrium.

B. Critics: Balance of Power and the Current International System

The end of the Cold War has put balance of power theory in a challenged position. When we look at the contemporary world through the lenses of balance of power, there is an anomaly that the preponderant power of the US has not yet balanced by a counterweight coalition. Robert A. Pape defines the international system in the 2000s as a unipolar system in which there is only one superpower and no other single state powerful enough to balance against it.¹⁹⁸ Furthermore, the related data such as GDPs and military expenditures suggests that in the contemporary world to effectively counterbalance against the US requires most or possibly even all of the second-ranked major powers to take place together in the same coalition.¹⁹⁹ Yet in today’s world, it’s difficult to claim that the lesser great powers came together in such a cohesive alliance or bloc to restore balance of power vis-à-vis the US primacy. Observing this fact, in 2002, Kenneth Waltz claimed that the international system is still in a transition process following the Cold War. He forecasted that in the long term it is not possible for the US to maintain the preponderant status as the sole superpower in the world. *“As nature abhors a vacuum, so international politics abhors unbalanced power.”*²⁰⁰

Besides the contemporary studies emphasizing the lack of counterbalancing against the United States, balance of power theory was attacked even in the Cold War era. A.F.K. Organski argues that the balance of power phenomenon was an illusion in the Cold War. In 1958, he contended that the power advantage of the West over the East was very huge. The US had three times national power sources of the USSR. Together with its powerful allies in Western Europe, the US was much more powerful

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁹⁸ Robert A. Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” p. 11.

¹⁹⁹ See *ibid.* and Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, **World out of Balance: International Relations and the Challenge of American Primacy**, pp. 22-59. This argument seems to be valid still with regard to more up-to-date data. See Table 2.

²⁰⁰ Kenneth N. Waltz, “Structural Realism after the Cold War,” pp. 51-56.

than the combination of the Soviet Union and China.²⁰¹ On the other hand, Stephen Walt, a neorealist scholar, suggests that the alignment behavior of European states after the World War II contradicts with the assumptions of balance of power theory. To Walt, if the only thing the states concerned with was balancing power, the European allies of the US would have allied with the Soviet Union which was the real weaker side.²⁰² However, after the World War II, the USSR rapidly grew as the greatest threat in the views of Europeans. Therefore, the US could bring most of the other industrialized states into its own alliance, though it was the most powerful state in the post-war era.

In addition to that the Sino-Soviet split is another fact pointing that states do not solely concern with the international balance of power in shaping their alignment behavior. Bilateral problems e.g. border disputes and ideological quarrels made China to view the USSR as threatening as the US. This led to a process of rapprochement with Washington in the 1970s.²⁰³ As a result, the world began to talk about a tacit alignment between Beijing and the Western powers.²⁰⁴ Thanks to the Sino-Soviet split, the international balance of power began to favor the US-NATO bloc even more. On the other side, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the criticism on balance of power theory reached its peak, as the world became increasingly unipolar towards the 2000s.

Some realist scholars offer theoretical explanations for the lack of balancing behavior by great powers in the current international system.²⁰⁵ Those arguments will be elaborated in the last section of this chapter. Here we should note only two interrelated factors affecting great powers' balancing behavior i.e., the disappearance of great power war and nuclear deterrence. It is important to underline these factors,

²⁰¹ A.F.K. Organski, **World Politics**, New York: Alfred A. Knopf Inc, 1958, pp. 291-292.

²⁰² Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 275

²⁰³ James MacHaffie, "The Potential for a China-Russia Military Alliance Explored," *Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations*, Vol. 10, No. 2&3, 2011, pp. 26-27.

²⁰⁴ Faruk Sönmezoğlu, Hakan Güneş ve Erhan Keleşoğlu, **Uluslararası İlişkilere Giriş**, İstanbul: Der Yayınları, 2011, p. 26.

²⁰⁵ For the debates on unipolarity and balancing behavior see John Ikenberry (ed.), **America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power**, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002, and John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C. Wohlforth (eds.), **International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011.

as the effect of nuclear weapons on great power's security and alignments was also emphasized by Waltz himself.

Looking backward into history, one can suggest that balance of power perspective generally captures alignment behavior by great powers from the foundation of the Westphalian European system to the end of the World War II. In this time period, the failure to restore the balance vis-à-vis the powers seeking to dominate the European Continent (Habsburgs, Napoleonic France, and Germany), would have meant losing serious territory and population and maybe even independence for the other European states.²⁰⁶ The total wars of the 20th Century further complicated the situation considering the catastrophic consequences of a military defeat. However, the disappearance of the major wars between great powers after 1945 may have been the reason for decreasing concerns on balance of power in the international system. The disappearance of interstate wars among the great powers which have possessed nuclear deterrence may have changed, to some extent, balance of power politics.

At this point, William Wohlforth explains why there has been no effective balancing against the US supremacy in the unipolar international system emerged after the Cold War with reference to nuclear peace as well as the US offshore geographical position:²⁰⁷

“Even if the stopping power of water did not disqualify the United States as a hegemonic threat, nuclear deterrence would. After all, [balance of power] theory is based on the assumption that states are security maximizers. By that assumption, existential deterrence must be credible: a would-be hegemon would have to conclude that other great powers would use their nuclear forces if their sovereign existence were ever threatened by territorial conquest.²⁰⁸ Hence, no rational would-be hegemon, no matter how overwhelming its conventional capabilities, would contemplate the territorial conquest of other nuclear armed great powers, and no rational, nuclear-armed great power would fear hegemony as contingent balance of power theory defines it.”

²⁰⁶ For an elaborate analysis on peace and war in European History which also underlines balance of power as a concern by the members of European state system, see Kalevi J. Holsti, **Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648-1989**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

²⁰⁷ William C. Wohlforth, “Revisiting Balance of Power Theory in Central Eurasia,” p. 217.

²⁰⁸ The existential deterrence concept suggests that the mere existence of nuclear weapons deters adversaries from attacking regarding the possible escalation towards a nuclear war and catastrophic consequences it would bring. See Trachtenberg, “The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis,” **International Security**, Vol. 10, No. 1, 1985, p. 139.

In a more recent study after the end of the Cold War, Kenneth Waltz makes a similar point that in the nuclear age though allies have been useful and therefore have been wanted, they were not essential in the sense of security of the superpowers.²⁰⁹ Having nuclear weapons, two states balanced each other mainly by internal means and focused on improving their military technology to increase their security through nuclear deterrence. On the other side, nuclear proliferation equated great power's strategic strength in defending their territories among those that gained second-strike capabilities. As a result, those great powers also did not need one other's help at the strategic level. In Waltz's words "*nuclear weapons ma[d]e alliances obsolete, just as General de Gaulle used to claim.*"²¹⁰

Considering the anomaly in the current international balance of power and the evolution of the post-Westphalian European style balancing behavior render at least the theory's assumptions on alignment formation not much applicable to our case. Even if it would not be the case, we know that Waltz portrays balance of power as a theory to explain outcomes in the system level -not alignment behaviors by specific states. In Waltz's perspective, behavior of different states is similar, not identical. In other words, the theory does not answer the question "*how will particular states react?*" Instead, the theory can offer general and useful answers to the question that "*what will a state have to react to?*"²¹¹ In this respect, Waltz suggests balance of power theory focusing is particularly instrumental in explaining the recurrent formation of balances of power. Therefore, it is susceptible whether it would be methodologically correct to build a study on alignment strategies of Russia over balance of power theory. Fortunately balance of threat and omnibalancing theories are developed to explain alignment behavior of particular states and used also in this way by the scholars who constructed theories themselves.²¹²

²⁰⁹ Waltz, "The Emerging Structure of International Politics," p. 73.

²¹⁰ **Ibid.**; Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, p. 182. In this regard, Waltz suggests that "*properly speaking, NATO and the WTO [Warsaw Treaty Organization] were more treaties of guarantee than military alliances old-style.*" Waltz, "Intimations of Multipolarity," p. 4. Here Waltz does not elaborate the meaning and implications of such a guarantee. However this suggestion seems to apply Morrow's model of asymmetrical alliances which function as a security umbrella over the smaller parties.

²¹¹ **Ibid.**, p. 122.

²¹² See Stephen M. Walt, "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia," **International Organization**, Vol: 42, No: 2, 1988, pp.275-316; and Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, pp. 55-182.

III. Alignment as a Response to Threats: Balance of Threat and Omnibalancing Theories

As a parsimonious theory focusing on the distribution of power in the international system, balance of power theory could become problematic while studying on alignment strategies of particular states. Since the theory directly combines threat with power, its assumptions fail in some cases in that states regard other factors as more dangerous to their national security. To overcome these difficulties, scholars defined some other factors that affect alignment decisions. Stephen Walt placed external threats at the center of his balance of threat theory and defined geography as another significant factor that affects alignment behavior of states. On the other side, Steven David's omnibalancing theory contributed the literature by emphasizing internal threats to the regime and state security as a factor shaping alignment behaviors of the Third World states. Both of them are threat centered approaches and examined below with regard to their implications for our case.

A. Stephen Walt and Balance of Threat Theory

Stephen Walt suggests his theory as a refinement of balance of power. He begins by criticizing Waltz's main assumption in balance of power theory that smaller states join the weaker side since it is the stronger side which threatens them. Walt suggests that this view is seriously flawed, *"because it ignores the other factors that statesmen will consider when identifying the potential threats and prospective allies."*²¹³ For example, a state may join the stronger side, when the weaker side is perceived to be more threatening for other reasons.²¹⁴ Therefore distribution of capabilities is not the only factor that determines alignment choices -although it is an important one. States, in fact, ally against 'the most threatening power.'²¹⁵

As noted earlier, Walt offers a wide definition for alliance that covers formal and informal arrangements for security cooperation between sovereign states. Accordingly, he uses the terms alliance and alignment interchangeably.²¹⁶ Since Walt

²¹³ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," **International Security**, Vol: 9, No: 4, 1985. p. 8.

²¹⁴ Stephen M. Walt, "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia," p. 279.

²¹⁵ Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," pp. 8-9.

²¹⁶ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 12.

challenges the view that power and threat are identical, he re-defines balancing and bandwagoning regarding external threats, rather than power alone. In balance of threat theory, balancing means allying against the most threatening state and bandwagoning means allying with the major source of threat. The theory's main argument is that states tend to balance rather than bandwagon when facing an external threat. To Walt, it is a safer strategy to survive. Allying with the dominant power is based on a trust in the latter's continued benevolence.²¹⁷ However, intentions can change and it risks survival of states. Having defined alignments as a response to external threats, Walt suggests that there are four factors that determine the level of an external threat and consequently alignment preferences of states: aggregate power, offensive power, geographic proximity, and aggressive intentions.

Like other neorealists, Walt defines 'aggregate power' as a state's capability to potentially threaten a state; in fact, it includes population, technology, and industrial and military capability.²¹⁸ Since other states cannot be sure how a powerful state uses its capabilities, power imbalances tend to create balancing coalitions.²¹⁹ Even though power is counted as a source of threat, in some cases it can also be prized. States that have greater capabilities can use their power for punishing enemies and rewarding their allies. Thus aggregate power of a state might motivate either balancing or bandwagoning.²²⁰

'Geographic proximity' is another important factor that either consolidates or weakens an external threat. Since power wanes over distance, a state that is in close proximity has the ability to threaten a particular state more than a state that is far away.²²¹ Proximity can also lead to either balancing or bandwagoning. If a proximate power trigger balancing around itself, a network of containment may emerge. Conversely, when a threat by a proximate power leads to bandwagoning, a sphere of influence is constituted. "*Small states bordering a great power may be so vulnerable that they*

²¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

²¹⁸ Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," p. 9.

²¹⁹ Stephen M. Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off Balance': Self Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy," John Ikenberry (ed.), **America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power**, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002, p. 134.

²²⁰ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 23.

²²¹ Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," p. 10.

*choose to bandwagon rather than balance, especially if a powerful neighbor has demonstrated its ability to compel obedience.”*²²²

Walt suggests that states that have great ‘offensive power’ mostly provoke an alignment rather than “*those are incapable of attacking because of geography, military posture, or something else.*”²²³ States with large offensive capabilities mostly motivate balancing. However, when offensive power of a state made it possible to conquer the others rapidly, it may discourage smaller states from resisting. Because their allies could not manage to support them quickly enough. States which are far from potential allies may have to choose bandwagoning. Walt suggests that it could be a reason for why spheres of influence emerge.²²⁴

The last factor posed by Walt is ‘aggressive intentions.’ States that are perceived to be aggressive are likely to trigger others to balance. Their superior capabilities are not as important as much as the perception of their intentions. “*In fact, offensive intentions are what give these states an aggressive perception rather than aggregate power.*”²²⁵ If a state is perceived to be unalterably aggressive, then the others may not choose bandwagoning since it seems irrational. In these cases, vulnerable states may become a victim even if they allied with it.²²⁶

After defining balancing and bandwagoning in terms of threats rather than power alone and suggesting the factors which affect the level of threat, Walt argues that “*we gain a more complete picture of the factors that statesmen will consider when making alliance choices.*”²²⁷ Yet, we cannot decide which sources of threat played the most significant role in a given case. In fact, all the factors are likely to play a role. As the level of threat grows, the tendency to seek allies for a state increases.²²⁸ The studies by Walt on alignment choices of particular states demonstrate that balancing is the dominant tendency in international politics. In *The Origins of Alliances* Walt examines

²²² Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, pp. 23-24

²²³ *Ibid.* p. 24

²²⁴ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 25.

²²⁵ Richard Nere, "Democracy Promotion and the Us National Security Strategy: Us National Interest, Us Primacy, and Coercion," *Strategic Insights*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2009, p. 4.

²²⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 26.

²²⁷ Walt, "Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power," p. 13

²²⁸ *Ibid.* This suggestion of Walt indicates that the only independent variable taken in balance of treat theory is the level of threat a state face. The four factors, on the other hand, constitute the dimensions of this independent variable.

the diplomatic history of regional states in the Middle East to test his argument. Between 1955 and 1979, he discovers thirty-six alignments – and consequently eighty-six separate alignment choices made by those states. He infers that at least 87.5 percent of them were made against the states that appeared most dangerous. On the contrary, the number of decisions to bandwagon with threatening states is at most 12.5 percent.²²⁹

Stephen Walt also offers an explanation for the exceptional cases of bandwagoning he observed. In this respect, he offers three hypotheses to identify the conditions under which bandwagoning is expected to occur.²³⁰ First ‘weak states’ facing a powerful opponent are more likely to bandwagon. If there seems no chance to alter the outcome through balancing and it is more likely to suffer intensely in the process, balancing ceases to be an attractive and rational choice. Geographic proximity to a great power makes balancing much more difficult. Second ‘availability of allies’ has a decisive impact on alignment behavior. When states lack useful allies they are more likely to bandwagon, since they will face the threat alone if they chose to resist. Lastly ‘the impact of intentions’ also plays a role in bandwagoning decisions. The belief that a threatening power can be appeased by entering into an alignment together induces bandwagoning behavior.²³¹

Alignment Behavior by Superpowers and Regional States

In his study on balance of threat theory, Stephen Walt also emphasizes differences between balancing behavior of the major states (the US and the Soviet Union) and regional powers with much smaller capabilities, which make some

²²⁹ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 149. In a later study, Walt extends the application of the theory towards Southwest Asia including Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India. Balance of threat theory’s predictions are mostly confirmed by the study over these states, while balance of power theory often fails. See Stephen M. Walt, “Testing Theories of Alliance Formation: The Case of Southwest Asia”.

²³⁰ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, pp. 172-178 and Walt, “Alliance Formation and the Balance of World Power,” pp. 16-18.

²³¹ Patricia Weitsman examines the relationship between the level of threat and the propensity for states to balance or bandwagon in a similar manner. Her theoretical studies over alliances suggest that when a state face a high level of threat it will balance against it. However if an external threat further grows to such an extent that a state’s survival is at stake a threatened state may ally (i.e. bandwagon) with its enemy. See Patricia A Weitsman, "Alliance Cohesion and Coalition Warfare: The Central Powers and Triple Entente," **Security Studies**, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2003, pp. 82-83; and Weitsman, **Dangerous Alliances: Proponents of Peace, Weapons of War**, , pp. 4, 12. Yet, the Author explicitly suggests that what is actually important here is the level of threat -but not whether the state is big or small, strong or weak. **Ibid.**, p. 18.

relevance to the current geopolitical competition over Eurasia. As Walt suggests, the superpowers of that era have allied to counter significant threats like any other state in the system. Considering their relative capabilities, the threats from the other superpower were among the most critical ones. Both the US and the Soviet Union had a broader network of foreign relations and various security interests in a wider geographical context. Hereby, they have been generally anxious about the expansion of the other's spheres of influence, at the expense of their own. Stephen Walt, tests balance of threat theory regarding this kind of threat perception in *The Origins of Alliances*. He suggests that, the theory would expect the US and the Soviet Union to balance more energetically whenever one's position against the other deteriorates. Conversely, if the assumption of balance of threat is false then we would expect them to be indifferent to alignments of the other in a specific regional context. The defeated one would also abandon the field instead of pursuing renewed efforts to restore its position.²³²

Walt's study on the regional alignments in the Middle East generally confirms his theory.²³³ For example, after the foundation of the Baghdad Pact in 1955, the Soviet Union sought closer ties with Egypt and Syria to balance this initiative. In the 1960s, consolidation of the influence of the Soviet Union through alignments with its regional clients induced the US to increase its military and economic support to its existing allies i.e. Jordan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia. At the same time, the US sought a rapprochement with Egypt and Syria through increasing economic aid and adopting sympathetic diplomacy.²³⁴ Observing these developments, Walt argues that, balancing behavior by superpowers may take two forms. A superpower could put pressure on the other superpower's ally directly or indirectly by supporting its regional adversaries. The second form is to try to induce the opponent's clients to realign either by offering more or by subversion of the regime.²³⁵

Regional states, however, seem to have different threat perceptions which shape their alignment behavior. According to Walt, small states whose security interests are confined in a minor geographical context are more sensitive and

²³² Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 153.

²³³ See *ibid.* p. 153-158.

²³⁴ *Ibid.* p. 154-155.

²³⁵ *Ibid.* p. 157.

vulnerable to threats from other nearby powers.²³⁶ The geographic proximity is more important for those states, because they have no strong means to deter their regional adversaries. Walt's analysis on the Middle East shows that most of the alliances formed by regional states were made to counter the threat by another local actor. Some examples are as follows. When Iraq joined the Baghdad Pact, this move induced Syria's and Saudi Arabia's alignment with Egypt. Similarly, Iraq's alignment with the USSR in 1972 was the result of the threat by the neighboring state Iran. On the other side, the long-standing alignment between Saudi Arabia and the United States has provided a guarantee against Iran following the Islamic Revolution in 1979.²³⁷

In this respect, the power competition through regional alignments has been an important characteristic of Cold War rivalry between the two superpowers which perceive threat from each other but avoid falling in a direct conflict together.²³⁸ Contemporary developments in the Middle East evokes this old history of regional competition between the US-led alignments and Moscow's regional allies. In recent years, Russia has made use of regional threat perceptions and the expansion of the ISIS (Islamic State of Iraq and Syria) to renew its alignment with Iran, Iraq and Bashar Assad's Syria.²³⁹ However, what is more important in the context of this study is that the post-Soviet security space has long been an arena of competition between the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty framework and NATO which has aimed at penetrating into the region. After 1991, Russia has put pressure over the post-Soviet states which tried to balance its military and political influence through building strong ties with the West, while it has offered more security assistance to its post-Soviet allies which preferred cooperate with Moscow and helped them deal with the regional sources of threat. Therefore, here it is suggested that Walt's assumptions on superpowers' behavior can be applied to Russia's alignment strategies as one of the contemporary great powers which seeks to defend and even to expand its sphere of influence.

²³⁶ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 158.

²³⁷ *Ibid.* p. 158.

²³⁸ See Mark O. Yeisley, "Bipolarity, Proxy Wars, and the Rise of China," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2011, p. 77.

²³⁹ See, Roy Allison, "Russia and Syria: Explaining Alignment with a Regime in Crisis," *International Affairs*, Vol. 89, No 4, 201, pp. 795-823; and Zvi Magen, "Russia in the Middle East: The Drive to Enhance Influence," *Strategic Survey for Israel* (Institute for National Security Studies), 2013/2014, pp. 101-110.

However, it shall be noted that the Middle East and the CIS that is the area where Russia has formed alliances together with small regional states have very distinct characteristics. While Walt defines the Middle East as a multipolar regional subsystem, scholars associate the post-Soviet area with unipolarity considering Russia's relative capabilities vis-à-vis the rest of countries located in this regional setting.²⁴⁰ (See Table 1) Certainly, Russia's military dominance over the region has a deep impact on the distribution of threats, and accordingly, alignment formation in the post-Soviet space. In this respect, first, we need to explore this connection to be able to apply balance of threat theory to the CIS region in a proper way.

Distribution of Threats and Alignment Formation under Different Regional Settings: Multipolarity vs. Unipolarity

Stephen Walt defines the Cold War Era Middle East a multipolar regional subsystem embedded in a bipolar global system.²⁴¹ Multipolar systems are generally conflict-prone. As argued by Kenneth Waltz for the international system in general, such a structure in the Middle Eastern regional context has also created many uncertainties about the distribution of threats, therefore, kept relations of friendship and enmity fluid.²⁴² During the Cold War years, Arab-Israeli wars have appeared a primary destabilizing factor in the region feeding external threat perceptions by regional states from each other. In addition, Walt's analysis exposes that threat perceptions by Arab states from each other further complicated regional frictions and accordingly alignment formation.²⁴³ In this conflictual context, small states have sought alignment with a distant superpower to guarantee their security against the local threats instead of seeking ways to reconcile and cooperate with each other. Furthermore, regional states have also tried to take advantage of penetration by the US and the Soviet Union into the Middle East. Knowing the fact that both superpowers have sought new allies at the other's expense, Middle Eastern states have often

²⁴⁰ See Robert Stewart-Ingersoll and Derrick Frazier, **Regional Powers and Security Orders: A Theoretical Framework**, New York: Routledge, 2012, pp. 60-62; Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, pp. 62, 397-436.

²⁴¹ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 266.

²⁴² See Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, pp. 164-168.

²⁴³ See Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, pp. 149-180. For a detailed analysis on threat perceptions in inter-Arab politics see Michael Barnett, "Alliances and Identity in the Middle East," Peter J. Katzenstein (ed), **The Culture of National Security Norms and Identity in World Politics**, New York, Columbia University Press, 1996, pp. 400-447.

encouraged the geopolitical competition between the two rival powers.²⁴⁴ In this regard, their geopolitical importance provided the regional states with the opportunity to free-ride relying on their allies' efforts to provide their security.²⁴⁵

However, it is not possible to identify the post-Soviet region as a multipolar subsystem. The Russian Federation is unambiguously the dominant power to manage military and security affairs in its neighborhood. Among the scholars underlining this fact, Buzan and Weaver put forward an advanced theoretical perspective on regional subsystems which is useful to comprehend the characteristics of the CIS region.²⁴⁶ According to these Authors, a regional subsystem can be divided from each other with regard to high-level security interactions either in positive or negative terms. Geographic proximity "*tends to generate more security interaction among neighbors than among states located in different areas, a point also emphasized by Walt.*"²⁴⁷ Within the structure of anarchy, the essential structure and characteristics of a region are determined by two kinds of relations: (i) distribution of the regional power and (ii) patterns of amity and enmity.²⁴⁸ Buzan and Waever's analysis of the CIS region confirms that the huge power advantage of Russia provides it a special position, and none of the regional (secondary) powers (Ukraine, Uzbekistan, etc.) have relative weight to define another pole.²⁴⁹ (See Table 1) The unipolar structure of the region centered on a great power place Russia to the epicenter of the relations of enmity and amity, which in turn shapes alignment formation in the CIS.

²⁴⁴ Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, pp. 156-157.

²⁴⁵ In this respect Walt suggests that Egypt and Jordan have occasionally signaled to realign in order to receive more military and economic assistance from their superpower allies. **Ibid.**, pp.156-157. Accordingly the Egyptian President Gamal Abdel-Nasser has once suggested that "*Egypt's great strength lay in the rival interests of America and Russia, ... and that each of the superpowers would protect her from the other.*" **Ibid.**, p. 163.

²⁴⁶ Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**. For the chapter on the post-Soviet region see pp. 397-436. The Authors prefer the term 'regional security complex' instead of regional subsystem as their theory is titled as 'regional security complex theory.' For another study, examining the unipolar structure of the post-Soviet Region with reference to material capabilities of regional states (population, natural sources, economic power and military strength), see Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier, **Regional Powers and Security Orders: A Theoretical Framework**, pp. 52-62.

²⁴⁷ Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 45.

²⁴⁸ The Authors maintain that regional systems "*like the international system of which they are substructures, can be analysed in terms of polarity, ranging from unipolar, through bi- and tripolar, to multipolar. Thus regions can also be analyzed in terms of polarity, ranging from unipolar, through bi- and tripolar, to multipolar.*" **Ibid.**, p. 49.

²⁴⁹ See **ibid.**, pp. 397-436.

Table 1 - Distribution of capabilities in the CIS: Population, military expenditures and GDP (2018) ²⁵⁰

	Population (million)	% Total Regional Population	Military Expenditures (million \$)	% Total Military Expenditures	GDP (billion \$)	% Total GDP
Russian Federation	144,5	49,8	61388	86,1	1630,7	75,1
Ukraine	44,8	15,4	4750	6,7	124,6	5,7
Uzbekistan	32,4	11,2	n.a.	n.a.	41,2	1,9
Kazakhstan	18,0	6,2	1614	2,3	170,5	7,9
Azerbaijan	9,9	3,4	1709	2,4	45,4	2,1
Belarus	9,5	3,3	715	1,0	59,6	2,7
Tajikistan	8,9	3,1	n.a.	n.a.	7,5	0,3
Kyrgyzstan	6,2	2,1	122	0,2	8,1	0,4
Turkmenistan	5,8	2,0	n.a.	n.a.	44,1	2,0
Georgia	3,7	1,3	317	0,4	16,3	0,8
Moldova	3,5	1,2	34	0,0	11,4	0,5
Armenia	2,9	1,0	609	0,9	12,4	0,6
Total	290,2	100,0	71258	100,0	2171,8	100,0

In this respect, Bailes et al. suggest that “*not only is Russia by far the strongest state in terms of size, military forces and economic potential, but it has the strategic character of a ‘hub’ to which former Soviet states are joined by a more strategically significant relationship than any pair of such states can have with each other.*”²⁵¹ This fact serves as a stabilizing factor in alignment formation, especially considering the relations between the states following the Russian leadership. Unlike the Middle East which inherited chronic regional conflicts from the Cold War years, there appears no pattern of amity and enmity among the Central Asian states. “*Nobody is looking to set up a system of alliances between the republics of Central Asia.*”²⁵² In the post-Soviet arena, as a whole, there is only one example for classical interstate war and rivalry between regional states. Armenia and Azerbaijan have fallen into a regional conflict

²⁵⁰ For population data see “DataBank World Development Indicators,” The World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SP.POP.TOTL&country> (15.6.2019). Military expenditures are taken from SIPRI Database. There is no available information for Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan whose military spending are excluded from the total. SIPRI Military Expenditure Database, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (15.06.2019). For GDPs see “IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2019,” <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/01/weodata/index.aspx> (15.06.2019).

²⁵¹ Alyson J. K. Bailes, Vladimir Baranovsky, and Pál Dunay, “Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area,” Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (ed.), **Sipri Yearbook 2007: Armament, Disarmament and International Security**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 168.

²⁵² Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 426.

with ethnic and territorial dimensions.²⁵³ Yet, as elaborated in this study, both sides of this conflict recognize Russia's key role in regional conflict and peace processes and behave accordingly. This appears as a function of the regional unipolarity. As Buzan and Weaver suggest, unipolarity might be in its extreme form "*when both sides of a local conflict are dependent on the same power, it is possible for that power to pressure the conflicting parties into peace processes.*"²⁵⁴

Stephen Walt's analysis on the Middle East put forward the fact that those small states have been mostly sensitive to aggressive intentions by other local actors with an ability to threaten their neighbors.²⁵⁵ With the notable exception of Armenia and Azerbaijan, this is not the case in the post-Soviet region. Under the unipolar structure of the CIS, almost all regional alignment decisions are made paying regard to Russia as the proximate great power –not other local states with different capabilities and intentions. However, the practical implications regional balance of power are neither straightforward nor predetermined. On the one side, there are some neighbors who "*accept or even seek Russia's 'paternalistic' lead.*" On the other side, some states view's Russia's dominant position as a threat to their national security and "*defy it almost on principle.*"²⁵⁶ In other words, while material dimensions of an external threat (i.e. aggregate power, offensive power, and geographic proximity) indicate Russia as the most threatening power in the CIS; perceptions towards Russia's aggressive intentions alter case by case among the post-Soviet states. As a result, balancing efforts has remained limited to the second group of states which identify Russia as an aggressive power in its neighborhood and seek alignments with Western powers penetrating towards the region.

Those alignments with outside powers, in turn, pose an external threat to Russia's security interests with regard to Walt's theoretical perspective. Russia has followed an assertive and threatening policy towards some states who sought to change the regional military balance through joining NATO. While pursuing such a threatening policy towards weak regional states, Russia has relied on its power and

²⁵³ See *ibid.*, p. 414.

²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 47

²⁵⁵ This led to continual shifts in regional alignments formed between them, which posed another destabilizing factor on regional politics. For the list of Middle East alliances that were formed against regional threats between 1955 and 1979, see Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 159.

²⁵⁶ Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p. 168.

geographical advantages as balance of threat theory would predict. As elaborated in Part Two, Chapter One, this policy has sometimes succeeded in pushing those states to bandwagon with Moscow, inducing them to take a more neutral position or at least blocking the expansion of foreign military influence towards the region.

However, it is not possible to explain all cases of alignment between Russia and the regional states through the hypotheses of bandwagoning in balance of threat theory. Most of the regional states aligned with Russia are not unwilling bandwagoners. From the 1990s onwards, the rising security cooperation and integration among the post-Soviet states has been depended on different special dynamics. Today, Central Asian states appreciate Russian security assistance to deal with some significant regional and domestic level threats rather than external threats from foreign powers. Therefore we need some other alternative theoretical approaches to comprehend the dynamics of alignment formation between Russia and post-Soviet states.

B. Steven David and Omnibalancing Theory

As another approach emphasizing the central role of threats in alignment behavior, Steven David's omnibalancing theory can be identified as a useful extension of balance of threat theory. However, the main divergent point between two approaches is omnibalancing theory's emphasis on the internal threats to domestic stability and regime security rather than threats from other states.²⁵⁷ David criticizes Walt's claim that alliances are formed in response to external threats. He suggests that leaders in the Third World must counter all threats which are not necessarily external

²⁵⁷ See Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**. David is not the only scholar who explains alignment formation with reference to domestic-level threats. For example, Levy and Barnett focus on the economic constraints and domestic threats that faces the illegitimate leaders of the weak states. For those leaders, reaching external economic and military aid is crucial to preserve their rule and domestic political stability against internal threats. Therefore, the resource-providing function of alignment is a determining factor in the choices of the Third World states. See Michael N. Barnett and Jack S. Levy, "Domestic Sources of Alliances and Alignments: The Case of Egypt, 1962-73," **International Organization**, Vol. 45, No. 3, 1991, pp. 369-395. On the other hand, Larson develops an institutionalist approach that takes political instability and illegitimate authority as the indicators of a state's real weakness instead of material capability. She suggests that in weak regimes elites who try to stay in power may place their own interest that is preserving their rule above the state interest. Hence, she concludes that elites in states with weak domestic institutions are likely to bandwagon with a threatening power, when it is possible to consolidate their power through collaboration with that powerful adversary state. Deborah Welch Larson, "Bandwagon Images in American Foreign Policy: Myth or Reality?" Robert Jervis and Jack Snyder (ed), **Dominoes and Bandwagons : Strategic Beliefs and Great Power Competition in the Eurasian Rimland**, New York, Oxford University Press, 1991, pp. 85-111.

but may also be internal.²⁵⁸ Considering Third World conditions, he challenges the neorealist view that states are unitary actors and domestic politics are hierarchically ordered. According to him, this view ignores “*the unstable, dangerous and often fatal nature of domestic political environment that characterizes the Third World.*”²⁵⁹ Third World domestic politics can be viewed as a microcosm of the anarchical structure of international politics. In this part of the world, leaders who are often perceived as illegitimate must balance against both internal and external threats to ensure their survival.²⁶⁰ In this regard, the main hypothesis of the omnibalancing theory is that “*the most powerful determinant of the Third World alignment behavior is the rational calculation of the Third World leaders as to which outside power is most likely to do what is necessary to keep them in power.*”²⁶¹

David prefers to use the term alignment in his studies over omnibalancing theory. He suggests that an “*alignment occurs when a state brings its policies into close cooperation with another state in order to achieve mutual security goals.*”²⁶² For him, such cooperation could take many forms including a formal written treaty that is necessary to establish an alliance.²⁶³ David also notes that the theory is largely

²⁵⁸ In fact, the Third World concept was coined by Alfred Sauvy, a French economist, in 1952, considering the Cold War conditions. The First World referred to Western capitalist countries, while the Second World consisted of socialist countries led by the Soviet Union. On the other side, the Third World was composed of states which had been colonized by Europeans and remained outside of the two categories. See Thomas M. Leonard (ed.), **Encyclopedia of the Developing World**, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 1542-1543. At the beginning of his book on omnibalancing theory, Steven David makes a generalization about the main characteristics of Third World states. Those countries are generally artificial creations by outside powers, which involve internal conflicts between different ethnic, religious, regional groups. Third World states are ruled by authoritarian governments whose legitimacy is very weak. Those states also lack effective institutions to mediate political disputes and a nation-wide agreement on the political structure and the related standards for the rightful exercise of power. In this respect, David suggests that omnibalancing theory only applies to such states where regimes are weak and illegitimate and the stakes for domestic politics are very high. See David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, pp. 7, 11-15. Such a characterization of the Third World by David enables us to apply omnibalancing theory to alignment behavior of the post-Soviet states. Although those states were born out of the Soviet Union's collapse after the Cold War, they still share significant characteristics with David's conception of the Third World.

²⁵⁹ Steven R. David, “Explaining Third World Alignment” **World Politics**, Vol. 43, No. 2, 1991, p. 235.

²⁶⁰ *Ibid.* p. 243.

²⁶¹ Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 6.

²⁶² Steven R. David, “Explaining Third World Alignment,” p. 234. David suggests two criteria that determine whether there is an alignment between particular states: “*First there must be ongoing cooperation to achieve mutual security goals. The arrangements for cooperation can be written or tacit, formal or informal.*” Second the client state must be depended on the preponderant side for its principle sources of arms. Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 29.

²⁶³ This suggestion implies that David also defines alliances as a subset of the phenomenon of alignment. *Ibid.* p. 29.

applicable to the Third World where regimes are weak and stakes for domestic politics are very high. Under such conditions, internal threats (e.g. assassination attempts, coups, civil wars, and secessionist movements) are much more likely to remove the Third World leaders from power than are threats from foreign states.²⁶⁴ Since 1945, wars between states have been outnumbered by internal wars which have mostly appeared in the Third World. On the other hand, military coups have become the most common form of regime change in those states. The Third World leaders who generally come in power through force often use suppression against their opponents to remain in power. Because those regimes lack legitimacy and moral authority for their rules, they are vulnerable to the threat of subversion by any domestic group that is more powerful than themselves. More dramatically, for Third World leaders losing of power may end up with death, imprisonment, and exile.²⁶⁵ On the other side, many leaders do not worry about the survival of their country, because even in the Third World extinction rate of states is very low. Observing the main characteristics of the domestic politics in the Third World David concludes that *“when confronted with a decision between aligning so as to benefit the state but endangering their hold on power and aligning in such a way that would harm the state but would preserve their power, the leadership would choose the latter.”*²⁶⁶

It is important to note that Stephen Walt, in a later work on balance of threat theory, confirmed that domestic threats could affect alliance choices and thus acknowledged the contribution by omnibalancing theory:

*“Although external threats were more important, domestic concerns also encouraged Pakistan and Iran to seek U.S. support. As Steven David has suggested, regime stability and personal survival rank high on the agendas of most Third World leaders. Balance of threat theory can accommodate this possibility fairly easily -states seek allies to balance both internal and external threats, whichever is most imminent –but balance of power theory cannot.”*²⁶⁷

Examining the origins of domestic threats, Steven David also focuses on the issues of national identity and consciousness as a perennial problem in the Third

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 238-239.

²⁶⁵ Eric A. Miller and Arkady Toritsyn, “Bringing the Leader Back in: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States,” p. 334.

²⁶⁶ Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 16. For a detailed discussion about the nature of the domestic politics in the Third World which moves David to this conclusion, see pp. 11-18.

²⁶⁷ Walt, “Testing Theories of Alliance Formation,” p. 312.

World. Most of the Third World states having a colonial past are artificial creations by foreign powers, whose borders were drawn arbitrarily. There are many sub-national (i.e. ethnic, religious, regional) groupings in those states, which act considering their self-identified interests rather than the national interest.²⁶⁸ While challenging domestic leaderships, different groups often seek outside support to gain greater autonomy within the state, to subvert the existing government or to achieve independence. Hence those kinds of internal threats in the Third World provides an ideal vehicle for other state actors to advance their interests. On the other hand, most of the Third World states lack sufficient capabilities to suppress the internal threats, their leadership often seek outside support to defeat them.²⁶⁹ In this regard, internal threats make them both vulnerable to and dependent on foreign powers.

Omnibalancing theory sheds light also to the conditions for a successful strategy that should be followed by major powers which seek to attract allies from the Third World.²⁷⁰ Those arguments are especially significant for this study focusing on Russia's alignment strategy as a great power. David suggests that the focus of a major power should be on convincing the Third World leaders that they would best be able to defeat the threats facing them through aligning with itself. In international politics, the ability to transfer of large amounts of arms quickly, the availability of proxy forces, and the willingness for direct intervention against external threats are critical considerations when evaluating a prospective ally. They are all important also in the Third World. When the domestic stakes become more pressing, the Third World leaders consider the possibility of gaining such assistance against the internal threats themselves such as civil wars and armed insurgencies. On the other side, in order to continue friendly cooperation and to prevent hostile realignments, the powerful side should convince allied governments in the Third World that their political survival is best served through maintaining the alignment. Accordingly, the surest way to attract an ally of a rival state is to persuade the leader of a Third World state that realignment could further consolidate the regime.

Omnibalancing and balance of threat theories are common in suggesting that threatening a regional state by a great power may result in a favorable alignment in

²⁶⁸ Steven R. David, "Explaining Third World Alignment," p. 239.

²⁶⁹ Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 14.

²⁷⁰ See *Ibid.* pp. 23-26.

some cases. Third World Leaders may choose to submit the demands of its superior adversary when it understands that the state “*backing the threats is also in the best position to undermine that threat.*”²⁷¹ The great power can easily diminish the threat through, e.g. suspending arms supplies or applying political pressure on the country or group that directly threatens the regime. However, this does not mean that threatening states through backing regional and domestic sources of insecurity is the most effective way for an outside actor to expand and consolidate its influence in the Third World. The omnibalancing perspective suggests the key factor determining alignment decisions is not threats at all, but rather which outside power is most likely to keep the leader in power.²⁷² In this regard, when another power is available seeming more willing and more capable to do what is necessary to preserve the regime, the leader will choose alignment with this alternative. Then, it may result in balancing both domestic threats and the threatening state’s regional influence.

In order to test omnibalancing theory in the face of empirical facts, David focuses on the elusive cases of realignment by Egypt, Ethiopia, Somalia and Sudan in the Cold War history.²⁷³ In this regard, he tries to prove that domestic threats and concerns on the regime survival were the real factors leading to realignments, while there was no significant change in the level and sources of external threats. On the other side, after the Cold War, the emerging chaotic situation in the post-Soviet region underlined by domestic threats such as military coups, ethnic, religious and political violence has induced some scholars to look at the region through an omnibalancing perspective. As noted in the introduction, Miller and Toritsyn applied the theory to the post-Soviet states in general and to Ukraine and Uzbekistan in particular.²⁷⁴ They put a special emphasis on galvanizing opposition forces defined as a variant of domestic level threat, which resulted in civil revolutions in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan. In fact, these opposition movements did not take the form of armed violence and seized power rather through peaceful ways. Yet, Miller and Toritsyn emphasize the differences concerning government changes in the CIS and in democratic states where the legitimacy of the political process is rarely questioned and personal survival and

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

²⁷² *Ibid.* p. 25.

²⁷³ See Steven R. David, “Explaining Third World Alignment,” and Steven R. David, **Choosing Sides Alignment and Realignment in the Third World.**

²⁷⁴ Miller and Toritsyn, *op.cit.*

wealth of the leaders are seldom at stake. In the post-Soviet states where there are no well-established practices and procedures for a regime change, the leaders' fear about galvanizing opposition movements and possible consequences of losing of power seem to be reasonable. Such concerns would inevitably affect their alignment preferences.

In this respect, while applying alignment theories to the CIS region, this study also examines Russia's assistance for regime survival in the post-Soviet states through the omnibalancing perspective. There are also some studies analyzing the impact of radical Islamist opposition and domestic armed conflicts in alignment preferences of Central Asian states such as Uzbekistan and Tajikistan.²⁷⁵ Such domestic level threats make relevance to the security cooperation within the framework of the CSTO, therefore, need to be examined by this study. However, our study's focus will not be on alignment decisions of small regional states but we will try to explore how Russia has confronted and utilized regional domestic threats in the CIS to reach its strategic objectives.

As seen above, the main studies which lay the foundations of balance of threat and omnibalancing theories generally focus on the asymmetrical alignments between major powers and small states that are vulnerable to external and domestic level threats. In fact, Walt's theory, as a systemic approach suggesting that states balance against the most threatening state by allying with the less threatening ones, seems to be applicable to any type of state actor in the international system including the contemporary great powers. Yet, the cases of alignments focused by Walt and other scholars testing the theory generally include small regional powers.²⁷⁶ The relative stability of great power alignments during the Cold War compared to the multipolar era in European history may be a reason for scholars to move their focus towards geopolitical competition in peripheral areas. With the emergence of the unipolar system, however, scholars again turned to the question about possible responses by

²⁷⁵ See Matteo Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignment in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," *International Political Science Review*, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2007, pp. 253-271; Kirill Nourzhanov, "Omnibalancing in Tajikistan's Foreign Policy: Security-Driven Discourses of Alignment with Iran," *Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies*, Vol. 14, No. 3, 2012, pp. 363-381.

²⁷⁶ For example see Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*; Walt "Testing Theories of Alliance Formation..."; Steve Yetiv, "The Travails of Balance of Power Theory: The United States in the Middle East", *Security Studies*, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2006, pp. 70-105; and MacDougall, *Post-Soviet Strategic Alignment...*

other great powers against the US preponderance. As a result, soft balancing theory emerged as a popular approach that analyses dynamics of security cooperation between the second-tier powers against unilateral policies by the dominant power in the international system.

IV. Soft Balancing Approach

Studies on soft balancing theory generally make references to a larger academic debate about unipolarity in international relations. In the 1990s, some prominent scholars argued that unipolarity is not durable and it seems inevitable that other major powers would rise to challenge the US preponderance.²⁷⁷ Within a decade, however, it became increasingly evident that unipolarity did not immediately lead to such a systemic transformation and thus the scholarly conventional wisdom began to change.²⁷⁸ At this point, some scholars emphasized the unipolar distribution of power itself as the main factor that makes counterbalancing prohibitively costly for weaker states and they argued that balancing will long remain unlikely to emerge.²⁷⁹ Scholars studying on soft balancing theory, admit that unipolarity discourages secondary powers to engage in conventional balancing through internal arms build-up or military alliance formation. However, they challenge the view that the US cannot be balanced and focus on some low-cost strategies labeled as soft balancing which aims to undermine threatening policies by the unipolar leader.²⁸⁰ Because proponents of soft balancing suggest that it is most likely to be practiced in unipolar systems, first we need to examine structural constraints by the current international system on alignment behavior of great powers.²⁸¹

²⁷⁷ For example, Kenneth Waltz and Christopher Layne suggested that the US power preponderance will induce others to balance against it. Kenneth N. Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," **The American Political Science Review**, Vol. 91, No. 4, 1997, p. 915; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Illusion: Why New Great Powers Will Rise," **International Security**, Vol. 17, No. 4, 1993, pp. 5-51.

²⁷⁸ Pape, *op.cit.*, p. 9.

²⁷⁹ See Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance**, p. 24; William C. Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," **International Security**, Vol. 24, No. 1, 1999, pp. 5-41; and William C. Wohlforth, "Us Strategy in a Unipolar World," John Ikenberry (ed.), **America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power**, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002, pp. 98-118.

²⁸⁰ See T.V. Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance," T.V. Paul, James J. Wirtz, and Michel Fortmann (ed.), **Balance of Power: Theory and Practice in the 21st Century**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2004, pp. 1-25; and T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," pp. 46-71.

²⁸¹ See Chaka Ferguson, **Soft Power as the New Norm: How the Chinese-Russian Strategic Partnership (Soft) Balances American Hegemony in an Era of Unipolarity**, Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation, Florida International University, 2011, p. 64.

A. Balancing Dynamics and Alignment Formation in a Unipolar World

As the unipolar distribution of power was further consolidated in the first decade of the 2000s, scholars began to further elaborate its theoretical and practical implications. In this respect, they developed operational definitions for unipolarity. While doing this, they remained loyal to the neorealist approach which deals with power at the system level by focusing on the distribution of capabilities. In this respect, Brooks and Wohlforth defines, the term ‘pole’, as a state that “*commands an especially large share of the resources or capabilities states can use to achieve their ends*” and “*excels in all the component elements of state capability, conventionally defined as size of population and territory, resource endowment, economic capacity, military might, and organizational-institutional “competence.”*”²⁸² Accordingly, unipolarity refers to an international system that contains only “*one state whose overall share of capabilities places it unambiguously in a class by itself compared to all other states*”²⁸³ Unipolarity has a distinct quality that there is no other single state which is powerful enough to balance against the leading state in the system.²⁸⁴ However, it has to be noted that unipolarity differs from hegemony; while the former is about the distribution of material capabilities, the latter refers to political relations and degrees of influence. To identify a system as unipolar does not prejudge questions about the logic of political relationships, and by definition, a unipolar leader does not always get the outcomes it prefers.²⁸⁵

After the Cold War, the United States’ share of power in the international system reached a point that is greater than any single power ever had in the last three centuries.²⁸⁶ As Wohlforth suggests, the US is the only leading power in the history of modern international politics, with a decisive preponderance in all the significant components of national power, e.g. economic, military, technological, and geopolitical.²⁸⁷ Today the US military primacy was supported by huge defense

²⁸² See Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance**, p. 12. The Authors quote the components of national capability from Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, p. 131.

²⁸³ John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C Wohlforth, "Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences," John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C Wohlforth (ed.), **International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 6.

²⁸⁴ Pape, **op.cit.**, p. 11.

²⁸⁵ Ikenberry, Mastanduno, and Wohlforth, "Introduction: Unipolarity, State Behavior, and Systemic Consequences," pp. 4-5.

²⁸⁶ Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance**, p. 12.

²⁸⁷ Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 7.

spending which accounts for nearly 53 percent of the total of all major powers and 36 percent of the world total. Despite China's rise in recent years, the US still controls almost one-quarter of the world economy and its economic capability places itself in a different category compared to the following major states (Table 2).²⁸⁸

Table 2 - Military expenditures and gross domestic products (GDP) of the major states (2018)²⁸⁹

	Military expenditures (\$ billion)	% Major power defense expenditures	% World defense expenditures	GDP, current prices (\$ billion)	% Major power GDP, current prices	% World GDP, current prices
United States	649	52,47%	36	20,494	38,80%	24,18%
China	250*	20,21%	14*	13,407	25,38%	15,82%
India	66,5	5,38%	3,7	2,718	5,15%	3,21%
France	63,8	5,16%	3,5	2,775*	5,25%	3,27%
Russia	61,4	4,96%	3,4	1,631*	3,09%	1,92%
UK	50	4,04%	2,7	2,829	5,36%	3,34%
Germany	49,5	4,00%	2,7	4,001	7,57%	4,72%
Japan	46,6	3,77%	2,6	4,971	9,41%	5,87%

The unipolarity debate started in the early 1990s when its durability was mostly in question. In the following years, the American primacy did not decline but further consolidated, therefore scholars began to analyze why the US has not been balanced

²⁸⁸ Here it is not argued that these two indexes i.e. military expenditures and GDP alone could measure distribution of capabilities definitely and determine the system's type. As Waltz suggests, the power of a states depends on how they scores on all of the components of national capabilities. "*States have different combinations of capabilities which are difficult to measure and compare.*" Yet, historically, "*one finds general agreement about who the great powers of a period are, with occasional doubt about marginal cases.*" Waltz, **Theory of International Politics**, p. 131. The military expenditures and GDPs support the general agreement that the US is the leading power with superiority over all of the other major states. Besides, some other components which are harder measure such as the US technological and innovative capabilities and geopolitical advantages also underline the American preponderance. John Ikenberry, "Introduction," John Ikenberry (ed.), **America Unrivaled: The Future of the Balance of Power**, New York: Cornell University Press, 2002, p.1 and Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 7.

²⁸⁹ Adapted by merging two tables from Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance...**, pp. 29, 32. Updated with the data from Nan Tian et al. "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2018," April 2019, SIPRI, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2019-04/fs_1904_milex_2018.pdf (30.11.2019); and "IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2019," <https://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2019/01/weodata/index.aspx> (15.06.2019). Data indicated with an asterisk represents the institutions' estimates. Though Saudi Arabia moved its position to the third rank between China and India in the list of the countries with the highest military expenditure in 2018, it was removed from the table due to the fact that its capabilities fall short of a great power, considering other components of national power.

and how it can preserve its preponderance.²⁹⁰ In recent years, the rapid rise of China induced some scholars to talk about the end of American primacy by challenging the thesis that unipolarity is durable.²⁹¹ The analyses supporting this argument emphasize that there are clear signs that the US influence in world politics is diminishing and that China's economy would overtake the US economy within a few decades. However, none of them argues that in terms of material capabilities China has already established itself as a superpower which could balance the US alone. Rather, they focus on the future prospects that China would first convert its economic power to military capabilities. Then Beijing may challenge the US military preponderance, try to establish a regional hegemony in East Asia, and maybe enter into an intense rivalry with this state for global superiority.²⁹² The implications of China's rise on Russia's alignment strategies are elaborated in Part Two, Chapter Two. However, when we look at the present world, we see that the US GDP in market prices around 53 percent bigger than the Chinese GDP.²⁹³ Maybe more importantly for defense, the US spends more than the total of following major powers. In addition, because our analysis focuses on Russia's alignment strategies in the 2000s and those strategies were mainly developed under the unipolar distribution of power, we need to further elaborate the constraints by unipolar international structure on alignment behavior by great powers.

William Wohlforth and Stephen Brooks put forward comprehensive analyses that try to explain the anomaly that the US power has not been balanced yet, by other great powers acting together in a coalition.²⁹⁴ Balance of power theory predicts that states try to prevent to the rise of a hegemon, thus an ascending power must be

²⁹⁰ For example, see Wohlforth, "Us Strategy in a Unipolar World"; Walt, "Keeping the World 'Off Balance': Self Restraint and U.S. Foreign Policy."

²⁹¹ Stephen M. Walt, "The End of the American Era," *The National Interest*, Vol., No. 116, 2011, pp. 6-16; Christopher Layne, "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2012, pp. 203-213; Christopher Layne, "The Unipolar Exit: Beyond the Pax Americana," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2011, pp. 149-164; and Randall L Schweller and Xiaoyu Pu, "After Unipolarity: China's Visions of International Order in an Era of Us Decline," *International Security*, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2011, pp. 41-72.

²⁹² See Layne, "This Time It's Real: The End of Unipolarity and the Pax Americana," pp. 2-4; and Walt, "The End of the American Era," pp. 9-10.

²⁹³ See "IMF World Economic Outlook Database, April 2019". In order to measure economic power of great powers, Layne uses an alternative index i.e. purchasing power parity version of GDP which generates more favorable results for China vis-à-vis the US. However, as Wohlforth emphasizes, purchasing power parity based index is more appropriate to be used in comparative domestic level researches rather than global level analyses. William C Wohlforth, "How Not to Evaluate Theories," *International Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 56, No. 1, 2012, p. 219, fn. 1.

²⁹⁴ Brooks and Wohlforth, *World out of Balance...*; Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Assessing the Balance," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 24, No. 2, 2011, pp. 201-219; Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World"; Wohlforth, "Us Strategy in a Unipolar World,"

concerned about counterbalancing. Yet, the theory yields no such implication for a state which has already established its material primacy. In this respect, the Authors argue that once a country achieves such a unique position in the system, the effect of increasing power is reversed; the stronger the leading state, the more unlikely are counterbalancing dynamics.²⁹⁵ The military and economic power gap between the US and each great power makes balancing very costly and an almost hopeless task.²⁹⁶ Furthermore, forming balancing coalitions through military alliances or engaging intense arms buildup by secondary powers may trigger an adverse reaction by the unipole. As T.V. Paul suggests, such a reaction would undermine the economic and military security of great powers and may leave them less secure than before.²⁹⁷

The power gap between the unipole and the other members of the international system requires a counterbalancing coalition that includes most or possibly even all of the major powers.²⁹⁸ This fact draws our attention into the second factor that renders balancing much more difficult in unipolar systems namely the problems of coordination and collective action. As Snyder suggests, “[t]he logic collective goods undercuts the balance of power theory.”²⁹⁹ The security associated with an international equilibrium could be enjoyed by all actors in the system, whether or not they pay the cost for balancing. Under unipolarity, balancing requires the sudden resolution of coordination and collective action problems, because buck-passing by any major power may doom the others all leaving the coalition less powerful than the system’s leader.³⁰⁰ This fact facilitates the United States to play a successful ‘divide-and-conquer’ strategy through punishing balancers and rewarding major powers that remain aloof or support itself instead.³⁰¹

Geography further complicates the problems of coordination and collective action among the secondary powers in the current international system. Leaving the unipolar leader aside, all other great powers are clustered in and around Eurasia. Due to their proximity to one other, great powers’ attempts to balance the unipole through

²⁹⁵ Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance...**, p. 23.

²⁹⁶ Birthe Hansen, **Unipolarity and World Politics: A Theory and Its Implications**, p. 31.

²⁹⁷ Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance," p. 3.

²⁹⁸ Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 11.

²⁹⁹ Snyder, **Alliance Politics**, p. 50. Snyder’s argument outlined here is cited by Wohlforth, "Us Strategy in a Unipolar World," p. 102.

³⁰⁰ Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," pp. 11-12.

³⁰¹ Stephen M. Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 96.

internal efforts are likely to create security dilemmas with nearby states which may spark local counterbalancing. Such balancing could emerge through compensatory internal efforts, regional alignments or even alignments with the US.³⁰² In this regard, alignment with the unipole cannot be called as bandwagoning as those states will not capitulate the US power and threat. It should rather be classified as ‘regional balancing’ against nearby threatening states. However, Walt argues that it is a strategy supportive of the unipole at least as much as bandwagoning.³⁰³ Besides, some states may want to utilize the US capabilities to deal with regional threats by non-state actors such as international terrorism, as they see a common interest to suppress them. Such security cooperation may well fall short of comprehensive alignment and also cannot be classified as bandwagoning. However, the shared fear of terrorism here does provide a reason for states to overlook their concerns about the US power and pushes them to a limited and ad hoc collaboration with the unipole.³⁰⁴

In connection with geography, the relative importance of local issues rather than the global balance of power is another factor feeding the problems of coordination and collective action among the secondary powers. Wohlforth puts this factor clearly that, “*politics –even international politics- is most often local.*”³⁰⁵ Because, to project power is difficult over long distances, for any state the most significant threats and opportunities tend to be nearby. Therefore, great powers generally face strong incentives to control regional developments regarding their security interests in their neighborhood. The more great powers are embedded in a regional security system, the less they become willing to form a counterbalancing coalition.³⁰⁶ In this case, the cost of losing autonomy by entering into a power accumulating alliance further increases for great powers, especially on the side of the weaker ones. That is why Walt argues that balancing efforts by great powers will not take the form of a formal countervailing alliance, “*unless the US adopts an extremely aggressive approach to several different parts of the world.*”³⁰⁷

³⁰² Wohlforth, "Us Strategy in a Unipolar World," p. 107.

³⁰³ Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," pp. 101, 111-114. History suggests that regional balancing by major powers are also possible, as this motivation, for example, has brought Western European states and to some degree China in an anti-Soviet coalition. **Ibid.**

³⁰⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 114.

³⁰⁵ Wohlforth, "Us Strategy in a Unipolar World," p. 102.

³⁰⁶ **Ibid.**, pp. 107-108.

³⁰⁷ Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 119.

Last but not least, chain ganging is suggested as a critical factor that complicates the problems of coordination and collective action in alliance formation and management.³⁰⁸ Chain ganging refers to being dragged into conflict by a reckless and aggressive ally. Snyder calls the phenomenon as (the risk of) entrapment and suggests that it occurs when one state involves in conflict but does not share the interest of its ally or shares it only partially.³⁰⁹ Entrapment is unavoidable when one values the preservation of the alliance more than the cost of involving into the conflict in favor of its ally's interests. Under unipolarity, it is unlikely for great powers to be dragged into an armed conflict with the superpower through chain ganging, because considering its superior capabilities, great powers would strictly avoid a direct conflict with the US. However, great powers may fall into regional conflicts with some regional actors, in which the US involved through their allies or proxies. Entrapment here could result in dragging a great power in costly and enduring conflicts over an issue that they are not concerned about much. As a result, great powers will avoid undertaking alliance commitments together with the others regarding their divergent security interests over different parts of the world.

Moving beyond the problems of coordination and collective action, one can suggest non-prevalence of existential threats in the current international system as the last significant factor that undermines great powers' motivation towards counterbalancing. In history, fears of losing sovereignty and physical security to a reigning hegemon have been the primary factor forcing the other states counterbalance through internal arms buildup and military alliances. However, as Paul suggests, great powers currently do not consider the United States as a direct threat to their existential security.³¹⁰ According to T.V. Paul, there are three reasons why other great powers do not fear a direct US aggression.³¹¹ First, the possession of nuclear weapons by some major powers allows them to worry less about a military subjugation by the United States. Nuclear weapons even in small numbers provide them with credible deterrence against a possible aggression by the US. This situation here refers to existential deterrence the notion that the possession of nuclear weapons deter aggressors

³⁰⁸ See Thomas J. Christensen and Jack Snyder, "Chain Gangs and Passed Bucks: Predicting Alliance Patterns in Multipolarity," *International Organization*, Vol., 1990, pp. 137-168; and Glenn H Snyder, "The Security Dilemma in Alliance Politics," *World politics*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 1984, pp. 461-495.

³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

³¹⁰ Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," pp. 47-53.

³¹¹ See *ibid.* p. 56.

regarding the risk of an escalation towards a nuclear war and catastrophic consequences it may produce, even it is not certain that the adversary state has not the capabilities guaranteeing mutually assured destruction.³¹² Second, as the US avoids intervening in secessionist movements in Russia, China and India directly (e.g. by offering military assistance), those states are further assured that Washington does not want to challenge their territorial integrity. Third, the recent history of the world proves that the forces of nationalism and asymmetric strategies by local groups make a permanent occupation of a state infeasible. All these three facts demonstrate that great powers do not need to consider the US military superiority as a direct threat to their sovereignty and territorial integrity. In this respect, Paul notes that, although not explicitly stated, the military doctrines of great powers including China and Russia rule out war with the US and move their focus increasingly on regional and internal security challenges.³¹³ Therefore there is no strong imperative for them to balance the unipole through internal means or military alliances.

To sum up, the current power gap between the US and second-ranked powers, the problems of coordination and collective action and the diminution of existential threats to great power security can be suggested as the three main factors that have prevented the emergence of a counterbalancing coalition in the current system, which would re-establish the global balance of power. However, it does not mean that the unipolarity will endure, as long as these factors continue to be effective. As Wohlforth suggests, in the absence of counterbalancing, *"the fate of unipolarity depends on the relative rates of growth and innovation of the main powers."*³¹⁴ In this respect, we do not know whether or when other great powers would reach the material capabilities sufficient to balance the US in the international security realm. Besides, as noted earlier, the military and economic preponderance of the unipole does not ensure that the US could resolve all international disputes in favor of its interests by projecting power throughout the world. Other great powers may well practice some other strategies of opposition against such hegemonic aspirations. In this respect, soft

³¹² Marc Trachtenberg offers a clear-cut definition for existential deterrence: *"The mere existence of nuclear forces means that, whatever we say or do, there is a certain irreducible risk that an armed conflict might escalate into a nuclear war. The fear of escalation is thus factored into political calculations: faced with this risk, states are more cautious and more prudent than they would otherwise be."* Trachtenberg, "The Influence of Nuclear Weapons in the Cuban Missile Crisis," p. 139.

³¹³ Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," p. 53.

³¹⁴ Wohlforth, "The Stability of a Unipolar World," p. 32.

balancing by some great powers has been a factor constraining the US military actions in the 2000s, when Washington began to pursue excessive unilateral policies discarding their interest altogether.

B. Soft Balancing Behavior

Even though the most important concern that has driven balancing behavior throughout the history has been existential threats to state sovereignty and territoriality, theoretical studies on balancing behavior also implies that state also balance against non-existential threats to secondary security issues.³¹⁵ Accordingly, the high-level security currently enjoyed by great powers does not mean that they feel easy with the US overwhelming capabilities or that they simply view it as a benign dominant power. As T.V. Paul suggests, since the turn of this century, the US has followed some quasi-imperial policies through indirect means generally by helping to establishment of friendly regimes, *“in strategic regions such as the Middle East and East Asia, from where it can control the flow of goods and commodities vital for its economy as well as those of its allies.”*³¹⁶ Such indirect threats by the US strategic behavior could easily harm other great powers’ secondary security interest. According to Robert Pape:

*“Concerns over indirect threats are likely to be greater in unipolar systems than in other balance of power systems. A unipolar leader is so strong that it may engage in military actions in distant regions of the world that are often likely to have real, if inadvertent, consequences for the security of major powers that are geographically close or have important economic ties to the region. For instance, how the unipolar leader wages a war on transnational terrorism can reduce or improve the security of other major powers, giving them a powerful security interest in how such a war is waged.”*³¹⁷

Soft balancing theory, in this regard, emphasizes ‘non-existential’ and ‘indirect threats’ by the military actions of a major power which undermine the security of another, even if unintentionally.³¹⁸ The debate on soft balancing reached its peak around 2005 following the occupation of Iraq by the US-led coalition. Yet, in the background, rising political and diplomatic cooperation between Russia and China as a response to the Kosovo crisis of 1999 has been another factor inspiring soft balancing

³¹⁵ See Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance...**, pp. 49-50. Kenneth Waltz explicitly suggests that *“balancing is a strategy for survival, a way of attempting to maintain a state’s autonomous way of life.”* Quoted in **ibid.**

³¹⁶ Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," p. 55.

³¹⁷ Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 14.

³¹⁸ **Ibid.**, p. 13.

theorists. The common concern of these two states was that a NATO operation bypassing the UN could establish a dangerous example. This pushed them to take common diplomatic initiatives in the UN and to develop their security cooperation and dialogue through the 2001 Treaty on Good Neighborliness, Friendship, and Cooperation and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.³¹⁹ On the other hand, the unilateralist tendencies by the Bush administration culminating towards the Iraq war expanded the group of the major states opposing the US military policies, even to include some of its key NATO allies such as France and Germany. In the UN Security Council, these two states acted together with Russia and China to block resolutions that would authorize the US and its allies for the Iraq operation. They continued their diplomatic efforts in other platforms i.e. EU and NATO and prevented the latter's involvement in the war. From the perspective of Russia, China, France, Germany, as well as a majority of states in the international system, the Iraq war posed a challenge to the Westphalian sovereignty norm. The US now was making an explicit claim to its sovereign right to intervene, to disarm and to subvert regimes in other countries subject to no external restraint.³²⁰ The need to constrain the US unbalanced power was obvious, yet regarding risks and costs those states preferred a subtler strategy of balancing.

Therefore, this antiwar coalition did not balance the US in the conventional sense e.g. by trying to resist its armed forces directly or sending military support to Iraq, but appealed to diplomatic and political means of resistance that increased the political and economic costs on Washington's decision to go to war.³²¹ In this respect, Robert Pape defines soft balancing as "*actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies.*"³²² Soft balancing scholars share the previous subsection's argument that the traditional 'hard' balancing through substantial military expenditures or forming alliances has lost its appeal among second-tier powers. For them, the resistance to the US power has taken a new form that involves tacit balancing short of formal alliances. According to Paul, soft

³¹⁹ Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," pp. 60-64.

³²⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 64-70 and Judith Kelley, "Strategic Non-Cooperation as Soft Balancing: Why Iraq Was Not Just About Iraq," *International Politics*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2005, pp. 153-173.

³²¹ Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 104.

³²² Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 10.

balancing emerges when states develop ‘ententes’ or limited security understandings together against a specific potentially threatening state or a rising power. Besides bilateral diplomatic relations, the collaboration may also develop under the framework or regional or international institutions. The security cooperation within the soft balancing coalition may extend to the military realm but in a restricted manner through e.g. limited arms buildup and ad hoc cooperative exercises.³²³

Stephen Walt emphasizes another distinction between hard balancing and soft balancing by focusing on the motivations of each behavior:

*““Hard balancing” focuses on the overall balance of power and seeks to assemble a countervailing coalition that will be strong enough to keep the dominant power in check. By contrast, soft balancing does not seek or expect to alter the overall distribution of capabilities. Instead, a strategy of soft balancing accepts the current balance of power but seeks to obtain better outcomes within it.”*³²⁴

On the other side, Kai He and Huiyun Feng, offer two categories within soft balancing focusing on the content of cooperation among the balancers. According to these authors, besides non-military forms of soft balancing, we can talk about a ‘military soft balancing,’ as states sometimes use military efforts to undermine aggressive policies of a threatening state. It could be practiced through arms control initiatives restraining the powerful state. In addition, states could supply arms to the adversaries of that threatening state in the absence of any formal commitment and alliance.³²⁵ At the heart of soft balancing logic, there is a concern to prevent any possible retaliation by the dominant power. Even though security cooperation could extend into the military sphere, states will avoid directly challenging the threatening power by defining it as an outright enemy or forming military alliances against that powerful state.³²⁶

In the literature, scholars suggest some key examples of soft balancing actions in which Russia involves as a central actor.³²⁷ For example, the transfer of nuclear

³²³ Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance," p. 3.

³²⁴ Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 104.

³²⁵ Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and Us Policy toward China," pp. 372-374.

³²⁶ See Nikolaos Tzifakis, **The Emergence of Israeli-Greek Cooperation**, New York: Springer, 2015, p. 32; and Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," p. 59.

³²⁷ Stephen G. Brooks and William C. Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," **International Security**, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2005, pp. 83-91.

technology and military hardware by Russia to Iran is generally considered as a soft balancing measurement against the US military aspirations towards the region. At the same time, Russia's strategic partnerships with India and China developed through bilateral diplomatic relationships, the SCO framework, and arms sale agreements are posed as another case by scholars.³²⁸ Besides, Paul's suggestion that soft balancing emerges when states developing ententes, directly links this theoretical approach to the security cooperation among Russia, India, and China. As noted earlier, Russia signed bilateral agreements establishing ententes with these two states in the 1990s. Then the SCO was transformed into a consultation pact in the 2000s.

Chaka Ferguson offers an operational definition of soft balancing in his article examining how the strategic partnership between Russia and China has played out within the confines of the SCO. For him, soft balancing refers to "*nonmilitary alignments of at least two states that are designed to reduce or remove the military presence and external influence of an outside power from a specific region.*"³²⁹ Such an alignment may adapt three tactics to conduct soft balancing behavior "*indirect attempts to reduce or remove the military presence of the external actor from a region; removing regional actors allied politically with the external great power; and reducing economic, cultural and normative influences promoted by an external actor.*"³³⁰ According to the Author, soft balancing literature implies that it is largely a regional strategy aiming at denying American influence in geographic areas proximate to other great powers.

Weiqing Song, on the other side, shows that how the limited and ad hoc security cooperation against terrorism, separatism and religious extremism within the SCO has been used as a soft balancing measurement against the US growing regional influence.³³¹ The joint SCO military exercises are officially counter-terrorist practices and do not make any reference to the United States. However, through this initiative, the members show generally to the world and particularly to the United States that they have the determination and capability to fight regional terrorism in the region. In this

³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

³²⁹ Chaka Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," p. 200.

³³⁰ *Ibid.*

³³¹ See Weiqing Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 672.

respect, those states try to remove the causes on which the US legitimizes its military engagement to the region. Therefore this ad hoc cooperation embodied in joint exercises can be well identified as an initiative to “*delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies*” touching upon Pape’s definition of soft balancing.³³²

In order to put forward the connections between this theoretical approach and Russia’s alignment strategies, we need to further elaborate how soft balancing works. Robert Pape suggests that there are four common strategies of soft balancing which states use against the unipole: (i) territorial denial, (ii) economic strengthening, (iii) entangling diplomacy, and (iv) signaling of resolve to balance.³³³ Superior states often utilize territories of third countries for their military power projections as staging areas for their ground forces or as transit bases for air and naval forces. In this regard, ‘territorial denial’ may reduce the superpower’s prospects for victory regarding a planned military operation by increasing the costs of intervention, as the unipole would be forced to fight with air and sea power alone. This is a discouraging factor for a superpower to conduct unilateral military operations throughout the international system. As examined in this dissertation, Russian and Chinese initiatives within the SCO framework aiming at removing the US military presence from Central Asia can be viewed as an example of such a strategy.³³⁴ ‘Economic strengthening’ strategy through e.g. establishing regional trade blocs vis-à-vis the dominant state is not elaborated by this study, since our definition of alignment covers security cooperation and excludes economic collaboration. However, ‘entangling diplomacy’ against the US unilateral policies practiced at the bilateral and institutional levels (in the UN and other international organizations) can be taken as a direct indicator of alignment. To quote Walt again, our definition of alignment covers “*informal ad hoc agreements based either on tacit understandings or some tangible form of commitment, such as verbal assurances.*”³³⁵

Last but not least, second-ranked powers states give ‘signals of resolve to balance’ by acting collectively against a sole superpower through some ways short of

³³² Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 10.

³³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37.

³³⁴ See Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’," pp. 210-213.

³³⁵ Stephen M. Walt, “Why Alliances Endure and Collapse,” p. 157.

direct confrontation. In Pape's words, a core purpose of soft balancing actions "*is not to coerce or even to impede the superior state's current actions, but to demonstrate resolve in a manner that signals a commitment to resist the superpower's future ambitions.*"³³⁶ This is also helpful to overcome the fear that the collective action among soft balancers could not be managed. Those states could gradually increase their trust to each other, by demonstrating their decisiveness and cooperating repeatedly for the sake of this common goal.³³⁷ Accordingly, such signals are also an indicator for us to identify a strengthened alignment between the states under examination.

It is also important here to consider connections between the soft balancing approach and the other theories elaborated previously in order to grasp its logic more clearly. As Brooks and Wohlforth indicate, soft balancing is rooted in balance of threat theory rather than balance of power theory.³³⁸ Pape's study confirms in many places that it is aggressive unilateralism by the Bush administration that has induced soft balancing in the 2000s, though the US has been exempt from such a constraint in the previous decade.³³⁹ Both Pape and Paul claim that if the unipole continues its aggressive policies, intense efforts to restrain it could evolve into a hard balancing coalition.³⁴⁰ Conversely, Pape argues, if the US returns to multilateralism and gives up its aggressive intentions, there would be little balancing in any kind. This proposition contradicts with balance of power theory which claims that systemic imperatives force states to counterbalance, even though the rising power seems to be benign.³⁴¹

³³⁶ Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 37.

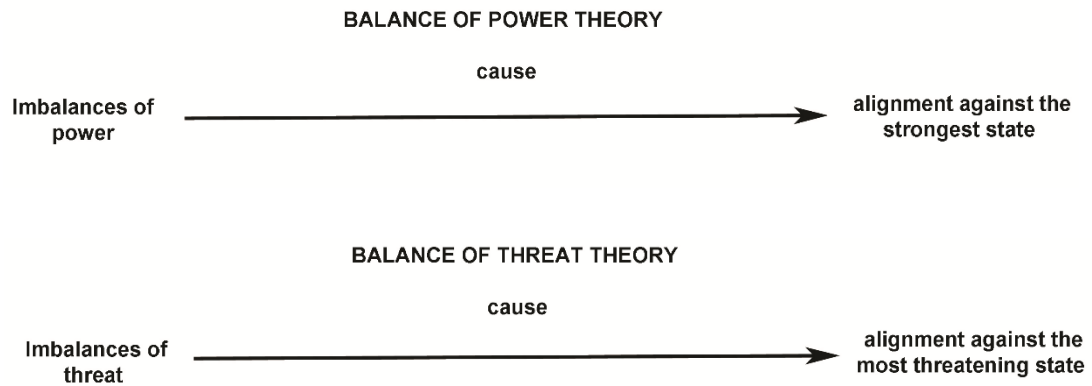
³³⁷ **Ibid.**

³³⁸ Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance...**, p. 61.

³³⁹ See Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," pp. 9-10, 13. In another page, Pape argues explicitly that, "*the more aggressive the intentions of the unipolar hegemon, the more intense the balancing by second ranked states, to the extent balancing is possible at all.*" **Ibid.**, p. 18.

³⁴⁰ **Ibid.** and T.V. Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," p. 71.

³⁴¹ In defense of balance of power theory, for example, Waltz suggests that even the US "*behaves with moderation, restraint and forbearance, weaker states will worry about its future behavior*" and this concern will lead them to balance; therefore, unipolarity will not last long." Waltz, "Evaluating Theories," p. 915.

Figure 4 - Alignment formation in balance of power and balance of threat theories³⁴²

As shown in figure 4, balance of power theory suggests that states ally with weaker powers against stronger ones to remove imbalances of power. According to Walt, however, states primarily pay regard to imbalances of threat emerging when the most threatening state seems remarkably more dangerous than the second most threatening state or coalition.³⁴³ In this respect, alignment formation is about making preferences between different sources of external threats, by evaluating their degrees. Formation of an alignment between two states does not necessarily eliminate bilateral threat perceptions, as their security interests beyond countering a common adversary may continue to clash with each other. Such contradictions of interest are generally more salient in ententes which fall short of formal alliances. As Snyder suggests, by reducing the level of conflict ententes tacitly raise expectations of mutual support. But past adversaries here do not reduce their conflict enough to transform their cooperation into an alliance.³⁴⁴

Regarding our case, scholars suggest that the US aggressive unilateralism in Eurasia has been a significant catalyst for the rising security cooperation between Russia and China and among the members of the SCO.³⁴⁵ It is also possible that the distribution of threats may change in the future, and accordingly, it could deeply affect alignments between Russia and other major Asian states. If the US becomes less threatening towards the major Asian states, it may again uncover the conflicts of

³⁴² Adapted from Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 256. The word 'alliance' in the original figure is replaced with 'alignment' considering the definitions applied by this study.

³⁴³ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁴ Snyder, *Alliance Politics*, p. 10.

³⁴⁵ For example, see Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of US Primacy," p. 64; Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 102 and Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," pp. 197-222.

regional and other interests among those states which are geographically proximate towards each other. In this sense, soft balancing against the US, supported by a flexible alignment strategy towards other major powers enables Russia to reformulate its position regarding changes distribution of threats. This strategy also prevents possible losses of autonomy for Moscow, as Russia avoids establishing rigid Cold-War-style military alliances with other major powers.

Soft balancing theory takes a position in between dichotomous perspectives that the current distribution of power renders balancing in any kind highly unlikely and that unipolarity will be brought to an end through 'hard' balancing by great powers. As Paul argues, these rigid perspectives cannot satisfactorily explain the empirical reality in current international politics.³⁴⁶ In this respect, soft balancing theory will provide us powerful insights to examine Russia's flexible alignment strategy that falls short of establishing formal alliances with major Asian states. However, like any theory, soft balancing is not without its critics. Brooks and Wohlforth put forward one of the most outstanding critics that what scholars call as soft balancing is indistinguishable from conventional policy disputes and diplomatic bargain. They suggest that the US, like every state, has usually faced such diplomatic opposition even long before it has established itself as the unipolar leader.³⁴⁷ The Authors also suggest alternative explanations for the key cases offered by soft balancing scholars including those we mentioned above. Regarding the establishment of the SCO, Brooks and Wohlforth, emphasize regional security concerns and the rise of transnational security challenges in Central Asia as the main inducement in the Sino-Russian rapprochement. They confirm that this ad hoc cooperation against non-military threats such as organized crime and terrorism may result in shifts in relative power and perhaps in reduced US freedom of action in the region. However, they insist that these outcomes are in fact 'side-effects' and should not be confused with the real causes that have driven the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership.³⁴⁸ In addition to that, Brooks and Wohlforth associate Russia's large amount of arms sales to China, India, and Iran as well as its cooperation in the nuclear technology to the latter with Moscow's economic interests. For them, states may undertake such actions

³⁴⁶ Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance," p. 13.

³⁴⁷ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," pp. 75-79.

³⁴⁸ Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance...**, pp. 72-73.

considering their economic gains, which have nothing to do with challenging the United States, though those actions may indirectly hamper the conduct of American foreign policy.³⁴⁹

On the other side, Lieber and Alexander offer a parallel critic that “*what is termed as soft balancing are so typical in history that they are not, and perhaps cannot be, distinguished from routine diplomatic friction between countries, even between allies.*”³⁵⁰ Diplomatic frictions, they contend, are a normal feature of world politics which have occasionally occurred also before the US reached its dominant position. Yet, as He and Feng point out, these Authors do not question why and how the United States increasingly became the focused target of diplomatic friction after the Cold War and especially in the 2000s.³⁵¹ The increasing occurrence of such friction between the unipole and great powers acting together inevitably induced more in-depth investigation and theorization by soft balancing scholars. As Walt points out if states choose to coordinate their actions and undertake new commitments with some other states, “*because they are worried about the unipole’s dominant position and/or are alarmed by the actions it is undertaking,*” we can identify such behavior as a form of balancing from a strategic perspective.³⁵²

In this respect, one can investigate for example the security cooperation between Russia and China and among the members of the SCO framework within a specific time period in a soft balancing perspective in order to explore the relationship between aggressive intentions by the US (as an independent variable) and strengthening alignments (the dependent variable). Brooks and Wohlforth seem to be right to some extent in their alternative explanations because there have been some other factors apart from the US military policies which have pushed the SCO members towards security cooperation. However, international organizations generally encompass many related objectives and activities together, and once established members could re-consider and shape their agenda in order to use them to manage their interests. In this sense, the soft balancing perspective will contribute us to

³⁴⁹ Brooks and Wohlforth, "Hard Times for Soft Balancing," pp. 75, 87-91.

³⁵⁰ Keir A. Lieber and Gerard Alexander, "Waiting for Balancing: Why the World Is Not Pushing Back," **International Security**, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2005, p. 131.

³⁵¹ Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and Us Policy toward China," p. 369.

³⁵² Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 104.

examine how indirect and non-existential threats by the global dominant power has shaped Russia's alignment strategies towards other major states.

C. Application Guidelines and Main Assumptions of the Study

So far in this chapter, we have elaborated theories of alignment focusing on their specific assumptions which are critical for our study. In the remaining pages, we examine logical connections between these approaches in order to consolidate the integrity of our theoretical perspective. While doing this, we will also discuss the applicability of the theories with respect to Russia's alignment strategies towards different states in the Eurasian region. Such a discussion, in turn, will put forward application guidelines by this study which utilizes various approaches within the same analysis. Last but not least, we will derive three basic assumptions from alignment theories with regard to our case, which will guide the whole analysis of Russia's alignment strategies.

As noted earlier, James Morrow's study sheds light to one aspect of our problematic that Russia has sought military alliances only with small regional states in the CIS. In addition to that, Morrow elaborates implications of his autonomy-security tradeoff model of alliances for balance of power and balance of threat theories.³⁵³ He underlines that Waltz ignores the role of minor powers that do not possess sufficient capabilities to shift the balance of power, therefore, only symmetrical alliances between major powers with roughly equal capabilities make relevance to balance of power theory. According to Morrow, however, balance of threat theory can account for both symmetrical alliances and asymmetrical alliances. Minor states seeking more security can balance external threats they face by aligning with a major power. They may also try to appease a threatening major power through bandwagoning with itself to avoid further losses in its security. In both cases, minor states sacrifice from their autonomy in exchange for security, while major powers get more freedom of action outside of their borders.

Although Morrow does not discuss his model's relevance to omnibalancing theory, the same logic also applies to asymmetrical alliances formed on the basis of domestic and transnational threats. In this case, a minor power can increase its security

³⁵³ See James Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," pp. 926-928.

through assistance by its major power ally against internal threats they face such as terrorism, extremist movements, and civil conflicts. In this regard, military alliances may serve for major powers as a tool of military power projection. Those alliances also prevent them from aligning alternative power centers, which in turn consolidate their autonomy in international politics. Therefore, Morrow's model on asymmetrical alliances, balance of threat theory and omnibalancing theory complement each other to explain Russia's long-standing attempts to collect the small post-Soviet States in a former military alliance since the 1990s. While applying our theoretical framework to Russia's alignment strategies in its near abroad, this study will utilize these three theoretical perspectives together. There is another aspect of Russia's alignment strategy towards the CIS, which is not covered by realist alignment theories. Besides its strategic objectives, Russia seems to have a genuine interest in confronting various sources of regional instability, considering their possible repercussions in its borders. This is a fact which needs to be taken into attendance by this study.

It should be also noted that all regional military alliances formed between Russia and post-Soviet states make relevance to the Kremlin's security interests at the regional level. Therefore, those alliances have nothing to do with hard balancing vs. soft balancing debate at the international system level, as they have only a marginal impact on global balance of power. This study takes soft balancing theory as instrumental rather to comprehend the transformation of major power alignments into a more flexible and ad hoc manner. In this regard, the study sticks to Walt's separation between hard balancing and soft balancing behavior: While the former concerns the overall balance of power and seeks to establish a countervailing coalition to keep the dominant power in check; the latter accepts the current balance of power, but seeks to obtain better outcomes within it.³⁵⁴ Here Walt makes a comparison between the motivations of each behavior, rather than instruments and arrangements utilized by balancing coalition.

³⁵⁴ Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 104.

Table 3 - Comparison of hard balancing and soft balancing behaviors³⁵⁵

	<i>Nature of Rivalry</i>	<i>Key Strategies</i>
<i>Hard Balancing</i>	Intense, open, often zero sum. Relative gains matter most.	Open arms buildup, formal alliances, or both.
<i>Soft Balancing</i>	Submerged, non-zero sum. Relative gains of limited concern for now.	Limited arms buildup. Informal, tacit, or ad hoc security understandings among affected states, within or outside of international institutions. Preventive strategy.

T.V. Paul, one of the most significant contributors to soft balancing theory, makes another separation between hard and soft balancing behaviors (Table 3). One could identify the intentions of balancers looking at the nature of the rivalry. In a hard balancing world, relative gains in power are of primary concern and need to be responded by other states in the system. In a system where soft balancing prevails, states have limited concerns on relative power but primarily consider how it is used. Here, Paul takes a step further and makes a separation between instruments and arrangements put in practice by balancers. To compensate relative power gains by the dominant state, hard balancers have to increase their own capabilities by open arms buildup. If it is not sufficient they have to pool their capabilities together to restore the balance of power. The best arrangement to provide this is to establish a formal military alliance which would ensure that the participants will undertake certain commitments for each other's security. Military alliances also signal that the member states are ready to use their capabilities collectively in case of an aggression by the dominant power. Furthermore, formal alliances create bodies and mechanisms which coordinate and even integrates military units of the members. That is why Paul and some other scholars associate hard balancing with formal alliances. On the other side, soft balancing is associated with ententes, tacit agreements, and ad hoc security understandings at bilateral or institutional levels. Those all apply to security cooperation between Russia and major Asian states within the SCO, which will be examined through the soft balancing perspective.

³⁵⁵ T.V. Paul, "Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance," p. 13.

However it does not mean that all initiatives opposing the US specific plans and policies, which rely on military instruments can be identified as hard balancing. Some scholars argue that recent armed reactions by the Kremlin against Western initiatives are examples of hard balancing acts; such as the Russian-Georgian war of 2008, Russia's intervention in Ukraine in 2014 and its military involvement in the Syrian civil war in favor of the Assad regime.³⁵⁶ According to the author of this study, however, this view seems to be flawed. It is a fact that all these military initiatives undertaken by Russia emerged as reflections of geopolitical competition between Moscow and Western powers. After these conflicts broke out, the Kremlin decided to intervene militarily into those three countries where Russia had some military presence dating back into history. The successful military operations against regional actors and proxies preserved and further consolidated Russia's regional position. However, beyond resisting power projections and military policies at the regional level, hard balancing is identified as a revisionist act at the international system level with regard to the global balance of power.³⁵⁷

In fact, such proxy conflicts were also observed during the Cold War years. As examined in Part Two, Chapter One, Russian troops occasionally intervened in regional conflicts in its near abroad in the 1990s. It is very likely that Russia will not avoid defending its positions and interests in the future when military crises would arise under similar conditions in confidence with its deterrence capabilities that

³⁵⁶ See Alexander Korolev, "Theories of Non-Balancing and Russia's Foreign Policy"; Alexander Korolev, "Systemic Balancing and Regional Hedging: China–Russia Relations," **The Chinese Journal of International Politics**, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2016, p. 385; and Nathan A. Sears, "China, Russia, and the Long 'Unipolar Moment'," *The Diplomat*, April 27, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/04/china-russia-and-the-unipolar-moment/> (18.10.2018). Korolev further contends that these cases run contrary to assumptions explaining why there is no counterbalancing against the United States by great powers in the contemporary unipolar system, some of which are examined at the beginning of this section. In a recent study, T.V. Paul takes a similar position associating hard and soft balancing behavior directly to instruments they use, which also examines "hard" and "soft" balancing actions by Russia and the US-NATO Alliance conducted against each other. T.V. Paul, **Restraining Great Powers: Soft Balancing from Empires to the Global Era**, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2018.

³⁵⁷ In this regard, Korolev suggests that he defines 'balancing' not as "*a condition under which the capabilities of great powers – or of groups of great powers – are relatively similar,*" but as "*actions (internal, external, independent, or unionized) that a particular state or group of states takes when the international system is showing a tendency toward imbalance – or is already imbalanced – to restore the condition of a balance of power.*" Alexander Korolev, "Theories of Non-Balancing and Russia's Foreign Policy," p. 3. This definition does not contradict with balance of power theory. Yet, the analysis on those three cases explains neither how these reactionary moves by Russia can be associated with its aim at restoring the balance of power nor how they can contribute such a condition to emerge. The analysis on the Syria case notes Russia's aim as "*shifting the balance in the region*", which "*is likely to have more substantial impact the international power configuration.*" See *ibid.*, pp. 19, 21. However such an impact -if it ever emerges would be likely on the margins.

prevent a direct armed response by the US and its allies. Yet such actions by Russia (military intervention into regional crises or direct military support to a regional actor) do not represent a challenge to the unipolar structure international system, while the constraints it poses over alignment behavior of great powers remain untouched. In this respect, this study embraces Walt's identification of hard and soft balancing, which is based on the motivations of each behavior. Although balancing of power at the system level requires military buildup and alliance formation among great powers, it is the motivations not only instruments that determine the type of balancing behavior.

On the other side, associating hard balancing (or to put it more appropriately 'counterbalancing' or 'balancing of power') directly with military instruments, would take soft balancing theory down from the system level and make it merely a theory of foreign policy. As a result, we can find many states with various capabilities in the system as a 'hard' balancer against any other power including the unipole (e.g. if it uses military means in a proxy conflict where the US is involved at the opposite side). This would contradict the neorealist research tradition which deals with power at the system level with regard to the distribution of capabilities across the units - not as a mean for political influence. Having spelled out our application guidelines, we can derive three main assumptions from all the theoretical discussion above to examine Russia's alignment strategies in Eurasia.

1) As a great power, Russia's autonomy concerns encourage it to form asymmetrical alliances with the post-Soviet states, which increases its freedom of action in its neighborhood, while the same concerns discourage it from establishing alliances with other major powers.

Russia's primary objective in the current international system seems to be preserving and consolidating its status as an indispensable great power. A great power is defined as a state that plays a major role in international politics with respect to security-related issues.³⁵⁸ To establish alliances with small regional states is a useful and effective way for a great power seeking to expand its military influence towards the regions of a strategic significance. To quote James Morrow again, the logic of alliance always includes a trade-off between autonomy and security. Here it is

³⁵⁸ Jack S Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495-1975," p. 585.

suggested that in a unipolar regional subsystem, autonomy gains provided by an asymmetric alliance given become much greater, while security costs remain at minimum. Because, once a great power with a huge power preponderance consolidates its military dominance over such a regional context like the CIS, the possibility of armed conflicts between regional decreases and external threats towards the region weaken. In this case, Russia faces a much smaller risk of entrapment into conflicts due to the military commitment it undertakes for its allies. On the other hand, Russia's huge relative capabilities projected towards the region boost its autonomy vis-a-vis other regional actors and foreign powers with an interest in penetration into the post-Soviet security space. This strengthens Russia's control over regional peace and conflict processes and weakens the possibility of successful challenges against the Kremlin's dominant position in the region by regional actors or outside powers aligned with them.

As examined later in this study, Russia's willingness to form asymmetrical alliances does not extend beyond the post-Soviet space. For example, Moscow's security cooperation with small powers in significant regions e.g. the Middle East falls short of a formal military alliance, where the risk of entrapment seems much bigger and the Kremlin's leverage on its allies remains more limited. Although Morrow's model does not concern on the distribution of power within a regional context and its implications for autonomy and security trade-offs in asymmetrical alliances, the role of this factor will be taken into attendance by this study. Lastly, Morrow's suggestions on symmetrical alliances seem to apply Russia's security cooperation with major powers in Asia, which also falls short of a military alliance. By avoiding such a binding alliance, the Kremlin preserves its autonomy to concentrate on regional security issues that are most crucial for Russia. Instead, Moscow seeks flexible arrangements for security cooperation with those states on the issues of common interests, which would consolidate the recognition of its place among other great powers in the current international system.

2) To consolidate the regional alliances and military power projections within the post-Soviet space, Russia utilizes and manipulates regional threats emphasized by balance of threat and omnibalancing perspectives.

In theory, all states in the international system seek to increase their autonomy and secure their independence, although the intensity of these motivations does vary among different post-Soviet states. States undertake alliance obligations when facing some threats which they consider to be dealt with effectively in an allied relationship. Balance of threat theory operates very well in the Cold-War-era Middle East as a conflict-ridden ‘multipolar regional subsystem embedded in the bipolar world.’³⁵⁹ However, in the post-Soviet unipolar regional system, regional states do not face such imminent external threats from other local actors with the notable exception of Armenia and Azerbaijan. In addition to that, considering three main sources of threat defined by Walt, i.e. ‘aggregate power, offensive power, and geographic proximity,’ Russia itself appears as the most threatening state. However, regional perceptions towards its ‘aggressive intentions’ alter by different small states. The power and geographical advantages of Russia, in this sense, provide Moscow with the ability to put effective pressure over balancers to bring them into his own orbit. However, today the most of the post-Soviet allies of Russia are not unwilling bandwagoners, as their governments appreciate Moscow’s security assistance against domestic threats such as revolutionary opposition movements, religious extremism, and terrorism, which all make relevance to the omnibalancing perspective.

As examined later in this study, Russia’s assertive policies towards the regional balancers have brought optimum success in some cases, in the early 1990s. As a result, Moscow signed formal alliances with Azerbaijan and Georgia, while the latter also permitted Russian military presence on its territory. After appeasing Russia through cooperation, these two states could make progress in stabilizing their country and establishing their own national militaries. Besides Georgia, Russia secured a military presence in Moldova and Ukraine through intervention into regional conflicts, although these states have never joined the CST alliance. In fact, Russia’s military engagement strategy into the regional conflicts welcomed by local people serves the same Russian objective that is increasing its regional military dominance and autonomy, albeit in a more limited manner. Although Russia’s interventions did not result in formation of an alliance in several cases, this kind of a military engagement seems to be the second-best option in the Russian strategy, because it also blocks the possibility of the expansion of foreign military alliances towards the region. As

³⁵⁹ See Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 266.

examined in Part two, such threatening policies by Russia also induced some small states to take a more neutral position in their foreign policy, which was welcomed by Moscow.

3) *Beyond the CIS, Russia's flexible alignment strategy towards the major powers combined with soft balancing against the US could best serve to its interest in establishing a 'multipolar world' corresponding to Moscow's ideal definition.*

In realist thinking, the balancing motivation against the powerful states is driven by concerns on both survival and autonomy. As Brooks and Wohlforth suggest, most theoretical writings on the balance of power concept in general “*appear to define hegemony as a concentration of power that threatens not just other great powers' 'core security' ... but also and much more immediately their capacity autonomously to resolve less existentially important "secondary security" issues.*”³⁶⁰ In the current unipolar system, Russia is the most capable nuclear power to respond to the US with a retaliatory strike, therefore it must be the state which feels most secure against the possibility of a direct US aggression. On the other side, the developments in Georgia and Ukraine in recent years demonstrated that Russia could successfully confront challenges to its ‘secondary security interests’ in the CIS alone without foreign military support. Under these conditions, Moscow seems to have no strong motivation to change the distribution of power in the system through a collective counterbalancing action that is very costly and difficult to achieve. Its national interest in strengthening its position as ‘one of the influential centers of a multipolar world’ makes much relevance to its status and autonomy in international politics than to the material distribution of power in the system.³⁶¹ The Russian ideal ‘multipolarity’ can be read as multilateralism, considering the dialog (or concert) among the great powers in the international system. A flexible alignment strategy regarding the major powers, in this sense, could serve the interest of Russia that is ready for cooperation on the security issues with all great powers that respect its national interests including even the US.

Following a rather short period of security cooperation, the extreme unilateralism by the US since about the Iraq war has induced Russia to conduct soft

³⁶⁰ Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance**, p. 50

³⁶¹ The definition of Russia's interest is cited from National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000, Official Translation, Retrieved from: http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/589768 (05.04.2017).

balancing actions. In this respect, Russia made an emphasis on the SCO's role in the Eurasian security space which emerged as a consultation pact including Russia, China and Central Asian states as its members.³⁶² Moscow increased its security cooperation with China, as the two states took common responsibility to sweep away the regional threats that have encouraged the US military engagement into Central Asia. However, this cooperation did not develop into a counterbalancing alliance that could be established only if two states were willing to sacrifice from their autonomy to overcome the problems of coordination and collective action. It is possible that these problems will be further complicated in the SCO after the enlargement towards India and Pakistan. On the other side, as Walt notes, in a unipolar system, major powers face greater incentives to free-ride or pass the buck unless the unipole threatens them more or less equally.³⁶³ In this regard, one could ask that what if the US efforts for strategic rebalance in the Asia-Pacific opens more space for Russia in the geographic area extending from the post-Soviet region to the Middle East, while some regional actors continue to call for Russian security assistance in order to deal with the local threats. Under such conditions, would Russia-China alignment strengthen or weaken? Such a scenario demonstrates that coordinating policies to balance the unipole will be so difficult within the great geographical extent where the US militarily engaged and that divergent interest and strategic priorities of the great powers may continue to render counterbalancing impossible.

The political developments associated with our three assumptions and the future scenarios which could be derived from such facts will be dealt with in detail in the next chapters. All the theoretical discussion conducted in this chapter shows that balance of threat, omnibalancing and soft balancing approaches could be well applied to our case and that they could offer reasonable explanations for Moscow's strategic behavior. However, one problem remains. These theories were mainly developed in the US by realist scholars. Therefore, they are a product of the American perspective of international politics, to an important extent. For that reason, it may be useful to re-examine the links between the theories and our case but this time by placing Russia in the epicenter of analysis. In this sense, the next chapter tries to put forward the Russian view towards alignments and the international system. Besides examining the Cold

³⁶² For the declaration of the consultation commitment in the SCO, see "Full Text of the Declaration on 5th Anniversary of the SCO".

³⁶³ Walt, "Alliances in a Unipolar World," p. 96.

War experiences, the chapter deals with Russian foreign policy discourses about the critical issues with regard to our theoretical perspective such as Eurasianism, its great power status, unipolarity, and multipolarity.



CHAPTER TWO - THE RUSSIAN VIEW TOWARDS ALIGNMENTS AND THE INTERNATIONAL SYSTEM: PAST EXPERIENCES, CURRENT TENDENCIES

I. The Legacy of the Cold War: A Brief Overview

This chapter starts with a historical review on Moscow's alignment strategies which have some implications for the contemporary policies followed by Russia, as a major state with a centuries-old great power tradition. The Warsaw Pact provides a historical experience on how to use a formal alliance as a mechanism to assert military dominance over a specific region. Yet there are some certain differences in methods and objectives of Russia's contemporary approach compared to the Cold-War years, which are underlined in the following pages. On the other hand, the collapse of the Sino-Soviet alliance provides a great example of how autonomy concerns by major powers may render bilateral military cooperation through a formal defense pact unsustainable. In addition, the geopolitical competition that emerged around the Soviet-China-India triangle based on local security dilemmas could offer critical historical lessons for Russia and other Asian major states -if they want to avoid such tensions in the post-Cold War world. Lastly, the Soviet alignment relations with the Third World and Iran account for the reasons why Russians should avoid forming formal alliances in regions beyond its sphere of influence and military dominance. Therefore, all these historical cases are examined below through a realist perspective which de-emphasizes the ideological factors during the Cold War era.³⁶⁴

³⁶⁴ In this regard, the historical review here analyzes past experiences, focusing on what actually happened in the Cold War with regard to the Soviet alignment behavior rather than the Kremlin's foreign policy thinking. Domestic-level debates over the intellectual foundations of Soviet perspective of international politics are excluded because they were mostly ideologically oriented. If one tries to put forward the Soviet perspective towards alignments and the international system during the Cold War, he/she should follow ideological debates on international communism and the Soviet theory of 'correlation of forces' that concerns on the class conflict and revolution, thus, challenges the state centric view in the Western thinking of balance of power and in other theories of alignment. See Julian Lider, "The Correlation of World Forces: The Soviet Concept," **Journal of Peace Research**, Vol. 17, No. 2, 1980. However, such an endeavor would take our focus away from our theoretical perspective and it is clear that the ideological issues have lost their influence in Russian foreign policy after the Cold War.

In order to put forward theoretical implications of these alignments and the impacts of historical experiences on Russia's contemporary strategies, this section offers a very limited and selective reading of history. Instead of examining various dynamics and dimensions of interstate relations between the Soviet Union and the relevant actors, this section focuses on how significant variables of our theoretical framework have functioned in all these cases, such as threat perceptions, autonomy concerns, and local security dilemmas. In addition, the present review of the Kremlin's strategic relations with its Cold-War allies concentrates on some specific periods such as the establishment of alignments, the times of trouble between allies and the collapse of security cooperation arrangements. It is because those periods have provided the most crucial historical experiences which should be taken into attendance by Russia to develop more appropriate strategies and to avoid repeating mistakes of the past.

A. The Warsaw Pact: An Asymmetrical Alliance under the Soviet Leadership

The foundations of the Soviet domination of Eastern Europe through forty-five years were laid in the last years of the World War II. It was the Red Army that liberated most of these countries from Nazism in 1944-1945, then made it possible for Moscow to impose the Soviet Model on most of the regional states regardless of their national differences.³⁶⁵ Under the Soviet occupation, those states had no choice but to join a military alliance with Moscow.³⁶⁶ By 1948, the Soviet Union concluded bilateral alliance treaties with some regional states like Poland, Romania, Hungary, and

While this section deals with historical developments at the international system level touching upon their implications on Russia's current alignment strategies, the rest of this chapter focuses rather on reflections and interpretations of such developments in Russia's strategic perspective.

³⁶⁵ See David Holloway, "Introduction," David Holloway and Jane M. O. Sharp (ed.), **The Warsaw Pact: Alliance in Transition?**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 36; and Malcolm Mackintosh, "The Warsaw Treaty Organization: A History," David Holloway and Jane M. O. Sharp (ed.), **The Warsaw Pact: Alliance in Transition?**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984, p. 41.

³⁶⁶ Within three years following the occupation, the Kremlin has first managed to eliminate non-communist parties and then the communist political leaders with national reputation and public support. As a result, the top positions in those states were seized by a new political elite who owe their leadership and power directly to Moscow. For the process of establishment and consolidation of communist political systems in Eastern Europe see Richard J Crampton., *Eastern Europe in the Twentieth Century—and After*, 2nd Ed., New York: Routledge, 1997, pp. 211-254. In this respect, Eastern European states' alignment with the Soviet Union does not represent even an independent bandwagoning decision aiming at appeasing the USSR and avoiding further losses in their physical security. It was rather an involuntary submission to occupation. According to Mueller, "*almost all of central and eastern Europe might have done with the United States after 1945, if the Soviet Union's neighbors had been free to select their own allies.*" Karl Mueller, "Alignment Balancing and Stability in Eastern Europe," **Security Studies**, Vol. 5, No. 1, 1995, p. 45. See also pp. 44-47.

Bulgaria.³⁶⁷ On May 14, 1955, Albania, Bulgaria, Czechoslovakia, German Democratic Republic, Hungary, Poland, Romania, and the Soviet Union announced that they signed a new treaty which founded the Warsaw Treaty Organization (commonly called as the Warsaw Pact). The official *raison d'être* of the alliance treaty was the threat of German revanchism, which was signed several days after the accession of West Germany to NATO.³⁶⁸ Article, 4 of the treaty codified the military commitment of the alliance that in case of an aggression towards one or more members, the others will come to the assistance “*with all such means as it deems necessary, including armed force.*”³⁶⁹

Contrary to official declarations, however, it is hard to claim that an increase in the threat of war resulted in the foundation of the Pact. When the Alliance was established, the Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev has been defending its argument at home that the threat of war had diminished and he began to promote what became known as the ‘first détente.’³⁷⁰ Besides the fact that the USSR acquired nuclear weapons in 1949, it was especially the successful test of a hydrogen bomb in 1953 that boosted the Soviet self-confidence in its deterrence capabilities.³⁷¹ In the early 1960s, the ‘nuclearisation’ of Soviet military thinking became evident, as the leadership of the USSR was convinced that nuclear weaponry would be the decisive factor in any future war.³⁷² For all these reasons, it seems not conceivable that the Warsaw Pact was formed by the states which aimed at aggregating their capabilities to deter possible aggression and to prevent war in the conventional sense. Unlike the Great Britain and

³⁶⁷ For the information on these treaties, see “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions,” <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.04.2017).

³⁶⁸ See Caroline Kennedy-Pipe, **Russia and the World, 1917-1991**, London: Arnold Publishers, 1998, p. 108. The preamble to the treaty stated that German Federal Republic’s integration to the NATO and Western moves towards its rearmament increased the danger of another war and constituted a threat to the security of the peaceful states of Europe. Vojtech Mastny and Malcolm Byrne, **A Cardboard Castle?: An inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991**, New York: Central European University Press, 2005, p. 78

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 78. In addition to this alliance commitment, the members have agreed to establish a Unified Command of the armed forces and obliged not to participate in any coalitions or alliances conflicting with the objects of the Warsaw Treaty. See the full text of the Warsaw Treaty. *Ibid.*, pp. 77-79.

³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³⁷¹ See Kennedy-Pipe, **Russia and the World, 1917-1991**, p. 116. Therefore, the Soviet leader made a critical decision for the first substantial cuts of Soviet conventional forces in 1955. On March 20, 1956, Khrushchev declared that the Soviet bloc must work to reduce its troops and increase its defense at the same time, emphasizing hydrogen bomb, nuclear arms, and jet-propulsion technology which he saw as crucial factors to force the Western adversaries to talk with the Kremlin. Mastny and Byrne, **A Cardboard Castle?: An inside History of the Warsaw Pact 1955-1991**, pp. 2,7.

³⁷² Scilla McLean (ed.), **How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1986, p. 241.

France examples in the NATO, there has never been any secondary nuclear power in the Warsaw Pact. It was a quite asymmetrical alliance in which air defense system has been controlled centrally from Moscow by the Commander of Soviet Air Defense Forces.³⁷³

Nonetheless, the aggressive intentions by the U.S. and its allies in the perspective of the Kremlin could be a reason that forced the Soviets to tighten their relations with the Eastern European allies. Between 1945 and 1955, some critical developments underlined these intentions such as, the creation of the Western European Union and the NATO, the latter's enlargement towards Turkey and Greece, the establishment of the ANZUS (Australia, New Zealand, the US) alliance, the South East Asia Treaty Organization, and the Baghdad Pact.³⁷⁴ Although the Soviet weapon development programs seemed to diminish the threats to its 'core security', in the same decade, the fear of encirclement by adversary alliances may have induced the Kremlin to take some counter-measurements to consolidate its sphere of influence in Europe, as balance of threat theory would predict. In this respect, one of the main strategic benefits of the Warsaw Pact for the Soviet Union was that it provided a legitimization for the stationing of troops in the Eastern and Central Europe, as the Kremlin could no longer justify its military presence under the heading of 'occupation forces.'³⁷⁵ In addition, the Pact formalized military relations between the USSR and its European allies and promoted systemic integration of their armies under a joint command structure which was firmly controlled by the Soviet officers.³⁷⁶ As a result, the Warsaw Pact denied its small state members' national sovereignty over their armed forces which could undertake territorial defense functions. This fact later facilitated rapid military interventions by the Soviets in the internal affairs of the Eastern European states.³⁷⁷

³⁷³ See *ibid.*, p. 240; and Mackintosh, "The Warsaw Treaty Organization: A History," p. 48.

³⁷⁴ Neil Fodor, **The Warsaw Treaty Organization: A Political and Organizational Analysis**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1990, p. 7.

³⁷⁵ See McLean (ed.), **How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made**, p. 236; and Mackintosh, "The Warsaw Treaty Organization: A History," p. 45.

³⁷⁶ See Malcolm Mackintosh, "The Warsaw Pact Today," *Survival*, Vol. 16, No. 3, 1974, p. 125; and Kennedy-Pipe, **Russia and the World, 1917-1991**, p. 109. For the military structure of the alliance see McLean (ed.), **How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made**, pp. 237-242.

³⁷⁷ Christopher D. Jones, "National Armies and National Sovereignty," David Holloway and Jane M. O. Sharp (ed.), **The Warsaw Pact: Alliance in Transition?**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984, pp. 109-110. Besides the military realm, the Warsaw Pact also played a significant role in managing the Soviet political control over the members, as the organization has been used for

Maybe, the most substantial evidence for Moscow's use of this asymmetrical alliance manage its control over Eastern Europe is that all of the military operations by the Soviet army which have made reference to the Warsaw Treaty have been carried out against the allied states. In 1956 when the leader of Hungarian government Imre Nagy proclaimed the state's withdrawal from the Warsaw Pact and declared a neutral position for Hungary, it resulted in a military intervention by the Soviet armed forces that destroyed the Hungarian military, seized its political leaders and consequently re-established the USSR's authority.³⁷⁸ The Soviet Union subsequently cited the Warsaw Treaty to justify the intervention, yet it was unconvincing because the treaty referred only to collective defense against external aggression.³⁷⁹ Later in 1968, the Czechoslovakia crisis led to Warsaw Pact's military intervention to this country by a multinational force composed of Bulgarian, Polish, Hungarian, and overwhelmingly Soviet troops. Through this intervention, the Soviets managed to suppress the national political reform program known as 'socialism with a human face' which was evaluated as a threat to Czechoslovakia's loyalty to the Soviet Union. Yet, in this case, the Czechoslovak leadership did not choose to call for armed resistance, as the outcome of the Hungarian uprising was evident, and the intervention was managed almost bloodless.³⁸⁰

At the end of the 1980s, the domestic political crises of the Soviet-sponsored regimes led to a wave of revolutions in Eastern Europe and the Warsaw Pact was formally dissolved in 1991. Nonetheless, the Warsaw Pact has become a historical experience for the Russians for utilizing an institutionalized asymmetrical alliance to manage Moscow's control over its sphere of influence -but to be evaluated in the Cold War conditions. In this case, Moscow has sought full political and military control over the domestic affairs of its allies and sometimes tried to compensate for the losses in the former by using the tools associated with the latter. The USSR also tried to

transmitting Soviet foreign policy requirements to the Eastern European states. The Treaty of Warsaw established the Political Consultative Committee as the main political body in the organization including the heads of government, foreign and defense ministers as members, with the aim at coordinating foreign policy and delivering public statements to represent common positions. See McLean (ed.), **How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made**, pp. 242-244.

³⁷⁸ Jones, "National Armies and National Sovereignty," p. 89.

³⁷⁹ See McLean (ed.), **How Nuclear Weapons Decisions are Made**, p. 236. Earlier in the same year, a similar scenario was hardly avoided in Poland which began to take a new course under a nationalist communist leadership supported by civilian upheavals. The Polish leader Wladyslaw Gomulka managed to assure Moscow that his government would not allow its country to leave the Warsaw Pact. Mastny and Byrne, **A Cardboard Castle?: An inside History of the Warsaw Pact, 1955-1991**, p. 7.

³⁸⁰ See Mackintosh, "The Warsaw Treaty Organization: A History," pp. 49-50.

legitimize its regional military policies with the possibility of war in Europe. After the Czechoslovakia crisis, the Kremlin declared the Brezhnev doctrine which asserted that a communist country has a right to self-determination only so far as the interests of other states in the socialist bloc are not jeopardized.³⁸¹

However, neither the threat of war that was used strategically by Moscow nor this kind of ideological justifications could extinguish the national reactions against the Soviet hegemony in Eastern Europe. Today, thanks to the changes in the post-Cold War international security environment, some governments in the post-Soviet space themselves see a strategic interest in security cooperation with Moscow, particularly against non-state threats. This fact facilitates mutual legitimization of the military cooperation by Russia and its regional allies both at the intergovernmental and public level. Furthermore, the rising ethnic and civil wars have enabled Russia to implement a more skillful and smoother strategy to manage its military dominance over the region, as it emerged as the most influential actor over the protectorated conflicts. Last but not least, it is important to note that unlike the historical example of the Warsaw Pact, Russia does not aim at full control over its current post-Soviet allies' foreign and domestic policies. Rather, Moscow seems to focus on restricting the expansion of foreign political and military influences at the expense of its special relations with those small states.

B. The Soviet Alignments with China and India: The Role of Autonomy Concerns and Local Security Dilemmas

An analysis of the Soviet alignment behavior throughout the Cold War would remain truly incomplete if one does not examine Moscow's strategic relations with China, a major state with a huge population which transformed itself into a great power through increasing its military capabilities and reaching nuclear weapons in the 1960s. This process coincided with some developments that gave rise to what is known as the Sino-Soviet split and the breakdown of the military alliance that had been signed in 1950. In the literature, scholars offer four main explanations for the split focusing on ideological disagreements, the divergence of national interest, domestic politics and personality of the leaders.³⁸² Here, it is not argued that any of these factors were

³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

³⁸² See Odd Arne Westad, "Introduction," Odd Arne Westad (ed.), **Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, pp. 30-31; and

insignificant, indeed all of them has played a role in the Sino-Soviet split. Yet, looking through our theoretical perspective, we need to underline some definite factors, i.e. autonomy concerns by Moscow and Beijing and their threat perceptions from each other, which in fact have played decisive roles at least in the termination of the military cooperation. In this respect, two questions are critical: First, was the Sino-Soviet defense pact established as an asymmetrical alliance or not? Second, to what extent the autonomy concerns by these major states and divergent security interests contributed its de facto collapse in the 1960s?

There is some convincing evidence that the alliance which was actively sought by China through 1949 and 1950, emerged as an asymmetrical one.³⁸³ When the alliance was signed in February 1950, the Chinese Communist Party had just consolidated its control over most of mainland China, while its enemy in the civil war, Kuomintang, supported by the United States had escaped to Taiwan. In this respect, the People's Republic of China (PRC) strongly needed international recognition and support. In addition to that, the Mao Zedong leadership evaluated that only external security guarantees by the Soviet Union could provide the revolutionary regime with the protection from possible attacks by the United States, its ally Japan, and anti-Communist forces in China.³⁸⁴ The Chinese side seemed to be ready to sacrifice from its autonomy and to accept a subordinate role in the alliance, in exchange for the Soviet political, economic and military support.³⁸⁵

Lorenz M. Lüthi, **The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World**, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008, p. 3. Stephen Walt also examines the role of ideology in *The Origins of Alliances*. He argues that when an ideology calls for a single leader, the regimes embracing the same ideology must come to an agreement on who will occupy the leading role. Then the regimes following such an ideological movement will be forced to accept the authoritative guidance of the leading power, thus they will find their autonomy threatened. Because the claim to be leadership is bound to interpretation of the common ideology, it is very likely that ideological quarrels would appear. Walt suggests that "*they are also likely to be intense, because each faction can defend its own actions only by portraying rivals as traitors or heretics.*" Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 36. He concludes that ideology may well play divisive role in alignment formation. The history of international communism provides a striking example for this. See *ibid.*, p. 35-36.

³⁸³ In the light of archival documents, Lüthi argues that it was the Chinese side that pushed for both the alliance's establishment and collapse. See Lüthi, **The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World**, p. 2.

³⁸⁴ See Westad, "Introduction," p. 9.

³⁸⁵ During the negotiations in Moscow, Lui Shaoqi, soon to be vice chairman of the PRC government, emphasized that Moscow was the leader of international communist movement and that should some differences arise between the Chinese and Soviet communist parties, the former will submit and carry out the decisions by the Soviet leadership. *Ibid.*, p. 10.

Through signing the Sino-Soviet Treaty of Friendship on February 14, 1950, the Chinese side obtained a promise for active military assistance by the Soviet Union in case of an aggression “*by Japan or any other State which might directly or indirectly join with Japan.*”³⁸⁶ This commitment implied that Moscow would protect China from an attack by the US that was indeed closely allied with Japan. In addition, the Soviet provided China with substantial economic and military assistance which increased air defense capabilities of the latter.³⁸⁷ In 1955, Moscow agreed to provide material and technical assistance to China in its national nuclear program. In 1957, the USSR even gave a promise to supply China with a prototype of an atomic bomb. However, within two years Moscow suspended its cooperation with Beijing in nuclear technology due to the increasing tensions in bilateral relations.³⁸⁸

As Niu Jun points out, the Sino-Soviet alliance was both easy to reach in principle and difficult to manage in practice.³⁸⁹ What the Soviets expected from the alliance was to build joint strategies with China in East Asia, so that Moscow could ensure its security on the eastern flank and increase its autonomy and influence in Asia-Pacific. On the other side, China has focused on its specific defense needs against the US and removing the threat by the nationalist Chinese government in Taiwan. The divergence in motivations has further grown when Khrushchev declared the peaceful coexistence initiative with the capitalist world as a part of the de-Stalinization process. The Soviet Union’s new approach towards the West inevitably disturbed China, which assessed that Moscow now would be more reluctant to defend itself against the US-led alliances and to support Chinese initiatives towards the Taiwan issue.³⁹⁰

In August 1958, China made a unilateral decision without consulting Moscow for shelling two offshore islands controlled by the Republic of China (ROC), which

³⁸⁶ “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions,” <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.06.2017).

³⁸⁷ For Soviet assistance to China’s economy and military see Westad, “Introduction,” pp. 11-16; Raymond L. Garthoff, “Sino-Soviet Military Relations,” **The ANNALS of the American Academy of Political and Social Science**, Vol. 349, No. 1, 1963; Amardeep Athwal, “The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority,” *Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2004, pp. 272-273.

³⁸⁸ Amardeep Athwal, “The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority,” **Journal of Slavic Military Studies**, Vol. 17, No. 2, 2004, pp. 272-273.

³⁸⁹ Niu Jun, “The Origins of the Sino-Soviet Alliance,” Odd Arne Westad (ed.), **Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 71.

³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

was militarily allied with the United States.³⁹¹ The Kremlin heavily criticized the Chinese action arguing that Beijing misjudged the international situation and was playing into the hands of the enemy but re-affirmed its military commitments for defending China.³⁹² Russians clearly feared of dragging into an armed conflict with the US through chain ganging effect. After the crisis, Moscow offered a diplomatic solution to Beijing that China would renounce its claim to conquer in exchange for a similar declaration from Taiwan regarding the mainland. This put forward the divergent approaches of the two sides towards the conflict. For Mao, it “*was tantamount to a slap in the face*”.³⁹³

In the same year, another development that revealed the crack in the Sino-Soviet alliance became Beijing’s reaction to the Soviet plans on furthering military cooperation and integration with China. Moscow proposed installing joint technical intelligence facilities and naval communications stations along the Chinese coast, and setting up a joint force of nuclear submarines that would operate in the Western Pacific.³⁹⁴ Mao’s refusal of these plans put forward Chinese autonomy concerns within the alliance.³⁹⁵ Increasing disagreements with Beijing led the Soviets to slow down the transfer of nuclear technology and renounce its earlier promise to supply China an atomic bomb.³⁹⁶ The USSR’s strategic interest vis-à-vis the United States was also a critical factor in Moscow’s changing position on this issue. In early 1959, the Kremlin offered the US and its allies that a nuclear-free zone could also be created in Southeast Asia, thus, implied that the Chinese would not obtain nuclear power status, in exchange

³⁹¹ ³⁹¹ Westad, "The Sino-Soviet Alliance and the United States," Odd Arne Westad (ed.), **Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 176. This conflict is known as the Second Taiwan Crisis. Following China’s first attack on Taiwan in 1954, the US signed a defense pact with the ROC and deployed nuclear missiles on the island, signaling that it could retaliate with them if China tried to occupy Taiwan. Stephen M. Walt, **Revolution and War**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1996, p. 324.

³⁹² Westad, "The Sino-Soviet Alliance and the United States," Odd Arne Westad (ed.), **Brothers in Arms: The Rise and Fall of the Sino-Soviet Alliance, 1945-1963**, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1998, p. 176.

³⁹³ See Athwal, "The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority," p. 280.

³⁹⁴ Westad, "Introduction," p. 21.

³⁹⁵ When meeting with the Soviet ambassador on this issue, Mao pointed out that the Soviets has an ambitious vision regarding joint programs in the army, industries, agriculture, education etc., which all aim at controlling Chinese. In his discussion with Khrushchev in Beijing, Mao reiterated this argument and asked him sarcastically whether Chinese still had a sovereignty vis-à-vis Moscow and was Russian intention to take over their coastal area or not? Michael M. Sheng, "Mao and China's Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: A New Look at the Taiwan Strait Crises and the Sino-Soviet Split," **Modern China**, Vol. 34, No. 4, 2008, pp. 496-497.

³⁹⁶ Westad, "Introduction," p. 21.

for a guarantee that nuclear weapons were not given to the Western Germany.³⁹⁷ In addition after the Cuban crisis of 1962, Moscow made it clear that the USSR expected to sign a treaty on nuclear test bans and nonproliferation with the US. Beijing described it as an attempt aiming to deprive China and other socialist states of their right to resist the nuclear threats of US imperialism.³⁹⁸ In the 1960s, Beijing raised its ideological criticism on the USSR centered on the inevitability of war with capitalist states and directly accused the Soviets that they turned to be 'revisionists' and 'social imperialists' in collaboration with the West. In this regard, China began to challenge the Soviet Union's leading position in the communist world.³⁹⁹

This strategic rivalry and mistrust between the two sides became sufficient to arouse some bilateral problems with a historical origin that had been forgotten in the name of ideological solidarity. In the 1960s, Beijing signaled its intention to claim South-Eastern Siberia and a half million square miles of Soviet Central Asia that had been conquered by Tsarist Russia in the 19th Century. From 1962 onwards, serious military clashes began to emerge on the common borderline. On the other side, China which now defined the USSR as its number one enemy tested an atomic bomb in 1964.⁴⁰⁰ Although having an undisputed nuclear superiority vis-à-vis Beijing, the Kremlin was suspicious of whether it is sufficient to deter China, because Mao was calling of nuclear weapons as a 'paper tiger,' and had some apocalyptic visions that socialism would prevail even after a nuclear war. In this regard, the Soviet Union had to go on fighting the rest of the Cold War always looking on its shoulders.⁴⁰¹

In 1969, the hostile relations between Moscow and Beijing transformed into the most serious border conflicts during which the Soviets indicated that they were thinking of a nuclear attack on the Chinese territory. This time, the US decided to take advantage of the conflict by reducing its hostile stance towards China, so that it became

³⁹⁷ Athwal, "The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority," pp. 279-280.

³⁹⁸ See Westad, "Introduction," p. 28; and Athwal, "The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority," p. 281.

³⁹⁹ For an elaborate analysis on the ideological disputes in the Sino-Soviet relations see Lüthi, **The Sino-Soviet Split: Cold War in the Communist World**.

⁴⁰⁰ See Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World, 1917-1991*, pp. 128-132.

⁴⁰¹ See Westad, "Introduction," p. 29; and Sheng, "Mao and China's Relations with the Superpowers in the 1950s: A New Look at the Taiwan Strait Crises and the Sino-Soviet Split," p. 487.

possible for Beijing to start a major reorientation in its foreign relations.⁴⁰² In 1973, Washington even offered an informal alignment to China covering the sharing of intelligence collected by the US satellites about Soviet military activities.⁴⁰³ With the US-China rapprochement in the 1970s, Beijing increasingly emerged from isolationism and established itself as a real great power through increasing its nuclear stockpile and military capabilities.⁴⁰⁴ This led to the emergence of a triangular pattern in global politics. In this new context, the US began to use its close relations with China to put pressure on the Soviets in the détente process. On the other side, Washington underlined the Soviet threat towards China and used the US-Soviet détente as a stick vis-à-vis Beijing to consolidate its pivotal role in this strategic triangle. This put forward how the US as an offshore leading power could exploit the enmity between two proximate great powers to secure its international interests.⁴⁰⁵

Beyond triangular politics and bilateral problems between Moscow and Beijing, the Soviet strategic relations with India have become another crucial factor that contributed to the Sino-Soviet schism. Since the Khrushchev years, Moscow has given a strategic priority to improve relations with India, while Sino-Indian relations became increasingly hostile. India was important for the Soviets mostly for two reasons. First, the Soviets were facing a containment policy in South Asia. In 1955, Washington created a new defense pact i.e. the South East Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), including New Zealand, Pakistan, The Philippines, and Thailand as members from the region. In addition, the US supported the establishment of the Central Treaty Organization (CENTO) by Iran, Pakistan, Turkey, and Great Britain as another collective defense organization in 1959.⁴⁰⁶ As a reaction, Moscow tried to use its relations with India to enhance its own position in South Asia and sought New Delhi's support for its various diplomatic initiatives in the Asia-Pacific region. Secondly, the Soviets initiated a geopolitical opening towards the outside of the socialist world in the mid-1950s. In this respect, Moscow tried to influence the Non-Aligned Movement which included most of the Third World states as its members,

⁴⁰² Yang Kuisong, "The Sino-Soviet Border Clash of 1969: From Zhenbao Island to Sino-American Rapprochement," *Cold War History*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2000, p. 22.

⁴⁰³ Evelyn Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the "Soviet Card" in the US Opening to China, 1971–1974," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2005, p. 494.

⁴⁰⁴ Kennedy-Pipe, *Russia and the World, 1917–1991*, p. 147.

⁴⁰⁵ For an analysis of the US strategy in triangular politics see Goh, "Nixon, Kissinger, and the "Soviet Card" in the US Opening to China, 1971–1974," pp. 475–502.

⁴⁰⁶ Athwal, "The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority," p. 287.

through building closer relations with India that had played a leading role in its formation.⁴⁰⁷

For these reasons, the USSR chose to abandon its earlier neutral position regarding the problems between China and India and began to tilt towards the latter. The first serious military clashes over the disputed territory around the Sino-Indian border took place in 1959.⁴⁰⁸ After China's successful test of an atomic bomb, India's fear of a Chinese invasion was further grown. On the other side, India had to fight two wars with Pakistan which was a close ally of the US in Jammu and Kashmir (1965) and in East Pakistan (1971). The Soviet Union tried to take advantage of the increasing defense needs of India which faced security dilemmas with two neighboring states in order to build a close alignment with this country. In this sense, Moscow furthered economic and military assistance and arms sales to New Delhi which had been started in 1955.⁴⁰⁹ In the 1970s, the Soviet Union's arms transfer to India reached eighty-five percent of India's total imports.⁴¹⁰ Indo-Soviet cooperation in the military and economic realm was eventually transformed into a consultation pact by the signing of a Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation, in 1971. Article 9 of the treaty provisioned that "*in the event of either Party being subjected to an attack or a threat thereof,*" the USSR and India "*shall enter into mutual consultations in order to remove such a threat and to take appropriate effective measures to ensure peace and security of their countries.*"⁴¹¹

In fact, the Soviets had offered India to sign a collective security treaty i.e. an alliance, which had been refused by Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi suggesting that it would breach New Delhi's non-aligned policy.⁴¹² It was true that the basic principles of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) defined at the Cairo meeting in 1961 precluded its members from entering bilateral/multilateral alliances concluded 'in the

⁴⁰⁷ John W. Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," *The China Quarterly*, Vol. 125, 1991, p 85.

⁴⁰⁸ Athwal, "The United States and the Sino-Soviet Split: The Key Role of Nuclear Superiority," pp. 288-289.

⁴⁰⁹ For Indo-Soviet cooperation in the military sector throughout the Cold War, see Jerome M Conley, **Indo-Russian Military and Nuclear Cooperation: Lessons and Options for US Policy in South Asia**, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2001, pp. 7-54.

⁴¹⁰ Rajan Menon, "India and the Soviet Union: A New Stage of Relations?," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 18, No. 7, 1978, pp. 733-744.

⁴¹¹ "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions," <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.06.2017).

⁴¹² See Conley, **Indo-Russian Military and Nuclear Cooperation: Lessons and Options for US Policy in South Asia**, p. 29; and Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," p. 56.

context of Great-Power conflicts' associated with the Cold War.⁴¹³ Hence, non-aligned policy required not to involve directly into the competition between two military blocs. However it did not refer to a negative neutralist foreign policy, but a 'positive' and 'dynamic' one, as the first Indian Prime Minister Jawarhal Nehru put it.⁴¹⁴ In this respect, followers of non-aligned policy could cooperate with all states whether belonging to the military blocs or not, as long as they supported their national interests and development goals. It seems that India viewed its partnership with Moscow through this perspective and sought pragmatic relations to satisfy its national objectives. India also tried to keep its relations warm with the Western capitals to the most possible extent. Despite the disagreements and bilateral problems with Washington, New Delhi has never defined the American state, the main ally of Pakistan, as its outright enemy, while the US remained as the primary source of economic assistance and technology for India.⁴¹⁵

Although the rejection of a military alliance with Moscow was justified on a specific ground, namely the principles of non-aligned policy, India seemed to conceive that accepting such an offer would limit its freedom of action in its foreign relations, which is a general concern observed mostly in major states' alignment behavior. Considering the definitions employed by this study, we can confidently speak of a Soviet-Indian alignment in the Cold War, which falls short of a formal military alliance. First of all the treaty of friendship signed in 1971, was a consultation pact also including some form of commitment for bilateral interactions to take common appropriate measures for peace and the security of parties. By broadly construing threats to the security of their countries two states cooperated to influence the political and systemic changes in the Asian environment vis-à-vis the emerging US-China-Pakistan axis.⁴¹⁶ Besides supplying sophisticated arms to India, for example, Moscow also provided diplomatic support to New Delhi at the UN Security Council,

⁴¹³ See Arjun Appadorai, "Non-Alignment: Some Important Issues," **International Studies**, Vol. 20, No. 1-2, 1981, pp. 5-6. Accordingly, New Delhi rejected the Soviet request "*to acquire facilities for Indian Ocean Flotilla at Vishakapatnam. For it was difficult for the Soviet Union to erode India's autonomy in external relations beyond a point.*" Rajen Harshe, "India's Non-Alignment: An Attempt at Conceptual Reconstruction," **Economic and Political Weekly**, Vol. 25, No. 7/8, 1990, pp. 402-403.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁴¹⁵ See Menon, "India and the Soviet Union: A New Stage of Relations?," pp. 749-750. For India's strategic approach aiming at preserving the balance in its relations with Washington and Moscow see S Nihal Singh, "Can the Us and India Be Real Friends?," **Asian Survey**, Vol. 23, No. 9, 1983, pp. 1019-1020.

⁴¹⁶ See Ashok Kapur, "Indo-Soviet Treaty and the Emerging Asian Balance," **Asian Survey**, Vol. 12, No. 6, 1972, pp. 464-465

particularly over the Kashmir territorial dispute. In exchange, India expressed its political and diplomatic support to the USSR on a variety of controversial international issues and withheld criticism of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979.⁴¹⁷

An examination of the USSR's strategic relations with India and China reveals the fact that autonomy concerns by these two major states impeded the establishment of an enduring alliance with them, which could strikingly shift the global balance in the Cold War in favor of Moscow. It also demonstrates that the main factor that shaped India's and China's alignment behaviors were not balance of power considerations but the distribution of threats facing themselves, as emphasized by balance of threat theory. For example, the US arms shipment to India and its political support to Indian claims in the territorial dispute was critical for New Delhi in the 1962 border war with China.⁴¹⁸ After the wars with Pakistan and the US-China rapprochement, yet India decided to align itself with the Soviet Union. Fearing of encirclement by an Indo-Soviet alignment, China chose to enforce its alignment with Islamabad, by increasing its military aid and providing technological assistance to Pakistan's nuclear program that was accelerated after the Indian test of an atomic bomb in 1974. China also involved in the proxy war in Afghanistan by supplying small arms to the insurgents who were fighting against Soviet occupation forces via Pakistan.⁴¹⁹

C. Strategic Relations with the Third World: Main Characteristics of Security Cooperation

Besides building an alignment with India, the Soviet Union tried to increase the number of its allies in the Third World in the 1970s, by putting forward some serious diplomatic efforts which resulted in the conclusion of 'Friendship and Cooperation Treaties' with several states. Moscow successfully negotiated treaties entitled as such with United Arab Republic (Egypt) (1971), Iraq (1972), Somalia

⁴¹⁷ India also avoided to join international criticism about the Soviet invasions of Hungary and Czechoslovakia and opposed the view that the Eastern Bloc's military capabilities posed threats to peace and security in the Western Europe. S Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Transformation of Us-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2007, p. 644.

⁴¹⁸ See Arjun Appadorai, "Non-Alignment: Some Important Issues," p. 9; and S Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, "The Transformation of Us-India Relations: An Explanation for the Rapprochement and Prospects for the Future," *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2007, p. 643.

⁴¹⁹ See John W. Garver, "The Security Dilemma in Sino-Indian Relations," *India Review*, Vol. 1, No. 4, 2002, pp. 2-4 and Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," pp. 62-64. However, in 1980, China rejected Pakistan's offer to sign a defense pact together to retain its flexibility and avoid an entrapment into direct conflicts with the USSR and India. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

(1974), Angola (1976), Mozambique (1977), Vietnam (1978), Ethiopia (1978), Afghanistan (1978), South Yemen (1979) and Syria (1980) and Congo (1981).⁴²⁰ Like the 1971 Indo-Soviet Friendship and Cooperation Treaty, all these treaties were common in containing a consultation commitment with reference to the case of armed attack and a threat thereof, or to the situations that threaten peace and security of the parties.⁴²¹ In addition, most of these treaties provisioned the signatories for mutual aid and for common measures to develop the defense potential of the signatories. This paved the way for long term supply of military hardware by the Soviets that strengthened defense capabilities of these small states against their regional rivals.⁴²²

The fact that all these Third World states were the members of the Non-Aligned Movement was a significant factor preventing them from signing an alliance treaty with the Soviet Union. The movement's principles were formulated in the Bandung Conference in 1955 where it was agreed that the member countries shall not participate in military pacts and alliances initiated by the superpowers.⁴²³ The criteria of membership to the NAM were later formulated at the preparatory meeting in Cairo (5-12 June 1961) for the Belgrade Conference. It was declared that the members should not join multilateral, bilateral or regional defense arrangements which were concluded in the context of Great-Power conflicts. In addition to that, if a member *"has conceded military bases these concessions should not have been made in the context of Great-Power conflicts."*⁴²⁴ However, as we noted for India, these criteria have not denied the members from shaping their security orientation towards third parties including the superpowers through forming alignments -without an alliance treaty.

In fact, the central motivation by Moscow in involving in bilateral security arrangements with Asian and African states through signing a series of 'Friendship and Cooperation Treaties' was to compensate for the exclusion of the Soviet Union from defense pacts in the Third World.⁴²⁵ As noted earlier, the US successfully

⁴²⁰ Zafar Imam, "Soviet Treaties with Third World Countries," *Soviet Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 1983, p. 53; Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 224.

⁴²¹ See "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions," <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.06.2017).

⁴²² Imam, "Soviet Treaties with Third World Countries," p. 61.

⁴²³ S. D. Muni, "Non-Alignment and the Security Parameter," *International Studies*, Vol. 20, No. 1-2, 1981, p. 165.

⁴²⁴ Arjun Appadorai, "Non-Alignment: Some Important Issues," pp. 5-6.

⁴²⁵ Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 217.

contained the USSR, a great continental land power, from 1950s to 1960s, by forming bilateral alliances and multilateral pacts like CENTO and SEATO with regional states fearing the Soviet expansionism and domination. In the 1970s, developing ties on security cooperation between the Soviet Union and some 'radical' Third World regimes, as defined in the Western perspective, led to the formation of protracted military relationships between the two sides. In exchange for military aid and training assistance towards its allies, USSR gained the right for de facto use of naval and airbase facilities in some states such as Egypt, Syria, South Yemen, Somalia, Vietnam, and Angola. The Soviet Union failed to secure the use of these facilities on a permanent basis due to its allies' refusal. However, Moscow managed to enlarge its power projections towards different parts of the Third World and to challenge the US military influence in geopolitically significant regions neighboring itself.⁴²⁶ Besides, though all of them formally involved the Non-Aligned Movement, the signatories of the Friendship and Cooperation Treaties with the Soviet Union tended to support Moscow's position on diplomatic disputes between two blocs.⁴²⁷

However, it should be noted that in these cases of alignment which fell short of a formal military pact, the USSR could not exert significant leverage over foreign policies of its clients as it managed in the case of Warsaw Pact. They rather represented transitory and loose alignments based on mutual interest, through which the clients primarily expected to bolster their defense capabilities, while they conceded useful military facilities as the price for aid.⁴²⁸ The Soviet allies occasionally threatened Moscow to sever the ties of alignment when the latter failed to deliver the arms they needed. Some others even formally abrogated the Friendship and Cooperation Agreements as Egypt and Somalia actually did in 1976 and 1977.⁴²⁹ The Soviets tried to compensate for the defection of Egypt which was a leading regional actor in the Middle East, by gaining Iran after the Islamic revolution in 1979. Yet, Tehran's threat

⁴²⁶ For the Soviet diplomatic initiatives seeking to gain military facilities and bases in the Third World see *ibid.*, p. 197-217.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁴²⁸ Jonathan Alford, "The New Military Instruments," Edgar Feuchtwanger and Peter Nailor (ed.), **Soviet Union and the Third World**, London: Springer, 1981, p. 18; Allison, **The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World**, p. 222.

⁴²⁹ Allison, **The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World**, p. 222-223. Alford, "The New Military Instruments " p. 19.

perceptions from the USSR, its ideological hostility towards communism and some regional disagreements prevented the formation of a solid alignment with Iran.⁴³⁰

Following the revolution, the Soviets welcomed Iran's withdrawal from the CENTO and joining into the Non-Aligned Movement. Yet, Tehran did not seek to compensate for the collapse of the alliance with the US, by entering into a similar arrangement with Moscow. Instead, Iran adopted a rather independent posture against both superpowers which was symbolized in a public slogan 'neither West nor East.'⁴³¹ In fact, a Treaty of Friendship that had been signed in 1921 between the USSR and Iran, which has remained in effect in a long period extending from the Shah's rule to the Islamic Republic. Article 5 and 6 of this treaty, had provided Moscow with the right to militarily intervene to Iran's territory "*if a third country threatens to attack the Soviet Union from Iran or if Iran becomes a base for anti-Soviet aggression.*"⁴³² Considering the threat of future Soviet aggression, the new regime renounced these articles unilaterally in 1980. Furthermore, the Iranian ambassador told in Moscow that in case of an attack on their country by the US "*we can defend ourselves alone, and we will not allow a single foreign soldier to enter the country on whatever pretext and by virtue of whatever friendship treaty.*"⁴³³

There were some other factors straining the relations between the USSR and Iran such as Moscow's failure to prevent its ally Iraq's invasion to Iran which started the Gulf War; the Soviet's backing the communist party in Iran trying to undermine the Islamic regime; and Moscow's support to ethnic minorities seeking autonomy to pressure on Tehran.⁴³⁴ Iran also evaluated the Soviet invasion to Afghanistan in support of the Marxist-Leninist regime as a threat to its national security, in strategic terms, and as a hostile move against the Muslim World, in ideological terms. Thus, Iran also involved the proxy war in Afghanistan by supporting Shia groups and

⁴³⁰ For an analysis of these factors, see Shireen T. Hunter, "The Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran," Hafeez Malik (ed.), **Soviet-American Relations with Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan**, New York: Springer, 1987, pp. 244-266.

⁴³¹ See Allison, **The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World**, p. 187; and Zalmay Khalilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran," **Australian Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 38, No. 1, 1984, p. 1.

⁴³² These articles were used as the legal basis for the Soviet occupation of the Northern Iran in the World War II. Khalilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran," p. 3.

⁴³³ Imam, "Soviet Treaties with Third World Countries," p. 61; Hunter, "The Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran," p. 257.

⁴³⁴ Hunter, "The Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran," p. 255.

militants fighting against the Soviet forces.⁴³⁵ It became only possible in 1989, following the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the death of Khomeini, that bilateral relations between the two states were ameliorated, and that the Soviet the Gorbachev administration began to sell arms to Iran.⁴³⁶ After the dissolution of the USSR, Russia and Iran collaborated in opposing the expansion of the US influence in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union and about some other significant regional issues.⁴³⁷ However, it should be noted that neither Iran nor the USSR's allies in the Middle East and Africa turned to be Soviet satellites by transferring most of their foreign policy making autonomy to Moscow in exchange for the Soviet support against threats by Washington and their regional adversaries. They only cooperated with the USSR as long as their interests were converged.

In this respect, the loyalty of Third World allies to Moscow became a debated issue throughout the Cold War. The military assistance sure provided Moscow with some influence over its small allies. However, when they assessed that following the Soviet wishes would cost much more than Moscow's renouncing of assistance, some allies preferred to take unilateral actions not confirmed by the USSR.⁴³⁸ A striking example is that there is no evidence that President Saddam consulted in advance by his treaty partner and arms supplier about Iraq's planned invasion of Iran in 1980. What Moscow actually did after the Gulf War had started became only withholding its military assistance from Baghdad.⁴³⁹ Similarly, Egypt and Syria launched the Yom Kippur war against Israel in 1973, despite Moscow's previous efforts to dissuade its two allies from such a dangerous move fearing that it would lead a direct superpower conflict in the Middle East and that the Arab side would again lose.⁴⁴⁰ In this respect, regional military ambitions of Third World allies have instilled a fear of entrapment into the conflict on the side of the USSR. This could explain why Moscow avoided

⁴³⁵ See Khalilzad, "Soviet Dilemmas in Khomeini's Iran," pp. 4-5; and Hunter, "The Soviet Union and the Islamic Republic of Iran," p. 260.

⁴³⁶ Mark N. Katz, "Russian-Iranian Relations in the Putin Era," *Demokratizatsiya*, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2002, p. 69.

⁴³⁷ See Mark N. Katz, "Russia and Iran," *Middle East Policy*, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2012, pp. 54-64.

⁴³⁸ See Alford, "The New Military Instruments," p. 19.

⁴³⁹ Roy Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World*, New York: Cambridge University Press, 1988, p. 233.

⁴⁴⁰ Galia Golan, "The Soviet Union and the Yom Kippur War," *Israel Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1, 1999, pp. 127-152; During the years of 1971 and 1972, there was a serious political crisis between Egypt and the USSR due to the latter's refusal to transfer offensive arms demanded by Cairo. In 1972, the President Anwar Sadat decided to expel the Soviet military advisers from his country. David, *Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World*, pp. 68-82.

expanding its alliance treaty system towards the Middle East, a conflict-prone multipolar regional subsystem in the Third World, as defined by Walt, which has been difficult for military control.⁴⁴¹

In the current era, the instability of the Middle East underlined by non-state threats and conflict-prone interstate relations enforce alignment relations between Russia and some regional states. At the same time, the military engagement by outside powers into the region increases the risk for Russia of being dragged into a direct armed clash for the sake of protecting its regional allies. Under these conditions, alignments with regional states which fall short of a formal alliance provide Russia the opportunity to engage militarily into the region when it is in Moscow's interest and to lower its involvement when it is not. In addition, regional alignments without formal commitments make it possible for Russia to terminate its active support to its allies which run contrary to Moscow's interests and leave them alone. Therefore, Russia tends to preserve some flexibility in its strategic relations with small states outside the former Soviet Union, which was also observed in the Soviet alignments with the Third World states.⁴⁴²

Before concluding this section, we also need to link the historical review on the Soviet strategic relations with China and India, into our theoretical perspective and some contemporary facts. The historical developments examined above shows that certain factors rendering the formation of a military alliance by secondary powers as infeasible in the contemporary world, which are outlined in the previous chapter, have also affected alignment behaviors by the major states in Asia in the Cold War period. Looking backward to the history we need to leave the unipolar distribution of power aside but the role of geography should be underlined here, because the proximity of the Soviet Union, China, and India towards each other has been a complicating factor in strategic relations between these states. The disagreements and conflicts among these actors contributed to the emergence of local security dilemmas in Asia. This created opportunities for the US to involve in power struggles within the region. The United State as an offshore power was able to exploit the conflicts in Asia in order to manage its interest vis-à-vis all these states. On the other side, the importance of local

⁴⁴¹ Walt, *The Origins of Alliances*, p. 158.

⁴⁴² This argument will be dealt with in more detail in later parts of this study focusing on Russia's current alignment ties with Iran in the Middle East.

issues in strategic calculations by Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi rendered it difficult to coordinate policies in both the Sino-Soviet alliance and the Indo-Soviet alignment. While the Taiwan issue was of primary importance for China, the USSR tried to expand its influence elsewhere in the Third World strictly avoiding a direct conflict with the US. Besides balancing China, India used its alignment with the Soviets to gain support against threats by Pakistan and in the ongoing conflict in Kashmir. In this regard, all these major states seem to have focused on the issues that ranked high in their separate strategic visions and these issues obviously overshadowed their concerns on the global balance of power.

In sum, observing the history of alignments between these actors, one could suggest that as long as autonomy concerns and divergent security interests of the major states continue to exist, it will be not very likely to establish a great power military alliance in the context of Asia. Even in the bipolar world, the Soviet Union as one of the superpowers could not drive the other leading Asian states into a formal alliance that would consolidate its dominance in the Eastern bloc. Considering the weakening position of Russia in the Asian balance and the rise of China in recent years, now it seems less attractive for Moscow to establish a great power military alliance. If this kind of alliance could be established, it is obvious that Russians would not find themselves in such a superior and privileged position that it enjoyed in the Sino-Soviet alliance in the 1950s.

II. Redefining Russia's Position in the Post-Soviet Transition Period: 1991-1999

Towards the end of the 1980s, the world witnessed substantial developments and dramatic transformations in the Eastern bloc and in the international system as a whole. Facing a serious economic decline and crises in the USSR, Mikhail Gorbachev put major reforms into practice to reshape the economy and the state structure together, as the latter had the potential to create powerful obstacles in this process.⁴⁴³ This reform process which required reallocation of resources from defense to economic modernization coincided with a transformation in the Soviet foreign policy towards all important power centers in the world. In this respect, Gorbachev put his efforts to

⁴⁴³ Celeste A. Wallander, "Lost and Found: Gorbachev's 'New Thinking'," *Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 25, No. 1, 2002, p. 117.

normalize the Soviet relations with China and tried to minimize Sino-Indian friction to the most possible extent, so that it could avoid making a choice between the two states. The 1986 Vladivostok speech by Gorbachev exposed his new vision for Asia underlining hopes to develop a closer economic and political cooperation between China, India, and the Soviet Union in order to thwart Washington's efforts to militarize the region.⁴⁴⁴

At the same time, there have been much deeper changes in the Soviet approach towards the Western world, as the New Thinking paradigm challenged the idea that the Soviet and Western security interests are inherently conflictual. In this respect, Gorbachev leadership pursued the notion of mutual security with the West to break Cold War hostilities, while the Soviet Union sought recognition as an equal member of the world by the Western states.⁴⁴⁵ This new paradigm also questioned the conventional view that the power and status of the Soviet Union could be best served through military projections and geopolitical expansionism. Such policies were defined as costly and obsolete forms of international behavior impeding socio-economic development.⁴⁴⁶ After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, this New Thinking paradigm has become an element of continuity in Russian foreign policy, as President Yeltsin sought ways to integrate Russia into Western institutions as an equal partner of the US and European states.

A. Atlanticism vs. Eurasianism: Foundational Debates about Russia's Foreign Policy and its Place in the World

The end of the Cold War put a serious challenge on most of the states in the international system and induced them to reconsider their foreign policy in order to adopt the new realities of the world. This process became much more traumatic for the members of the socialist bloc, as their political and economic systems were also collapsed coincidentally at the domestic level. With the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia was born as a new state with new borders and new neighbors which were the former parts of this huge socialist federation. Moscow had no historical

⁴⁴⁴ Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," p. 84-85.

⁴⁴⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov, **Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity**, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, pp. 36-37.

⁴⁴⁶ For the main elements of Gorbachev's New Thinking see Hannes Adomeit, "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality," **International Affairs**, Vol. 71, No. 1, 1995, p. 42.

experience of modern foreign relations with these individual states, as they were submitted to the Russian authority for centuries back into the imperial age. On the other side, the loss of superpower status and the end of the ideological conflict on the global level required Russia to redefine its relations with the Western world. These all led to the emergence of huge foundational debates about foreign policy in the Russian domestic realm. As Andrey Tsygankov notes, those debates focused on some central questions: “*What kind of Russia has been born in the aftermath of the dramatic changes of the 1990s?*” What were the odds that Russia could achieve establishing a completely new type of relations with the other international actors without any experience with democratic political system?⁴⁴⁷

It is clear that such questions made relevance not only to issues of national interests which needed to be reevaluated considering changes in the international system but also the national identity of Russia itself. At the beginning of the 1990s, Russia’s foreign policy agenda was dominated by a foundational debate between Atlanticists and Eurasianists about what kind of a policy should be followed towards the outside world with regard to Russia’s identity and its place in the world.⁴⁴⁸ Below, main arguments by these groups are examined focusing on their approach towards three different issues namely national threat perceptions, great power relations, and Russia’s policies towards its near abroad. In this way, it will be easier to make a comparison between these national schools of thought and our theoretical framework in order to explore convergent and divergent points clearly.

For the most part, Atlanticists had a strong emphasis on the European character of Russia and advocated rejoining the European family from which the country has been separated by some historical accidents.⁴⁴⁹ In the early years of the Russian

⁴⁴⁷ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," **Mershon International Studies Review**, Vol. 41, No. 2, 1997, p. 248.

⁴⁴⁸ Regarding different polarizations among elites and society, one can talk about some other domestic debates in the early independence period. For the debate between Westernizers and Slavophiles which had its primary focus on the Russian national identity see Andrey Kortunov, "Russian National Interests: The State of Discussion," Kurt Spillmann and Andreas Wenger (ed.), **Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate**, Bern: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 39-44. At the same time it is possible to classify different sides of dispute as Pro-Westerners (liberal reformers), Anti-Westerners (national conservatives), and Moderate Nationalist Centrists, considering domestic political groups. Tatyana Parkhalina, "Impacts of Domestic and Regional Factors on Russia's Foreign and Security Policy," Kurt Spillmann and Andreas Wenger (ed.), **Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate**, Bern: Peter Lang, 1999, pp. 48-49.

⁴⁴⁹ Kortunov, "Russian National Interests: The State of Discussion," p. 41.

Federation, President Boris Yeltsin and his foreign minister Andrey Kozyrev have become strong advocates of an Atlanticist foreign policy. In terms of their threat perceptions, the Yeltsin leadership was mostly inward-looking to define the real factors challenging the security of the Russian state. Following the end of the Cold War, both Yeltsin and Kozyrev argued that Russia was no longer threatened from abroad and that the main sources of political and economic challenges were located inside of the state borders.⁴⁵⁰ To struggle against those challenges against national security effectively could be possible only through a partnership with the West. The US and the European states were identified as the main ideological and political allies of Russia, regarding the natural affinity of their country with the West based on such shared values as democracy, human rights, and a free-market economy. Alignment with these states was important since they were perceived as the primary source of aid urgently needed for reforms and the model of development.⁴⁵¹ At the same time, Atlanticists strongly warned against close relations with former Soviet allies regarding the possibility that they could divert Russia from domestic transformation processes.⁴⁵²

Such kind of threat perceptions associated with internal challenges within Russia and domestic characters of foreign states gave way to one-sided political and diplomatic efforts to develop a strong partnership with the US at the global level of great power relations. Atlanticists' conception of world politics was very close to the theory of liberal institutionalism, as they underlined the necessity of international cooperation and institutions against global security problems between states sharing common values and identities.⁴⁵³ Yeltsin and Kozyrev embraced Gorbachev's mutual security concept, especially in the context of American-Russian relations.⁴⁵⁴ This led to reinterpretation and broadening of the New Thinking paradigm in the early years of the Russian Federation. Russians were ready to take necessary steps to hasten the

⁴⁵⁰ Andrei Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," p. 250.

⁴⁵¹ Yevgeniy Bazhanov, "Russian Foreign and Security Policy in Its Global Dimension," Kurt Spillmann and Andreas Wenger (ed.), **Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate**, Bern: Peter Lang, 1999, p. 163.

⁴⁵² Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel A Tsygankov, "National Ideology and IR Theory: Three Incarnations of the 'Russian Idea'," **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2010, p. 669.

⁴⁵³ For an analysis comparing liberal institutionalism with realism see Joseph M Grieco, "Anarchy and the Limits of Cooperation: A Realist Critique of the Newest Liberal Institutionalism," **International Organization**, Vol. 42, No. 3, 1988.

⁴⁵⁴ See Andrei P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," pp. 249-250.

devolution of the empire, to eradicate their military preponderance in the CIS and other regions of the world, and to abandon efforts for military-strategic parity. At the same time, Russia sought full participation in the international institutions like GATT, IMF, and the G7, while the Kremlin declared its interest in membership to NATO.⁴⁵⁵

Especially until mid-1993, Russian leaders followed a similar if not identical approach with the West towards all major issues on the international security agenda. This in turn directly influenced its alignment relations of the Russian Federation, because it led to suspension or weakening of most of the ideological, geopolitical and economic ties with traditional Soviet allies.⁴⁵⁶ For example, while generally supporting the West's agenda during the Balkan crises, Russian leaders even avoided meeting with Yugoslavian authorities. Moscow sided with the Bosnian Muslims in condemning Serbian acts during the conflicts and supported political and economic sanctions against Yugoslavia. Russia also supported the US bombing of Iraq and the following UN sanctions. Abandonment of the Soviet Third World allies and supporting Western sanctions against Libya, Iraq, and Yugoslavia, cost Russia billions of dollars as it left many lucrative markets for arms sales. In addition, Andrey Kozyrev also complied with the US demands on restricting Russia's military ties with China, Iran, and India.⁴⁵⁷

Because Atlanticists mainly aimed at the transformation of the Russian Federation into a democratic nation-state, the idea of reintegration with the former Soviet countries was not considered to be an issue of national interest. Leaders of new Russia associated such kind of policies towards the near abroad to imperialist tendencies in the Soviet geopolitical history.⁴⁵⁸ When dealing with the post-Soviet states both Yeltsin and Kozyrev underlined international norms like the protection of human rights and avoided showing any signs of hegemonic ambitions. Although Russia proposed the establishment of the CIS, it was seen as a temporary institution serving the task of peaceful disintegration of the USSR.⁴⁵⁹ As a result of the changing

⁴⁵⁵ Adomeit, "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality," p. 44.

⁴⁵⁶ Bazhanov, "Russian Foreign and Security Policy in Its Global Dimension," p. 164.

⁴⁵⁷ Andrei P. Tsygankov, **Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity**, pp. 76-77.

⁴⁵⁸ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," **Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers**, Vol. 24, No. 4, 1999, p. 482.

⁴⁵⁹ Nicole J. Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 56.

threat perceptions, Russian officials sought ways to deal with regional conflicts in the near abroad collectively with the Western powers which were now defined as allies. When President Yeltsin ordered the withdrawal of Russian troops from the Nagorno Karabakh conflict zone, he also asked for the possibility that NATO would deploy peacekeeping forces there. After the signature of the CST in May 1992, Russia did not take serious steps to implement this treaty through a one-year period and instead it continued to discuss over the possibility of deployment of the UN or NATO peacekeeping forces in ethnic conflict zones in the post-Soviet space.⁴⁶⁰

Atlanticists' heavy reliance on the Western powers in Russian foreign policy and their neglect of the near abroad together with ethnic Russian populations living there were critically reacted by some domestic political groups in the country. Eurasianism as one of the leading intellectual opposition movements emerged simultaneously in the late 1980s and early 1990s, which run contrary to Gorbachev's New Thinking and Yeltsin's Western-oriented approach.⁴⁶¹ Eurasianists, in general, have a different view of Russian identity, as they do not define Russia as a European country that completely belongs to this civilization. According to them, the country's unique transcontinental position provides Russia great opportunities in its foreign relations, therefore southern and eastern dimensions in Russian foreign policy should not be subordinated to the western direction.⁴⁶²

The Eurasianist idea has its roots in 19th Century Slavophilism which explains different characteristics of the Russian identity and culture with reference to this unique geographical position influencing its historical development. On the other side, Eurasianism as an intellectual movement emerged in the 1920s led by a group of thinkers from different areas and disciplines who incorporated Slavophil ideas into Western geopolitical theories.⁴⁶³ After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the

⁴⁶⁰ Andrei P. Tsygankov, **Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity**, pp. 83-84.

⁴⁶¹ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Hardline Eurasianism and Russia's Contending Geopolitical Perspectives," **East European Quarterly**, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1998, p. 315.

⁴⁶² Kortunov, "Russian National Interests: The State of Discussion," pp. 41-42.

⁴⁶³ Among those, Halford Mackinder's heartland theory received a great deal of attention, as he granted a special geopolitical role to Russians (the USSR), who controlled most of the territory defined as the pivot area of the world. See John O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 6, No. 3, 2001, pp. 23-24. For elaboration of the ideas by the first Eurasianists in the early 20th Century see Ömer G. İşyar, **Avrasya Ve Avrasyacılık**, Bursa: Dora Yayıncılık, 2013 pp. 1-53.

followers of the Eurasianist movement again put their emphasis on geopolitics and reinterpreted the intellectual tradition to define an appropriate identity and role for the Russian Federation in the new international system. However contemporary Eurasianism is far away from being a homogenous intellectual movement, as it includes its own internal variants with different approaches towards the philosophy of Slavophilism and old geopolitical theories. That is why some scholars make a distinction between hard-line Eurasianism and some moderate versions which have become increasingly more influential in Russian foreign policy thinking.⁴⁶⁴

Hard-line Eurasianism can be observed in the discourses of both far-right nationalist and communist politicians in the Russian Federation.⁴⁶⁵ The theoreticians of such kind of Eurasianism make references to Mackinder's geopolitical theory which views history as a continuous struggle of supremacy and geopolitical domination between land and sea powers. As a result, they have very fixed threat perceptions that towards the United States which is viewed as the leading maritime power in the contemporary world as the successor of the British Empire. While continental powers are argued to have a tendency to unite contiguous lands and peoples on a non-exploitative and multi-cultural basis, maritime powers are described as overly repressive, exploitative and self-interested states whose behavior is driven by rootless and materialistic cultures.⁴⁶⁶ In this respect, the United States and its Western allies which constitute Atlanticism, are the major source of geopolitical and cultural threat to Eurasia. In Eurasianist terminology, Atlanticism is associated with the concept of 'mondialism' encompassing globalism, cosmopolitanism, and liberalism, which are seen as inherently threatening ideologies. Russia as the leader of the Eurasian space has a special goal to unite all the anti-mondialist forces within this major continent against Atlanticism and to expel its influence from the Eurasian landmass.⁴⁶⁷

⁴⁶⁴ For example see Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Hardline Eurasianism and Russia's Contending Geopolitical Perspectives," pp. 315-334; Charles Clover, "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland-the Reemergence of Geopolitics," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 78, No. 2, 1999, pp. 9-13; Alexander A. Sergunin, "Discussions of International Relations in Post-Communism Russia," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2004, pp. 21-23. For a more elaborate typology of Eurasianism see Vladimir Papava, "The Eurasianism of Russian Anti-Westernism and the Concept of Central Caucaso-Asia," *Russian Politics & Law*, Vol. 51, No. 6, 2013, pp. 55-56.

⁴⁶⁵ See Clover, "Dreams of the Eurasian Heartland-the Reemergence of Geopolitics."

⁴⁶⁶ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 483-484.

⁴⁶⁷ O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," p. 25.

The strong adherence by hard-line Eurasianists to the narrative on the eternal struggle between maritism and continentalism, push them to define constant allies for Russia at the great power level. They define Russia and Germany as the two historical continental powers with common geopolitical interests and world view which is in competition with those of Great Britain and the United States.⁴⁶⁸ While Germany is defined as Russia's most significant future ally, European powers and Japan are also expected to join the Eurasian axis that would emerge against the Anglo-Saxon unity. Hard-liner Eurasianists seem not to consider China, India and Muslim countries as crucial independent actors but an area for geopolitical and military expansion.⁴⁶⁹ Alexander Dugin, one of the most outstanding ideologists in this movement, perceives Chinese power as a serious threat to the future of the Eurasian empire and offers some measurements against this 'Asian giant.'⁴⁷⁰ Yet, some Eurasianists with hard-liner ideas also attach importance to those countries' potential support to anti-mondialist Eurasian coalition as they are considered to have anti-Western cultural tendencies. The end goal of this grand strategy is constructing 'Pax Evrasiatica' which refers to the geostrategic unity of Eurasian space on the basis of a community with characteristics of neo-totalitarianism. In fact, hard-line Eurasianism views constantly expanding empires as the key unit of action in international politics.⁴⁷¹ There is no consensus on what kind of a form this new empire will take and this question is a source of internal discussion among Eurasianists themselves.⁴⁷²

In this respect, the first target of expansionism defined by the hard-line Eurasianists is Russia's near abroad which they see as the main priority of Russian foreign policy. This is legitimized on the ground of classical Eurasianist ideas about the historical stabilizer and organizing role of Russia over Southern Eurasia that could be traced back to the age of the Russian Empire. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, some Eurasianists argue, the enduring clan-based social structures in Russia's south

⁴⁶⁸ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," pp. 256-257.

⁴⁶⁹ See Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Hardline Eurasianism and Russia's Contending Geopolitical Perspectives," pp. 324-29.

⁴⁷⁰ Cited in Andrei P Tsygankov, "Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up," **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, Vol. 36, No. 1, 2003, p. 124-125.

⁴⁷¹ See Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Hardline Eurasianism and Russia's Contending Geopolitical Perspectives," pp. 328-29.

⁴⁷² Emre Erşen, "Neo-Eurasianism and Putin's 'Multipolarism' in Russian Foreign Policy," **Perspectives**, Vol. 32, No. 3, 1998, p. 138.

continue to encourage social disorder, ethnic conflict and organized crime.⁴⁷³ On the other hand, hard-line Eurasianists insisted that Russia have to fill the geopolitical vacuum that emerged after the Cold War as soon as possible before it would be filled by a hostile power. In this respect, some hard-liners called for rapid incorporation of Belarus and Northern Kazakhstan into Russian borders, while others called only for the annexation of Belarus and Ukraine in order to constitute Slavic Eurasianism which would later expand geopolitically towards the post-Soviet region.⁴⁷⁴

Since the 1990s, hard-line Eurasianism has never been a part of Russian mainstream foreign policy discourse, while it has been increasingly marginalized due to its fantastic world view and the unrealistic goals it set for Russia.⁴⁷⁵ At the same time, there have been some other intellectuals and politicians who borrowed ideas from traditional Eurasianism but re-evaluated them through pragmatism and eliminated some extreme elements. Proponents of moderate Eurasianist ideas within Russian academics and intellectuals are associated with the realist school of international relations.⁴⁷⁶ In the political spectrum, these people take place in the center-right, while they are defined as ‘statists’ or ‘democratic statists’ in political science literature.⁴⁷⁷ Statists like other Eurasianists attach central importance to geopolitics and they share the classical Russian approach to geopolitical studies which has always been based on the idea of defensive belts surrounding the Russian heartland and blocking the expansion of foreign military influence.⁴⁷⁸ However, they are neither romantic about the early 20th Century geopolitical theories, nor advocates of empire-building strategies through military expansion throughout the Eurasian landmass.

⁴⁷³ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 484.

⁴⁷⁴ O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," p. 25; Papava, "The Eurasianism of Russian Anti-Westernism and the Concept of" Central Caucaso-Asia", p. 58.

⁴⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, 316; and O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," p. 24.

⁴⁷⁶ İşyar, *Avrasya Ve Avrasyacılık*, p. 104. In this respect, Sergo Mikoyan associates statist ideas including those of Yevgeny Primakov with the defensive version of the realist school which he argues dominated debates over foreign policy in Russia after 1994. Sergo Mikoyan, "Russia, the Us and Regional Conflict in Eurasia," *Survival*, Vol. 40, No. 3, 1998, p. 115-116.

⁴⁷⁷ On the other side, they were quickly labeled as ‘*derzhavniki*’ and ‘*gosudarstvenniki*’ in Russian domestic realm, which could be translated as proponents of state power. Sergunin, "Discussions of International Relations in Post-Communism Russia," p. 22.

⁴⁷⁸ See O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," p. 23.

As Graham Smith puts it, democratic statism has been adopted as the official version of Eurasianism which plays a dominant role in Russia's foreign policy thinking since 1993.⁴⁷⁹ Democratic statisticians do not view Western liberalism as a constant political or cultural threat to Eurasia that needs to be expelled from the continent. Indeed they have a commitment to the Western-style democracy, which democratic statisticians want to combine it with some kind of populist nationalism in order to produce a syncretic geopolitical discourse. What they try to achieve domestically is to construct a strong and sovereign state that is capable of maintaining order and stability in such a huge country and responding effectively to external geopolitical challenges whenever they emerge.⁴⁸⁰ Statisticians with moderate nationalist ideas are not anti-Western in their nature but they merely seek recognition for Russia as a strong and influential state in world politics by putting the emphasis on its military capabilities and economic development.⁴⁸¹

According to democratic and moderate versions of Eurasianism, the post-Cold War world does not automatically imply that Russian and Western powers' interests would converge, nor it means that Russia should simply adopt an anti-Western stance. Their approach towards great power relations is pragmatic enough to recognize that Russia must work with the US and the West and it is in Russia's interest to cooperate with the Western-led international institutions.⁴⁸² However they do not define the basis of cooperation as common values underlined by the Atlanticist perspective, rather this cooperation should be motivated and driven by common interests.⁴⁸³ In this sense, moderate Eurasianists do not raise objections to Russia's integration into economic, diplomatic and even military institutions of this advanced part of the world if it could be achieved on a partnership basis.⁴⁸⁴ From the 1990s onwards, there is a tendency among democratic statisticians to recognize it as a reality that the country's economic fortunes are dependent on good relations with the West. At the same time, they

⁴⁷⁹ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," pp. 483, 487.

⁴⁸⁰ See *ibid.*, and Sergunin, "Discussions of International Relations in Post-Communism Russia," p. 23.

⁴⁸¹ Parkhalina, "Impacts of Domestic and Regional Factors on Russia's Foreign and Security Policy," pp. 48-49; Andrei P. Tsygankov and Pavel Tsygankov, "National Ideology and IR Theory: Three Incarnations of the 'Russian Idea'," p. 669.

⁴⁸² Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 488.

⁴⁸³ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," p. 261.

⁴⁸⁴ Sergunin, "Discussions of International Relations in Post-Communism Russia," p. 22; Parkhalina, "Impacts of Domestic and Regional Factors on Russia's Foreign and Security Policy," p. 49.

acknowledge the fact that Russia neither possesses the superpower status of the Soviet Union, nor it would like to have the capacity to transform the international system towards the bipolarity of the past. Rather from the democratic statist perspective, Russia should adjust itself to be a part of the 'multipolar world' consisting of 'global power blocs' coexisting together. These ideas were mainly supported by the second foreign minister of Russia, Yevgeny Primakov, who was close to many basic ideas within the democratic statist and moderate Eurasianist tradition.⁴⁸⁵ As a strong advocator of what he conceptualized as 'multipolarity', he underlined the necessity of building a strategic partnership with China, as well as close relations with India and Iran in order to dilute American power and influence at the international level.⁴⁸⁶

Last but not least democratic statist have worked together with politicians and bureaucrats inclined to Eurasianism to persuade Yeltsin's government to promote the near abroad as a priority of Russian foreign policy and to initiate integration projects within the CIS.⁴⁸⁷ Moderates agree with the hard-liner Eurasianists that Russia's geopolitical position and historical experiences grant the state a special role to stabilize the post-Soviet region.⁴⁸⁸ In addition, democratic statist also see the near abroad as a crucial part of Russia's past greatness and natural sphere of influence. However, democratic statist want to establish a special great power role in the region, whose behavior differs from an imperial power. In this respect they have sought a legitimized role of leadership for Russia in the perspective of regional states, considering common political, economic interests and Russia's stabilizer role over the regional conflicts.⁴⁸⁹ In the 1990s, the escalation of regional ethnic conflicts with possible repercussions on

⁴⁸⁵ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 491. While Smith makes references to Yevgeny Primakov's speeches while examining democratic statism, Alexander Sergounin directly suggests that Primakov can be described as a '*derzhavniki*.' Alexander A. Sergounin, "Russian Domestic Debate on Nato Enlargement: From Phobia to Damage Limitation," **European Security**, Vol. 6, No. 4, 1997, p. 61.

⁴⁸⁶ Ariel Cohen, "The 'Primakov Doctrine': Russia's Zero Sum Game with the United States," The Heritage Foundation, Report No. 167, December 1997, <https://www.heritage.org/report/the-primakov-doctrine-russias-zero-sum-game-the-united-states> (06.12.2017).

⁴⁸⁷ Sergunin, "Discussions of International Relations in Post-Communism Russia," p. 22.

⁴⁸⁸ For example, Kamaludin Gadzhiyev, who is well-known for his textbook on geopolitics with moderate Eurasianist ideas, argues that Russia should formulate its foreign policy goals and interests to help the regional stability in Eurasia and to open space for ethnical and cultural differences in the region. In this respect, Gadzhiyev calls for Russia to lead to construct a collective security system in the post-Soviet region in order to address regional instability and some external geopolitical challenges towards the CIS. Cited by Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up," pp. 118-119.

⁴⁸⁹ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," pp. 488-489; Mikoyan, "Russia, the Us and Regional Conflict in Eurasia," p. 115.

Russia's internal security persuaded moderate Eurasianists that Russia's periphery became a primary security threat which was bigger than the West. Therefore moderate Eurasianists wanted to build military alliances in the CIS and supported the use of military force in the near abroad when necessary. Although they have not supported total military expansion or empire-building strategies defended by hard-liners, moderate Eurasianists welcomed using methods of strategic pressure over the states that were not willing to recognize Russia's stabilizer role.⁴⁹⁰ In this respect, they also sought ways to block foreign initiatives to fill the geopolitical vacuum in the near abroad.



⁴⁹⁰ O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," p. 27.

Table 4 - Atlanticist and Eurasianist approaches towards significant issues in Russian foreign policy

	Main Threat Perceptions	Great Power Relations	Near Abroad
Atlanticism	- Internal challenges as the primary source of threat - External threat perceptions based on domestic characteristic of states	- Institutional cooperation through a mutual security approach / Integration into the Western world - The US and Western powers are defined as natural allies - Abandonment of former Soviet allies	- Policies of neglect and encouragement to complete the Soviet dissolution process (civilized divorce) - Avoidance of a neo-imperial image for Russia - Willingness to share responsibility with Western security institutions and the UN
Hard-Line Eurasianism	- Fixed and constant threat perception from the leading sea power, the US and its Western allies (Atlanticism) - Ideological threats: liberalism, cosmopolitanism, globalism	- Zero-sum geopolitical contest between constantly expanding empires - The Eurasian axis of Germany-Russia-Japan vs. the US and Great Britain alliance - Expansion towards China and India plus the Muslim world	- Main priority in Russian foreign policy - Emphasis on Russian regional stabilizer role - Geopolitical and military expansion towards the region as a primary target of empire-building strategies
Moderate Eurasianism / Democratic Statism	- The West is not inherently threatening (interests may diverge or converge) - External geopolitical challenges towards the near abroad (which is viewed as a defensive belt around Russia) - Regional conflicts and instability in the CIS with repercussions on Russian internal security	- Cooperation with the US, European powers, Western institutions on the basis of common interests - Recognition of Russia's economic vulnerability in its relations with the US and the West - Supporting 'multipolarity' through strategic partnerships with rising power centers (e.g. China, India)	- Main priority in Russian foreign policy - Emphasis on Russian regional stabilizer role - Voluntary re-integration of the CIS on the basis of common economic interests and Russia's legitimate leadership - Providing security and stability through using military alliances and strategic pressure

Table 4 summarizes distinct approaches towards threat perceptions, great power relations and the near abroad in Russian foreign policy thinking by different intellectual groups involved in domestic disputes. A comparison between these

different approaches shows that Atlanticist thinking remarkably diverges from our theoretical framework. Since Atlanticism has no identified threat perceptions on the geopolitical expansion of foreign influences towards Russian borders, it does not favor balancing actions in any kind. Furthermore, the liberal institutionalist view and mutual security understanding by Atlanticists induced them to welcome and support some developments that would lead the expansion of Western military influence towards Eurasia. However, as examined in the following subsection, Russia's attempts to establish an 'alliance' with the US and European states based on common values and to deal with the global threats on a strategic partnership basis have by and large failed. At the same time, rising threats from the near abroad with repercussions on Russia's internal security increased political pressures against the Yeltsin leadership by Eurasianists and nationalist forces which forced the foreign policy change in 1993.

Compared to Atlanticism, hard-line Eurasianists ideas could be viewed as more close to realism, regarding their emphasis on the struggle for power between different actors over specific geopolitical contexts. However, it has to be noted that the realist school's approach towards foreign policy and geopolitics is substantially different from traditional geopolitics. The latter has a more reductionist and determinist view of state behavior which are driven by their physical elements such as climate, landscape, geology and, above all, geographical location.⁴⁹¹ The classification of states regarding physical characteristics and historical identities shaped by those characteristics enables hard-line Eurasianists to imagine a united Eurasian empire particularly led by Germany, Russia, and Japan against Atlanticist forces.⁴⁹² However, as balance of threat theory would suggest, such empire-building strategies most likely create security dilemmas and counterbalancing actions. Russia's expansionist moves to the near abroad and even towards China and India have the potential of wasting its national resources and facilitating its containment by adversary alignments. Such revisionist plans aiming at restoring the global balance of power against the US and its allies with the assistance of some Eurasian leading powers can be classified as hard balancing actions which are defined as not feasible by our theoretical framework.

⁴⁹¹ Eduard G Solovyev, "Geopolitics in Russia—Science or Vocation?," **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, Vol. 37, No. 1, 2004, p. 88.

⁴⁹² See Andrei P. Tsygankov, "Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-Up," **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, Vol. 36, 2003, p. 125.

This unrealistic conception of a hard balancing world which favors adventuristic strategic goals for Russia seems to be the main reason that hard-line Eurasianism has been marginalized in Russian official foreign policy discourse. However, this does not mean that Russia has not been able to withstand against geopolitical threats through building formal alliances and some military initiatives on the regional level. Moderate Eurasinists' emphasis on voluntary integration based on Russia's stabilizer role and common interests and using strategic pressure against some regional states makes a direct relevance to the second main assumption by this study with reference to balance of threat and omnibalancing theories. According to John O'loughlin Russian foreign policy since 1993 can be gauged as an implementation of such a moderate conception of Eurasianism which also make relevance to so-called 'Putin Doctrine'⁴⁹³

On the level of relations with the US and Europe, moderate Eurasianists are ready to take opportunities for economic and diplomatic cooperation and integration into Western institutions on a partnership basis, while recognizing the fact that Russia is the weaker side, especially in the economic realm. On the other side, democratic statist advocates strategic cooperation with the rising power centers of the world in order to consolidate Russia's influence in world politics in their approach towards 'multipolarity.' In this respect, they disapprove of hard balancing strategies which may lead to self-defeating results and embrace a soft balancing vision, as they remain careful about economic and political interests of Russia in its relations with the US. It is also clear that they want to gain better outcomes under the current distribution of power through strategic collaboration with other major powers. At the end, their pragmatic approach recognizing the realities of contemporary international politics led democratic statist's triumph in domestic disputes, as a group oriented to Eurasianism. As a result, they emerged as the most influential group on Russian foreign policy discourse after the foreign policy change in 1993, which they contributed to emerge.

⁴⁹³ O'loughlin, "Geopolitical Fantasies, National Strategies and Ordinary Russians in the Post-Communist Era," p. 27.

B. The Near Abroad Doctrine and After: The Rise of Realism and Geopolitics

Following the Soviet collapse, Atlanticists have become the dominant group both within the Yeltsin government and among Russian political elites. However during the spring and summer of 1992, when the ethnic conflicts in the CIS reached the top level, the opposition groups who adopted a pragmatic Eurasianist discourse increased their criticism against the Western-oriented policies.⁴⁹⁴ By the end of 1993, a new consensus emerged over the Russian foreign policy, which emphasized geopolitics and Russia's vital interests in the post-Soviet region. The shift in Russian foreign policy from a liberal institutionalist framework to realist parameters was symbolized with the declaration of the first military doctrine of the Russian Federation in November 1993. This document which is known as 'the near abroad doctrine' was written in an assertive tone and identified Russia as an emerging great power that faces multiple threats. In this regard, it put its emphasis on the importance of maintaining a sphere of influence over the newly independent states. The doctrine also assumed a stabilizer role for the Russian Federation in the CIS and advocated an active military involvement in the region.⁴⁹⁵

As examined below, the foreign policy change has also influenced other official documents on foreign and security policies published in the 1990s, which guided for the redefinition of Russia's external relations. In this respect, the rise of realism in Russian foreign policy during the whole decade. The main factors which have driven this process can be divided into three groups; (i) domestic political and economic factors, (ii) external factors underlining Russia's increasing threat perceptions from the West and (iii) regional factors associated with the rising instability in the near abroad. In the domestic sphere, the economic developments in the early 1990s disconfirmed the expectations that liberalization and institutionalization of free-market mechanisms could alone create favorable economic growth.⁴⁹⁶ This led to an overall

⁴⁹⁴ Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, pp. 59-69.

⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65; Svante Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2001, p. 330.

⁴⁹⁶ This was partly because the level of foreign investments and Western financial aid to support Russian reform process remained far lower than what was expected. Igor Ivanov, **The New Russian Diplomacy**, Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2002, p. 11; Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," p. 258; Kortunov, "Russian National Interests: The State of Discussion," p. 42.

disillusion in Western development models, and accordingly, Yeltsin leadership's political and economic reform process. In addition, socio-economic consequences of 'shock therapy' like widespread job insecurity and the absence of social security measurements to prevent people falling into deep poverty boosted people's appeal to nationalist, conservative, communist and far-right political parties. As a result, these groups won the majority of votes in December 1993 parliamentary relations, which led to Yeltsin leadership's tilt towards more nationalist and assertive policies, although the government did not fully capitulate to their extremist agendas.⁴⁹⁷

External threat perceptions need to be dealt with in more detail, regarding the parameters of this study which focus on system-level variables. During the 1990s, Russia's threat perceptions from the West have grown hand in hand with some developments that proved that the US and its NATO allies were not willing to recognize Russia as an equal partner in international security. As elaborated in the previous pages, Yeltsin's leadership initially preferred to break ties with the former Soviet allies. In the following years, however, Russians could not be persuaded that the West gave up power politics to reciprocate Moscow's behavior.⁴⁹⁸ At the same time, the Western powers tried to discourage Russian attempts to defend their military position in the CIS by labeling such attempts as a redivicism of Soviet imperialism. While the US and its European allies run contrary to political, economic or security integration projects in the post-Soviet space, they sought ways to expand NATO towards Russia's borders. From the Russian perspective, this meant that the conventional type of geopolitical contests would not perish also in the post-Cold War world.⁴⁹⁹

Following the dissolution of the Warsaw Pact, the Russian side offered some plans to build a collective security system for Europe. Russia first offered that the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) including nearly all European countries as members would play a central role in the future of European

⁴⁹⁷ See Adomeit, "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality," p. 58; Bazhanov, "Russian Foreign and Security Policy in Its Global Dimension," p. 164.

⁴⁹⁸ One of the facts underlining Russia's anxiety in this respect was that between 1991 and 1993, Russia's share dropped from 38 to 17 percent in the world arms markets as a result of the foreign policy change, whereas the US took it as an opportunity and increased its share from 30 to 58 percent. Andrei P. Tsygankov, **Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity**, p. 77.

⁴⁹⁹ See Ivanov, **The New Russian Diplomacy**, p. 12; and Andrei P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," p. 258.

security, as the primary institution to maintain peace and order in the continent. According to this plan, NATO, the EU, the Western European Union (WEU) would have been subordinated to this pan-European structure. In addition, Russians believed that NATO shall be transformed from a conventional military alliance into a more open, politically-oriented organization in the post-Cold War world. Should there emerged new members in Eastern Europe, they would be merely political members not allowing NATO troops or weapons on their territory. Last but not least, Russia demanded a privileged partnership status with NATO that would allow Moscow to influence and even veto key decisions such as enlargement.⁵⁰⁰ While the US and NATO did not satisfy any of these Russian demands, they only signed a 'Founding Act on Mutual Relations and Cooperation with Russia', which led to the formation of a permanent NATO-Russia Council in 1997. However, this was generally evaluated in Russia only as a formal concession made by the West to calm down Moscow's reaction to the forthcoming enlargement towards Central Europe. The structure of the Council obviously did not grant Russia a veto power which the Yeltsin government demanded before.⁵⁰¹

As a result, NATO's enlargement process which reshaped military balance and geopolitics in Europe in the conventional sense has been managed unilaterally disregarding all Russian diplomatic opposition and protests. There emerged some critics also on the Western side against the NATO enlargement process towards Poland, Czech Republic, and Hungary.⁵⁰² Most strikingly, George Kennan, a US diplomat and historian who is known for his contribution to the containment policy against the Soviet Union, suggested that "*expanding NATO would be the most fateful error of American policy in the entire post-cold-war era*"⁵⁰³ For him such a decision had the potential to inflame the nationalist, anti-Western and militarist tendencies within both the Russian public and state, to have an adverse effect on domestic

⁵⁰⁰ Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," *Political Science Quarterly*, Vol. 114, No. 4, 1999, p. 554.

⁵⁰¹ Allen C. Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 1, 2001, pp. 18-19, Andrei Tsygankov, *Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity*, p. 108.

⁵⁰² For a critical study dating back to 1998, which examines the negative possible outcomes of NATO expansion on the European security and Russia's relations with the West through the Western perspective see Eugene J. Carroll Jr., "Nato Enlargement: To What End?," Ted G. Carpenter and Barbara Conry (ed.), *Nato Enlargement: Illusions and Reality*, Cato Institute, 1998, pp. 199-206.

⁵⁰³ George Kennan, "A Fateful Error," *New York Times*, February 5, 1997. The full text can be found in Congressional Record: Proceeding and Debates of the 105th Congress, Second Session, Vol. 144, Part 3, March 1998, p. 4160.

democratization process, and to transform Russia's foreign policy into ways not to the West's liking.⁵⁰⁴ Besides acknowledging this, Kenneth Waltz also suggested that the enlargement decision had the potential to draw new lines in Europe and to push the Kremlin towards China instead of Europe and the United States. Thus he saw the enlargement, not a product of American foreign policy interests but of its domestic political impulses about spreading democratic and liberal values through the world.⁵⁰⁵

Whatever the real reasons behind were, the NATO enlargement process was an alarm call for Russians indicating that their liberal institutionalist approach and the mutual security perspective were not sustainable. In 1994, the president Yeltsin himself protested NATO's early enlargement plans, by stating that "*Europe has not yet freed itself from the heritage of the Cold War and is now in danger of lunging into a Cold War peace.*"⁵⁰⁶ Later he contended that "*NATO was intent on squeezing Russia out of Europe.*"⁵⁰⁷ While the process of integration of some former Warsaw pact members into NATO was continuing, Russia's focus turned to defend its military positions in the CIS. In 1995, Andrey Kozyrev suggested that "*Russia is making every effort to combat the drive for some CIS states to join NATO.*"⁵⁰⁸ This changing discourse has also negatively influenced Russia's cooperation with the Alliance through NATO's Peace for Partnership program (PfP), which aimed to promote

⁵⁰⁴ This view was confirmed by some leading reformists in the Russian government who warned that NATO enlargement would damage the position of pro-Western reformers since it represented a psychological rejection of Russia from the Western community. Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," p. 555.

⁵⁰⁵ Waltz, "Intimations of Multipolarity," p. 5. Dmitri Trenin agrees that the NATO enlargement was an error contributing to reemergence of the tensions between Russia and West in the geopolitical sense. However he suggests that avoiding that error would have also come at a price that Americans would have given up to extend their military control of Europe. They would have treated Russians as almost co-equals at their own expense, when the US was the undisputed dominant power and Russia was in a very weak and supplicant position. This required changes in the mentality of Western and mainly American leaders towards international politics to which they were not capable. Author's interview with Dmitri Trenin. Accordingly, Tatiana Shackleina from MGIMO underlines the fact that the Central and Eastern European countries were really decisive to join the NATO, so they initiated a diplomatic bombardment campaign on Washington underlining their threat perceptions from Russia. This set the ground for a great opportunity for Americans who aimed at keeping and enlarging its armed presence in Europe. It was also an irrefutable offer for the US army and the military industry which has always been willing to grow up through cooperation with new allies throughout the world. Author's interview with Tatiana Shackleina.

⁵⁰⁶ Quoted in Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 491.

⁵⁰⁷ Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," p. 555.

⁵⁰⁸ Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 74.

military contacts, cooperation, training and exercise programs between NATO members and non-members in Europe.⁵⁰⁹

Because Russia was politically and economically very weak against the NATO alliance and had no regional clients and proxies in Europe that could help to challenge the enlargement plans, it was clear that Russians had no other choice than accepting this expansion as a military *fait accompli*.⁵¹⁰ In this respect, it was an open secret that Russia strongly opposed NATO's enlargement towards Central Europe to forestall further enlargement to the post-Soviet region.⁵¹¹ Through the 1990s, the US concluded bilateral agreements with some post-Soviet states from the Black Sea to Central Asia and increased its military contacts with them through supplying new weapons and sending the US instructors to these countries for exercise and training.⁵¹² Last but not least, NATO's intervention to Kosovo in 1999, by-passing the UN Collective security system, against the Yugoslavian government which had close relations with Moscow underlined Russia's perception of NATO as an 'offensive alliance.'⁵¹³ This military operation which eventually led to Kosovo's recognition as an independent state aroused Russian concerns that similar scenarios could take place over the regional conflicts in the CIS. Besides the ethnic conflicts bordering Russia, some even feared that it could be a precedent case for a possible intervention into the Chechnya conflict within the country.⁵¹⁴

⁵⁰⁹ For more information about the PfP program covering the Alliance members, former Warsaw Pact members and post-Soviet states see Martin Smith, **Russia and Nato since 1991: From Cold War through Cold Peace to Partnership?**, New York: Routledge, 2006, pp. 51-76. As a part of its attempts to build a privileged partnership with NATO, Russia attained the program in 1994 but minimally and rather formally. Only one year later, Russia decided to block any sort of cooperation through this program and warned its allies not to cooperate with the Alliance through the PfP, as it began to consider the program as an arrangement facilitating NATO's enlargement process. Revaz Adamia, "Nato: Caucasus in the Context of Partnership for Peace," *Perceptions. Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 1999, p. 2; Alberto Priego, "NATO Cooperation towards South Caucasus," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2008, p. 3.

⁵¹⁰ Author's Interview with Tatiana Shackleina. See also George Kennan's arguments in *Congressional Record: Proceeding and Debates of the 105th Congress*.

⁵¹¹ Dmitri Trenin, "Reluctant Adoption: Russia's Security Policy Towards New Eastern Europe and the Baltics States," Kurt Spillmann and Andreas Wenger (ed.), **Russia's Place in Europe: A Security Debate**, Bern: Peter Lang, 1999, p. 95.

⁵¹² The states which signed bilateral agreements with Washington include Ukraine (1993), Azerbaijan (1997), Kazakhstan (1997) and Georgia (1998). Because these states also participated NATO's multilateral PfP program, these bilateral military agreements underlined Moscow's suspicions further that the US aimed at undermining some CIS member's relationships with Russia. Mikoyan, "Russia, the US and Regional Conflict in Eurasia," p. 119.

⁵¹³ Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov.

⁵¹⁴ See Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia: Reassessing National Interest," Albrecht Schnabel and Ramesh Thakur (ed.), **Kosovo and the Challenge of Humanitarian Intervention: Selective Indignation**,

The third significant reason that promoted the rise of geopolitics and realism in Russian foreign policy has become regional factors that are associated with increasing instability in the near abroad. The ethnic turmoil and regional conflicts in the CIS were seen by Russians as a clear indication that new republics themselves were not capable of organizing and stabilizing the region without Russia's leadership. Furthermore, their state-building practices resulted in a 'Balkanization' process, as the policies they followed led to ethnic conflicts in the Caucasus with repercussions on Russia's internal security.⁵¹⁵ Therefore, in 1992, when regional instability transformed into real ethnic and religious conflicts within the CIS space, Russians came to a point to perceive the southern neighbors as the sources of greatest threat. Confirming this view, Sergei Karaganov, the chair of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy and an early exponent of pragmatic nationalist ideas, argued that Russia's survival was "*depended first upon stability in the south and only then upon a limited partnership with the West.*"⁵¹⁶

Such threat perceptions from the near abroad unfolded the fact that Russia had to take greater responsibility in the former Soviet Union. Accordingly, it became clear that the regional security of the CIS could not be dealt with a liberal institutionalist framework and strategic partnership with the West. In the early 1990s, NATO went into a transformation process from a conventional defense pact to a military-political alliance that would undertake responsibility for crisis management and conflict resolution in different regions through conducting out of area operations.⁵¹⁷ The first area to test NATO's capability for these tasks became the Balkan region, where ethnic conflicts clearly mattered more for the European members of the Alliance, regarding the refugee problem and repercussions of regional conflicts on instability in Europe. Conversely, the US and its NATO allies were not willing to involve the regional

Collective Action and International Citizenship, New York: United Nations University Press, 2000, pp. 103-106.

⁵¹⁵ Andrei P. Tsygankov, "From International Institutionalism to Revolutionary Expansionism: The Foreign Policy Discourse of Contemporary Russia," p. 259; Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 489.

⁵¹⁶ Quoted in Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 60.

⁵¹⁷ See Gareth Winrow, "Nato and Out-of-Area: A Post-Cold War Challenge," **European Security**, Vol. 3, No. 4, 1994, pp. 617-638.

conflicts in the CIS where was an unknown and troublesome area for them. Therefore they de facto deferred main responsibility to Russia.⁵¹⁸

The regional conflicts of the CIS shared very similar characteristics with those in the Balkans, as they were also civil wars involved by dis-organized paramilitary forces who were responsible for human rights violations, mass killings, forced displacement of local populations, arms trafficking, etc. Accordingly, the instability in the near abroad had possible repercussions on Russia's internal security such as refugee flows, the rising ethno-nationalism, Islamic fundamentalism, and terrorism. When the war in Chechnya reached its peak in the mid-1990s, it fueled fears that the Russian Federation itself might succumb to Balkanization.⁵¹⁹ This was seen as a dramatic example of what would follow if Russia did not take responsibility to keep the peace in the CIS.⁵²⁰ All these developments show that Russia, as the only capable actor to achieve stability in the region had also a genuine interest to end the ethnic and religious conflicts in the near abroad – in one way or another. This is a fact disregarded by our theoretical framework. Yet, as examined later in this study, Russian approaches to stabilize the region favoring specific sides of regional conflicts to various degrees have been also shaped by specific strategic interests of Russia.

The rising significance of the near abroad in Russian foreign policy since about 1993 has also influenced the official declarations. In a 1994 speech, Andrey Kozyrev closed himself to a pragmatic nationalist and moderate Eurasianist discourse, as he argued that *"complete withdrawal and removal of any Russian military presence in the countries of the near abroad is just an extreme ... suggestion, comparable to the idea of sending [Russian] tanks to all the former republics to establish there some imperial order."*⁵²¹ In this respect, Kozyrev tilted towards the advocates of an assertive foreign policy in the Russian state and parliament, while he began to refer to some traditional realist notions so frequently such as military bases, spheres of influence, security alliances, power vacuums, buffer states, etc. For example in January 1994, addressing Russian ambassadors to the post-Soviet states he suggested that *"as soon as we leave these areas, the ensuing vacuum will immediately be filled by other forces, possibly*

⁵¹⁸ See Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, p. 362.

⁵¹⁹ Graham Smith, "The Masks of Proteus: Russia, Geopolitical Shift and the New Eurasianism," p. 489.

⁵²⁰ Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 69.

⁵²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

not always friendly and perhaps even hostile to Russian interests."⁵²² To avoid this Russia had to "*learn to conduct military actions to support and establish peace in the zones of our traditional geopolitical interests.*"⁵²³

The 1993 military doctrine emerged as an official confirmation that Russia would do all the necessary things to avoid both negative scenarios about an uncontrolled instability in the CIS or the expansion of foreign military influence towards Russian borders. This document known as the near abroad doctrine listed basic sources of external military threats such as "*existing and potential local wars and armed conflicts, particularly those in the immediate vicinity of the Russian borders;*" "*the expansion of military blocs and alliances to the detriment of the interests of the Russian Federation;*" and "*the suppression of the rights, freedoms, and legitimate interests of citizens of the Russian Federation in foreign states.*"⁵²⁴ In addition, the doctrine noted that Russia's and other post-Soviet countries' interests may require the Russian Federation to deploy troops and resources outside of its territory. The parts of the document defining the principles of sending Russian forces beyond its national borders declared that the deployments should be done only in accordance with international legal documents, the agreements laying down the framework of the CIS, and as well as, on the basis of a mutual agreement with the host country. However as examined later in the next chapter, Russia's military presence in the CIS inherited from the Soviet times was used as an element of strategic pressure in some cases which sometimes forced a formal mutual agreement itself.⁵²⁵

In the early 1990s, there have been some other initiatives to adopt an official foreign policy concept to define the main principles, orientations, and characteristics of the Russian Federation's external relations. From mid-1992 to 1993 Russian political and bureaucratic elites debated and drafted three foreign policy concepts

⁵²² Hannes Adomeit, "Russian National Security Interest," Roy Allison and Bluth Christoph (ed.), **Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia**, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998, p. 39.

⁵²³ Charles J. Dick, "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation," **The Journal of Slavic Military Studies**, Vol. 7, No. 3, 1994, p. 498.

⁵²⁴ The Basic Provisions of the Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 1993, Unofficial Translation, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/russia-mil-doc.html> (01.02.2018).

⁵²⁵ See Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 65; and Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**.

among which only one was adopted officially.⁵²⁶ The last one officially adopted in April 1993, under the title of ‘Basic Principles of a Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation.’ While all the documents were common in emphasizing the post-Soviet regional conflicts as a main threat to Russian security and recognized the possibility of use of military force in the CIS under certain conditions, the last concept was clearly the most assertive one. The document defined Russia’s main strategic objectives of in the post-Soviet space such as;⁵²⁷

“creation of an effective system of collective defense, ensuring the status of Russia as the single nuclear power in the CIS; strengthening of the external borders of the Commonwealth, maintaining its military infrastructure and installations and establishing an internal system of military security for its members.”

All of these objectives were clear signs that Russia aimed at consolidating its military dominance over the CIS. These declared principles gave way to the adaptation of certain political decisions. For example, Yeltsin lent support to the Ministry of Defense’s call to establish 30 military bases in the CIS by signing a presidential decree in April 1994.⁵²⁸ Within six months, Yeltsin signed another decree calling for a politically and economically integrated alliance of states in the CIS region and setting a legal basis to deploy Russian border troops in the former Soviet Union.⁵²⁹ These developments show that towards the mid-1990s there emerged a consensus on Russian foreign policy which promoted the integration processes within the CIS as one of the central national objectives. This foreign policy consensus was clearly based on realist notions of international politics and security.⁵³⁰

As Dov Lynch suggests, the replacement of Andrey Kozyrev with Yevgeny Primakov in 1996, did not change the essence of this consensus, while the new foreign minister brought greater coherence to Russia's foreign policy towards the CIS.⁵³¹ Primakov also identified Russia as the dominant state in the region which must be

⁵²⁶ For more information about this process see Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, pp. 63-64.

⁵²⁷ Adomeit, "Russian National Security Interest," pp. 37-38.

⁵²⁸ Taras Kuzio, **Ukrainian Security Policy**, London: Praeger, 1995, p. 87.

⁵²⁹ Alvin Z Rubinstein, "Russia Adrift," **Harvard International Review**, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2000, p. 17; Adomeit, "Russian National Security Interest," p. 39.

⁵³⁰ See *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁵³¹ Dov Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, London: Macmillan, 2000, p. 6. See also Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 75.

recognized as a necessary partner of for political, economic and military activity in the former Soviet Union.⁵³² In addition, Primakov brought a new innovation to Russia's relations with important power centers of the world, through promoting 'multipolarity' as a central concept in Russia's foreign policy discourse. In fact, the Russian approach to 'multipolarity' or what was called as the 'Primakov Doctrine' in the late 1990s has first emerged as a practical attempt to diversify Russia's relations with the actors outside the Western world.⁵³³

According to Primakov, the world was still in a transition process in the late 1990s, because not all the power centers which would construct 'multipolarity' have established themselves, while the US wanted to dominate the system under this condition.⁵³⁴ Russia had to oppose such negative trends in the system, by building close relations with the emerging Asian powers, especially with China and India. In addition, Primakov wanted to enlarge Russia's network of diplomatic cooperation as much as possible, by adding some other countries which were disturbed by the US hegemonic tendencies such as Iran, Iraq, Libya, Syria, Serbia, and even France and Germany.⁵³⁵ However, this does not mean that Russian officials viewed these relations as an alternative to Moscow's relations with the US and the West. Indeed, as a democratic statist, Primakov also maintained efforts to develop Russia's relations with the West. In a speech delivered to Duma in 1996, he put his position that "*the West would respect Russia only if it developed its own separate position on foreign policy issues – otherwise, he claimed, the West would not pay attention.*"⁵³⁶ As Thomas Ambrosio suggests:

"Multipolarity as a corrective to American hegemonism constituted a fundamental part of what some have called the "Primakov Doctrine". This did not require direct confrontation with the United States, but rather the creation of a more equal relationship between Moscow and Washington in which Russian

⁵³² **Ibid.**

⁵³³ Baidya Bikash Basu, "Russian National Security Thinking," **Strategic Analysis**, Vol. 24, No. 7, 2000, p. 1286.

⁵³⁴ Thomas Ambrosio, "Russia's Quest for Multipolarity: A Response to Us Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era," **European Security**, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2001, p. 53.

⁵³⁵ Mark N. Katz, "Primakov Redux? Putin's Pursuit of" Multipolarism" in Asia," **Demokratizatsiya**, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2006, p. 145.

⁵³⁶ Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 76.

*interests would be respected and the Americans would be constrained from acting unilaterally.”*⁵³⁷

Mark Katz makes a similar point that:

*“Primakov’s effort ... did not appear that he intended either to revive the Cold War or create an alliance that would seriously compete with the United States in the international arena. Instead what Primakov seemed to want was to create a situation in which Washington would have to seek Moscow’s advice and consent before it could act. But although Russia by itself was not strong enough to make Washington do this, Russia with important allies could. In other words, Primakov wanted to create a situation in which Washington would have no choice but respect Moscow’s interests.”*⁵³⁸

These propositions about Russia’s conception of ‘multipolarity’ make close relevance to soft balancing theory since they underline the strategic objective of the Primakov Doctrine as discouraging and undermining the US unilateral policies by consolidating Russia’s influence and leverage in international politics. Primakov tried to achieve this by building a network of alignment relations with different actors located in the Eurasian continent, which fell short of military alliances.⁵³⁹ The Russian approach to ‘multipolarity’ with its all relevance to alignment theories and system-level approaches in the neo-realist school will be examined in the next section. It should be noted here that although the most important diplomatic steps to support the formation of such a ‘multipolar’ world in the Russian perspective were taken in the Putin period, the evolution of Russian foreign policy towards realism in the 1990s has set the intellectual basis of Russia’s conception of such an ideal global system and provided some diplomatic experience in the way to contribute its formation. To sum, it was this evolution process that promoted providing military integration within the CIS and securing Russia’s position as an influential great power in world politics as Russian two main foreign policy goals, which were also embraced by the Putin administration.

⁵³⁷ Ambrosio, "Russia's Quest for Multipolarity: A Response to Us Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Era," p. 53.

⁵³⁸ Katz, "Primakov Redux? Putin's Pursuit of "Multipolarism" in Asia," p. 145-146

⁵³⁹ Indeed, Primakov was an opponent to the idea of forming constant alliance relationships with external actors apart from the regional post-Soviet states. In a speech dating back to 1996, he acknowledged the fact that there are no constant enemies but constant interests. Primakov went on by criticizing the Soviet foreign policy arguing that *“as a result in the circumstances of the time national interests of the government were sacrificed in the struggle with permanent enemies and on behalf of permanent allies.”* Instead, he called Russia to seek strategic partnerships especially with China, India, Japan, Iran, Iraq, Libya and others. Quoted in Rubinstein, "Russia Adrift," p. 19.

III. The Putin Period: Consolidation of Russia's International Position

Since the beginning of Vladimir Putin's first term of presidency in 2000, there have been many crucial international developments following each other with implications on Russia's regional and global security interests. The most important ones include NATO's military interventions into Kosovo and Afghanistan, the recognition of the former as an independent state, the US occupation of Iraq, color revolutions in the CIS, Russia-Georgia War of 2008, the Ukraine crisis in 2014 and the Arab Spring which led to civil wars in Libya and Syria. All of these developments have deeply influenced Russia's foreign relations with different state actors and institutions. However, this section does not follow a rigid chronological order. The primary task here is to examine the evolution of the Russian foreign policy perspective since the 2000s, rather than Russia's reactions to specific international events. Therefore, this section analyzes Russian foreign policy thinking under the Putin leadership in a thematic order focusing respectively on Moscow's main threat perceptions, Russia's approach towards its great power status, and 'multipolarity' at the international system level.

A. Main Threat Perceptions and Russia's Security Interests

A review of main doctrine-like documents adopted by the Kremlin since 2000 could make it easier to define Russia's main threat perceptions. Those significant documents include Foreign Policy Concepts (2000, 2008, 2013, 2016), Military Doctrines (2000, 2010, 2014) and National Security Concepts/Strategy Documents (2000, 2009, 2015) declared during the Putin period.⁵⁴⁰ All those documents

⁵⁴⁰ National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/589768; Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2000, https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2000_05/dc3ma00; Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/econcept.htm>; Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2008, <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/4116>; Russia's National Security Strategy to 2020, 2009, <http://rustrans.wikidot.com/russia-s-national-security-strategy-to-2020>; Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2010, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/2010russia_military_doctrine.pdf; Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2013, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/122186; Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014, <https://rusemb.org.uk/press/2029>; National Security Strategy Document of the Russian Federation, 2015, <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/OtrasPublicaciones/Internacional/2016/Russian-National-Security-Strategy-31Dec2015.pdf>; Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016, http://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/official_documents/-/asset_publisher/CptlCkB6BZ29/content/id/2542248. All documents except Foreign Policy Concept adopted in 2000, Military Doctrines adopted in 2000 and 2010 and National Security Strategy

commonly emphasize the most significant threat perceptions by Russia, albeit with changing words. Based on such a review on the documents and some declarations by leading political figures in Russia it is possible to divide Russia's threat perceptions into certain categories.⁵⁴¹ In this sense, this study offers three main categories for Russia's threat perceptions: (i) external military threats, (ii) foreign political threats to regime security and (iii) transnational threats by non-state actors.

In the literature, there is a tendency to define some elements in these categories such as NATO expansion and regional instability in the CIS as 'vital' threats to Russia's security without clear standards and background explanations on their negative implications for Russia's national security. To avoid such kind of a generalization this section also makes a distinction between 'existential threats' which refers to threats to territorial integrity and survival of states and 'secondary threats' which put a challenge to their regional security interests.⁵⁴² From the point of view of this study, such a separation seems necessary, as these two kinds of threats generally require different types of security cooperation arrangements with foreign powers.

External Military Threats

Since the turn of this century, attempts by the US to gain superiority in nuclear capabilities have represented one of the most significant military threats for Russian national security. First of all, nuclear weapons stay at the heart of Russia's national security and defense. Because Russia remains inferior to the US and its European allies in terms of conventional forces –a threat reinforced by NATO enlargement, the US plans to improve its nuclear defense capabilities are apparently eroding Russian

Documents adopted in 2009 and 2015 are official translations. (Last access to all documents: 05.11.2018).

⁵⁴¹ This categorization includes only threat perceptions which fall into the scope of the conventional realist perspective and make relevance to our theoretical framework. As this study defines security narrowly, Russia's threat perceptions towards economic, environmental, human, food security, etc. are excluded from the analysis.

⁵⁴² Such a distinction is embraced by some scholars writing on balancing behavior under unipolar distribution of power. Brooks and Wohlforth suggest that "[m]ost theoretical writings over the last three centuries appear to define hegemony as a concentration of power that threatens not just other great powers' 'core security'—that is, their prospects for survival as sovereign territorial units—but also and much more immediately their capacity autonomously to resolve less existentially important 'secondary security' issues." See Brooks and Wohlforth, **World out of Balance...**, p. 50. Similarly Pape argues that great powers do not perceive direct military threats to their national security but he talks about "indirect threats" by the US unilateral actions which "are often likely to have real, if inadvertent, consequences for the security of major powers that are geographically close or have important economic ties to the region." Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 14. See also Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," pp. 47, 54-56.

confidence in its deterrence capability.⁵⁴³ Through the 2000s, the most significant developments underlining such threats have been the US unilateral decision to withdraw from the Antiballistic Missile Treaty (ABM) and its plans to deploy some elements of the NATO missile defense system on Eastern Europe.⁵⁴⁴ In response to such kind of threats, Russian military planners try to take all necessary steps to preserve the strategic balance against the US through developing new technologies and additional deployments in Russian territory, even though this arms race threatens its economic security.⁵⁴⁵

As noted in Chapter One of this dissertation, T.V. Paul's article on soft balancing theory suggests that the notion of 'existential deterrence' is one of the main reasons that secondary powers do not fear of a US aggression, which means possession of nuclear weapons even in small numbers provides credible deterrence for other great powers. Yet, Russia's attitude towards nuclear weapons contradicts with this suggestion.⁵⁴⁶ A report published by Valdai discussion club puts forward that Russia has different perception of the value and role of nuclear weapons: Besides defining nuclear balance against the US as the foundation of Russia's national defense, the report suggests that Russia views this parity as "*one of the main levers of influence in the world arena, and the most important argument in favor of equitable dialogue with*

⁵⁴³ Richard Sokolsky, "The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security," Task Force White Paper, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 13, 2017 <https://carnegieendowment.org/2017/03/13/new-nato-russia-military-balance-implications-for-european-security-pub-68222> (11.11.2018).

⁵⁴⁴ Review of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation, published by Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, March 2007. Quoted in Marcel De Haas, **Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond**, New York: Routledge, 2010 p. 25, 27. For information about the ABM treaty which was signed in 1972 between the US and the Soviet Union, and Russia's reaction to the US decision on withdrawal declared in December 2001, see James M. Lindsay and Michael E. O'Hanlon, "Missile Defense after the ABM Treaty," **Washington Quarterly**, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2002, and Duncan Long, "Russia, NMD and the ABM Treaty: The Dangers of American Unilateralism," **South African Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 8, No. 2, 2001. For the debates on NATO missile defense deployments on Eastern Europe see Agnes Katona, "Nato Territorial Ballistic Missile Defense and Its Implications for Arms Control," **The Nonproliferation Review**, Vol. 22, No. 2, 2015.

⁵⁴⁵ Charles K. Bartles, "Russian Threat Perception and the Ballistic Missile Defense System," **The Journal of Slavic Military Studies**, Vol. 30, No. 2, 2017, pp. 168-169. Some Russians even view "*the growing arms race involved with maintaining strategic deterrence as part of a broader US reflexive control strategy designed to topple the Russian economy through heavy defense spending, as they believe the Soviet economy was toppled.*" That is why Russia sees arms control treaties as a more valid and cost-effective way. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

⁵⁴⁶ According to SIPRI's report on trends in nuclear forces in 2017, the US and Russia accounts for %93 of total nuclear warheads in the world in a close parity. Fearing that it may lose this strategic parity in the following decades, Russia goes on further developing new nuclear weapons. Shannon N. Kile and Hans M. Kristensen, "Trends in World Nuclear Forces," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, July 2017, pp. 1-3, <https://www.sipri.org/publications/2017/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-world-nuclear-forces-2017>, (11.11.2018).

the United States."⁵⁴⁷ In this regard, Russia's first and second-strike capabilities are viewed as a guarantee that the United States could never threaten Russia with the use of military force and would always avoid escalation towards a military conflict where Russians have a military presence. This is an important asset for Russia considering the potential military crises in NATO's eastern neighborhood and the Middle East where both the US and Russian forces are active.⁵⁴⁸ However, since Russia tries to preserve its nuclear second-strike capability mostly through means of internal balancing it does not put a challenge to the core logic of soft balancing theory.⁵⁴⁹

While new programs and initiatives by the US in the nuclear technology threaten the strategic balance, the NATO enlargement appears as a direct threat to the conventional balance in Europe, as it sets the ground for foreign military installations in the vicinity of Russia's borders.⁵⁵⁰ This threat perception was further strengthened by declaration of the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit noting that Georgia and Ukraine "*will become members of NATO.*"⁵⁵¹ In the case of interstate war, NATO's military expansion could transform into an existential threat to Russia. When some outstanding Russian experts are asked to decompose Russia's threat perceptions from the West and NATO, they start with the influence of historical experiences by underlining invasions by Western powers into Russia from the 16th Century and to the Second World War.⁵⁵²

⁵⁴⁷ Cited by Stefan Forss, "Russian Military Thinking and Threat Perception: A Finnish View," CERI Strategy Papers, No. 5, November 13, 2009, p. 14, https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=2314909 (11.11.2018). Bartles also indicates that Russia assess its nuclear capability as the most significant means to resist the US hegemonic tendencies. Bartles, "Russian Threat Perception and the Ballistic Missile Defense System," p. 153.

⁵⁴⁸ According to Igor Istomin, the strategic balance between Russia and the United States is one of the main factors forcing the US to watch Russian military forces carefully in the Syrian civil war in order to avoid any direct clash which may lead to escalation. One cannot be sure whether the US would have the same attitude or behave more assertively if there was no nuclear parity between the two states. Author's interview with Igor Istomin.

⁵⁴⁹ In addition to that, as examined in Part One, Chapter One, Russia's ambitions to balance the US falls short of challenging the other components of the US national capabilities let alone its whole military budget.

⁵⁵⁰ For such a threat perception, see Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016. In April 2008, Vladimir Putin stated, "*We view the appearance of a powerful military bloc on our borders . . . as a direct threat to the security of our country. The claim that this process is not directed against Russia will not suffice. National security is not based on promises.*" Quoted in Andrei P. Tsygankov, **Russia's Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity**, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2016, p. 178.

⁵⁵¹ Bucharest Summit Declaration, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, April 3, 2008, https://www.nato.int/cps/us/natohq/official_texts_8443.htm (31.03.2019).

⁵⁵² Dmitri Trenin starts with the invasions by Eastern European Kingdoms such as Lithuania and Poland in the Modern Age. Since the beginning of 19th Century, he suggests, Russia began to focus on preserving a buffer zone in Eastern Europe, an unstable region where small states were located, in order to keep the threats away by the European great powers like French, German, and Austrian Empires. This policy sometimes led to partition of small states of Eastern European e.g. Poland, while failing to

In the contemporary age, however, there is little or no risk of direct military confrontation between great powers. As Russia's Foreign Policy Concept suggests, "*a large-scale war, including nuclear war, between major powers remains unlikely.*"⁵⁵³

Yet there is another reality that the Russian military has no chance to disregard or risk NATO's installations nearby Russia's borders. Russian military and defense planners feel obliged to respond to those NATO forces by additional military deployments just considering the case of war.⁵⁵⁴ Following the 2004 enlargement, NATO's military presence in the Baltic States began to pose a strategic threat to Russia's homeland, which is less than a two-hour drive away from St. Petersburg.⁵⁵⁵ After the Crimea crisis, the US and NATO increased its military buildup on the territories of Poland, Romania, Bulgaria, and the Baltic states.⁵⁵⁶ Besides the Western initiatives challenging the nuclear parity, NATO's further enlargement will inevitably create extra burdens for Russia's military defense and require the allocation of more national sources to the security of the country. In the long term, it is not clear that the Russian economy which currently faces a stagnation could afford such additional costs necessary to maintain its current deterrence capacity.⁵⁵⁷ Accordingly, it could have indirect negative effects on the sustainability of Russia's power projections beyond the CIS which underpin its claim to be an influential great power in world politics.

preserve the buffer zones resulted in invasions by French and Germany. Author's interview with Dmitri Trenin. Sergei Karaganov goes further back into history by underlining that Russia was invaded from the West and so-called Europe during the last 700 years by either by Swedish, Poles, French, German troops or multinational group of forces. Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov.

⁵⁵³ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016. According to Sergei Karaganov, however, NATO's further expansion towards Ukraine would lead a real war in Europe between NATO forces and Russian military. He suggests that Russia has a 2,000 km common border with Ukraine which is indefensible. NATO enlargement towards this state will create a real security dilemma between Russia and NATO forces prompting fears on both sides on about a first attack possibility. If NATO seeks a new *fait accompli* by integrating Ukraine into the Alliance, Russia may be the side who would strike first, as it repeatedly warned that it is intolerable for Russian security. Therefore, Karaganov suggest, Russia eliminated possibility of a large scale European war during the Ukraine crisis, by blocking such an advancement by NATO towards Russian border. Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov.

⁵⁵⁴ Richard Sokolsky puts it clearly that "*NATO and Russian officials responsible for the security of their countries must, of necessity, base policies, plans, programs, postures, and resource commitments on estimates of the other side's military capabilities...These judgments are almost always driven by worst-case assumptions of the adversary's intentions.*" Sokolsky, "The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security".

⁵⁵⁵ **Ibid.**

⁵⁵⁶ See Ryan Browne, "NATO Chief: 4 battalions to Eastern Europe amid tensions with Russia," CNN Politics, June 13, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/06/13/politics/nato-battalions-poland-baltics-russia/index.html>; Ryan Browne, "U.S. launches long-awaited European missile defense shield" CNN Politics, May 12, 2016, <https://edition.cnn.com/2016/05/11/politics/nato-missile-defense-romania-poland/index.html> (11.11.2018).

⁵⁵⁷ See Sokolsky, "The New NATO-Russia Military Balance: Implications for European Security".

Besides the realm of military security, the NATO enlargement poses threats to regional political and economic interests of Russia in its Western neighborhood. According to Sergei Karaganov, NATO strengthens anti-Russian elements in the societies of the countries towards which it expands, through public diplomacy actions and other political initiatives. He suggests that NATO expansion is not seen solely as a military threat from the Russian perspective, as it is the driving factor behind other political and economic integration processes. Because the NATO expansion comes hand in hand with the EU enlargement, it also represents a commercial and economic challenge to Russia which closes market opportunities in the new member states.⁵⁵⁸ While NATO expansion represents an existential military threat to Russia's national security only, in theory, it poses a real challenge to Moscow's regional interests in practice by serving Russia's political, economic and diplomatic isolation from Europe.⁵⁵⁹

In addition, geopolitical crises between NATO and Russia seem to further reinforce anti-Russian sentiments in Eastern Europe, as they apparently increase their threat perceptions from Russia. For example, the increasing militarization of Eastern Europe and the Baltic Region following the Ukraine crisis creates automatic tensions and fears on the side of small members of NATO. If there emerge any armed clashes between Russia and the Alliance, their territory would quickly turn to a target of the Russian military.⁵⁶⁰ In the Russian perspective, NATO strategically uses and exploits such perceptions to build up its military presence over the Baltic States nearby Russian borders.⁵⁶¹ On the other side, the US, together with the UK, seeks to reaffirm NATO's role in defending Europe from external threats through their efforts to galvanize the continent against the Russian threat.⁵⁶² All of these factors underline Russia's

⁵⁵⁸ Karaganov goes on underlining the fact that Russia has had free travel regime with most of the Central and Eastern Europe before the expansion of NATO. Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov.

⁵⁵⁹ Such a threat perceptions seems to exist since the 1999 enlargement, as this 'isolation' concept is underlined in an article by Allen Lynch published in 2001: *"It is this concern about the unknown political and diplomatic effects of isolation, and not a belief that NATO constitutes any definite threat to Russia, that has driven Russian resistance to the inclusion of Poland, Hungary and others into the North Atlantic alliance."* Allen C. Lynch, "The Realism of Russia's Foreign Policy," p. 18.

⁵⁶⁰ In this respect, Karaganov suggests that Baltic States are rightly fearful for their security, because if there emerges such a conflict they will be wiped away in half a day. Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov.

⁵⁶¹ Galina I Gribanova and Yuri V Kosov, "Nato Policies in the Baltics: Objectives and Priorities," **Baltic Region**, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2018, pp. 59-62.

⁵⁶² Stefano Fontolan, "The drive of NATO militarization in Eastern Europe," The Alexander Gorchakov Public Diplomacy Fund, December 17, 2015, <https://gorchakovfund.ru/en/news/view/stefano-fontolan-the-drive-of-nato-militarization-in-eastern-europe/> (11.11.2018).

perception of the NATO enlargement process as a threat of containment together with its all military, political, diplomatic, economic implications.

Lastly, unilateral military operations by NATO and multinational coalitions led by the United States without the authorization of the UN are perceived both as a direct threat to Russia's geopolitical interests and a destabilizing factor for the entire international system.⁵⁶³ At the turn of the 21st Century, NATO's air operation against Yugoslavia during the Kosovo war led Russians to perceive that NATO has been transformed into an offensive alliance after the Cold War.⁵⁶⁴ In March 2003 the invasion into Iraq by the US-led multinational coalition further consolidated Russia's threat perceptions, as the Bush administration explicitly claimed a sovereign right for the US "*to intervene to disarm and carry out regime change in other countries, subject to no external restraint.*"⁵⁶⁵ The US justification of war on the basis of Iraq's alleged weapons of mass destruction was not convincing for Russia and many other states in the international system, as they suspected that the real American objective was asserting power in the Middle East and increasing its control over regional oil sources.⁵⁶⁶

Since the Kosovo War, Russia has put a great emphasis on the Westphalian sovereignty norm and opposed the use of force against sovereign states without the UNSC mandate.⁵⁶⁷ Russia remains critical towards the disputes on the concepts like humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect (R2P) which challenge the absolute interpretation of sovereignty norm and endorse such kind of military

⁵⁶³ In October 2003, Russia Ministry of Defense adopted a 'Defense White Paper,' which asserted that there is an increasing trend of unilateral use armed force by ad hoc coalitions "*for protecting economic interests, which enlarges foreign policy requirements for using violence.*" Quoted in De Haas, **Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond**, p. 27. Accordingly, in his milestone speech in the Munich Security Conference in 2007, the President Putin claimed that with the emergence of "*unilateral and frequently illegitimate actions*", the world witnessed "*an almost uncontained hyper use of force*" in international relations that plunged "*the world into an abyss of permanent conflicts.*" In Putin's view, such developments stimulated an arms race throughout the world, as states feel less secure considering that international law does not provide a protective wall over their national security. "Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy," February 10, 2007, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034> (11.11.2018).

⁵⁶⁴ Russia's Defense White Paper suggested that "*if NATO is preserved as a military alliance with an offensive doctrine, cardinal changes will be undertaken in Russia's military planning and development of the Russian armed forces, including its nuclear strategy.*" Quoted in Quoted in De Haas, **Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond**, p. 29.

⁵⁶⁵ Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," p. 69.

⁵⁶⁶ **Ibid.**

⁵⁶⁷ Russia's concern over this issue is incorporated in all Foreign Policy Concepts adopted since 2000.

operations under specific conditions.⁵⁶⁸ In the second decade of 2000s, the US and its allies' approach towards the Arab Spring has also been interpreted in geopolitical terms by Russia. In the Russian perspective, the Western powers' policies largely aimed at increasing their influence by destroying and changing regimes in strategically important areas.⁵⁶⁹ In this respect, Russia also worries about the possibility that NATO could claim responsibility in the post-Soviet conflict areas and conduct some crisis management operations legitimized on humanitarian grounds.⁵⁷⁰ As examined in the next chapter, therefore, Moscow has chosen to raise the stakes up in the region by consolidating military cooperation with its regional allies and keeping its military presence in conflict zones. Because decisions by Western powers to intervene militarily into humanitarian crises are also influenced by their rationalist considerations, such a policy by Russia has a high potential to deter military initiatives challenging the regional stabilizer role it claims.⁵⁷¹

Foreign Political Threats to Regime Security

Since the beginning of the Putin period in Russia, the chain of non-violent, color revolutions in former communist countries, Serbia (2000), Georgia (2003), Ukraine (2004) and Kyrgyzstan (2005) reinforced Russian conviction that the US adopted a grand strategy which seeks regime changes in the post-Soviet space.⁵⁷² The

⁵⁶⁸ Russian Foreign Policy Concept suggests that: "*Russia intends to prevent military interventions or other forms of outside interference contrary to international law, specifically the principle of sovereign equality of States, under the pretext of implementing the "responsibility to protect" concept.*" Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016. While Moscow generally reacts negatively to the Western initiatives legitimated on the grounds humanitarian intervention and R2P concepts, there emerged a contradictory trend in the Russian discourse to refocus these concepts to support its own action in South Ossetia and Crimea conflicts. Vladimir Baranovsky and Anatoly Mateiko, "Responsibility to Protect: Russia's Approaches," **The International Spectator**, Vol. 51, No. 2, 2016.

⁵⁶⁹ See Nicolas Bouchet, "Russia's "Militarization" of Colour Revolutions," **Policy Perspectives**, Vol. 4, No. 2, 2016.

⁵⁷⁰ Russia's concerns are underlined by the fact that some leaders in the post-Soviet space such as Heydar Aliyev in Azerbaijan and Eduard Shevardnadze in Georgia welcomed the Kosovo operation and suggested it as an attractive model considering their own unresolved conflicts. See Vladimir Baranovsky, "Russia: Reassessing National Interest," p. 105.

⁵⁷¹ British Prime Minister Tony Blair's milestone speech just before the Kosovo operation entitled as "the Doctrine of International Society" put forward the fact that Western decision making process for humanitarian interventions represents a rationalist framework. He suggests five criteria for taking the decision to intervene militarily into humanitarian crises. Among those he underlines the importance of the practical assessment of the situation to make sure that military operations can be sensibly and prudently undertake; the preparation level by the countries who are willing to intervene, the long term strategies after the end of fighting, and the involvement of national interests into a given conflict. Aidan Heir, **Humanitarian Intervention: An Introduction**, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2010, p. 152.

⁵⁷² As Bunce and Wolchik argue, in the most extreme form, it is argued that these revolutions engineered directly by the US, for example by funding "*opposition groups that would support its policies after*

Russian Federation's reading of the color revolutions was largely conspiratorial and geopolitical. They were viewed as similar initiatives aimed at drastically reducing Russia's influence in the near abroad and expanding the United States' one, which had to be stopped before reaching other states allied with Russia.⁵⁷³ Furthermore, the color revolutions in the CIS have also grown into a direct threat perception to Russia's sovereignty. In this respect, those revolutions were seen as rehearsals for exporting a revolution into Russia itself, which would end up with the establishment of a pro-US puppet regime in Moscow.⁵⁷⁴

In this regard, Russian view of color revolutions seem to de-emphasize the role of domestic factors such as public unrest against corrupt regimes. Rather they are conceived as foreign political initiatives to subvert regimes to replace them with more friendly ones, which makes relevance to Stephen Walt's balance of threat theory.⁵⁷⁵ Following color revolutions in Georgia and Ukraine, the US and Russia have fallen into a power competition in the domestic politics of those countries. While the US sought the consolidation of anti-Russian regimes by supporting their domestic and foreign policy goals which run contrary to Moscow's interest, Russians tried to undermine and reverse the color revolutions in these countries.⁵⁷⁶ This competition encouraged pro-Western regimes to challenge Russia's political, economic and security interests in the region, not to mention Georgia's military intervention into South Ossetia which led to the Russia-Georgia war in 2008. In this respect, regardless of their origins or even their initial goals color revolutions served to decrease Russian influence in the neighboring states.⁵⁷⁷ Color revolutions also contributed regional

taking power." Valerie J Bunce and Sharon L Wolchik, "International Diffusion and Postcommunist Electoral Revolutions," **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2006, p. 298.

⁵⁷³ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," **The Washington Quarterly**, Vol. 32, No. 4, 2009, p. 12. See also Graeme P Herd, "Colorful Revolutions and the CIS: 'Manufactured' Versus 'Managed' Democracy?," **Problems of Post-Communism**, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2005, p. 5; and Lincoln A Mitchell, **The Color Revolutions**, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012, p. 92.

⁵⁷⁴ Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," p. 12; Bouchet, "Russia's 'Militarization' of Colour Revolutions," p. 2; Margarete Klein, "Russia's Military: On the Rise?," Transatlantic Academy Paper Series, Vol. 31, 2016, p. 6, <http://www.gmfus.org/file/7583/download> (12.11.2018). For the official codification of this threat perception on 'color revolution' in Russia see National Security Strategy Document of the Russian Federation, 2015.

⁵⁷⁵ As noted in the First Chapter of Part One, Walt observes that balancing actions by the US and the Soviet Union against each other in the Middle East included attempts to induce the opponent's clients to realign either by offering more or by subversion of the regime. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 157.

⁵⁷⁶ Mitchell, **The Color Revolutions**, p. 98.

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

balancing efforts against Russia through informal alignments with the US and NATO and discouraged regional states from entering into security cooperation with Russia.⁵⁷⁸

In more recent years, Western attitude towards the Arab Spring generally supporting domestic opposition movements in Middle Eastern states have consolidated Russian threat perceptions on the regime security of its allies. The emergence of proxy conflicts in the Middle East added a military dimension to geopolitical competition over the regimes. In addition, Ukraine's Euromaidan revolution in 2014 which led to the fall of the pro-Russian Viktor Yanukovich regime was also followed by the outbreak of a new civil conflict with an ethnic dimension on Russia's borders.⁵⁷⁹ Hereby, Russia's political and military leadership began to conceive phenomena like the Arab Spring and color revolutions in the CIS, *"as an externally instigated processes, as a "new form of Western warfare" to limit Russia's influence in strategically important areas by either destroying Russia-friendly regimes or by creating a "zone of chaos" around Russia."*⁵⁸⁰ On the other side, Russian Military Doctrine adopted in 2014 defined *"establishment of regimes whose which policies threaten the interests of the Russian Federation in the states contiguous with the Russian Federation, including by overthrowing legitimate state administration bodies"* as an element in the list of 'military risks and military threats.'⁵⁸¹

Against such a threat perception defined by Russia, Moscow seeks to consolidate sovereignty of the states in neighboring states and legitimate their state-practices against various threats to their regime security. Russia's political and security cooperation with Central Asian states is especially important in this sense, where regimes face domestic threats by radical Islamist movements which have connections

⁵⁷⁸ Following the revolutions in Ukraine and Georgia, Washington publicly supported their rapid admission into NATO and maintained common military exercises with these two states disregarding Russia's disturbance. Andrei Shleifer and Daniel Treisman, "Why Moscow Says No: A Question of Russian Interests, Not Psychology," **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 90, No. 1, 2011, p.22.

⁵⁷⁹ National Security Strategy Document of the Russian Federation approved by Putin in December 2015 puts forward Russia's official interpretation of the Ukrainian Revolution in 2014: *"The support of the United States and the European Union for the anti-constitutional coup d'état in Ukraine led to a deep split in Ukrainian society and the emergence of an armed conflict. The strengthening of far right nationalist ideology, the deliberate shaping in the Ukrainian population of an image of Russia as an enemy...are turning Ukraine into a chronic seat of instability."* National Security Strategy Document of the Russian Federation, 2015.

⁵⁸⁰ Klein, "Russia's Military: On the Rise?," p. 6. This view on "a new form of warfare" against Russia is shared by Vladimir Putin and some senior Russian officials including the Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov, Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu and Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov. See Bouchet, "Russia's "Militarization" of Colour Revolutions," p. 2.

⁵⁸¹ Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014, Official Translation.

with their counterparts in the Middle East.⁵⁸² Russia worries about the possibility that foreign-sponsored initiatives to create a more pluralist political system could lead successful Islamist uprisings in the regional states.⁵⁸³ In addition, various challenges to the existing regimes in Central Asia could open the floodgates to Islamist militants and insurgents or may even prompt another color revolution under the banner of Islam.⁵⁸⁴ For all these reasons, regime security in Central Asia is crucial for Russia to maintain active cooperation with those states against radical Islamist organizations and transnational threats in the region.

Transnational Threats by Non-State Actors

Transitional threats such as international terrorism, drug trafficking, organized and cross-border crime, ethnic separatism, the strengthening of Islamic extremism close to Russian borders, etc. are often cited as significant threats to Russia's national security by the official concepts on foreign policy and defense.⁵⁸⁵ Russia has a genuine interest to confront those transnational threats in Eurasia regarding their possible repercussions on Russia's internal security. A Western specialist on Central Asia acknowledges that *"for Moscow, the security of the southern borders of Central Asia is seen as a question of domestic security not out of "imperialism", but of pragmatism."*⁵⁸⁶ Many extremist organizations in Afghanistan have connections with Central Asia such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. More recently, the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) has also found supporters in the Central Asian region.⁵⁸⁷

Therefore Russia sees it in its interest to keep those threats as far as possible from Russia's borders and confront them directly in its near abroad through

⁵⁸² See Elena Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1543. For CSTO's concerns on the ISIS influence in Central Asia see also Roy Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2018, p. 19.

⁵⁸³ Roy Allison, "Virtual Regionalism, Regional Structures and Regime Security in Central Asia," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2008, p. 197.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*; Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," p. 12.

⁵⁸⁵ For example see the list of threats to Russia's security in Defense White Paper, 2003. Quoted in De Haas, *Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond*, p. 27; Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014; and Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016.

⁵⁸⁶ Marlène Laruelle, "Russia in Central Asia: Old History, New Challenges?," EU-Central Asia Monitoring (EUCAM) Working Paper, No. 3, 2009, p. 7 <https://core.ac.uk/download/pdf/148851854.pdf> (12.11.2018).

⁵⁸⁷ Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1543.

cooperation with regional states. Russia feels itself vulnerable to such threats especially in its most unstable borders i.e. North Caucasus. From the First Chechnya War (1994-1996) onwards there emerged another concern by Moscow that domestic-level threats by non-state actors could be manipulated and used against Russia as a tool by adversary states to weaken its global influence.⁵⁸⁸ Such concerns continued also under the presidency of Vladimir Putin, who in fact supported the war on terrorism started by the United States in 2001. However, Putin soon became disappointed to see that Russian interpretation of the meaning of terrorism and of mutual support was not echoed by the United States' policy especially in relation to Chechnya.⁵⁸⁹ After Beslan terrorist attacks in North Caucasus in September 2004, Putin directly blamed the West for being behind the terrorists and using them to weaken and dismember Russia.⁵⁹⁰

As examined in the next chapter, Russia had some problems with Georgia and Azerbaijan during the Chechnya Wars, as their territories have been used as safe havens and a place for rehabilitation by Chechen fighters. In the Russian perspective, this was partly because of their orientation towards the Western powers. Had those nations been under Russian influence and cared about their relations with Russia that would not have happened. Rather they would have chosen to cooperate with Russia.⁵⁹¹ In this sense, NATO's penetration towards Russia is viewed also as a danger to its border security, which weakens Russia's ability to confront non-state threats in the North Caucasus.⁵⁹² For all these reasons above, Russia has always wanted to assert some military control through regional alignments and political influence through cooperation with friendly regimes in its near abroad. This also makes relevance to the

⁵⁸⁸ According to the Russian Federation National Security Blueprint adopted in 1997, *"this is reflected in actions aimed at destroying the Russian Federation's territorial integrity, including actions involving the use of inter-ethnic, religious, and other internal contradictions ... By their policy these states are seeking to reduce the Russian Federation's importance in the solution of key problems of the world community and in the activity of international organizations. As a whole this could lead to the limitation of Russia's influence, the infringement of its most important national interests, and the weakening of its positions in Europe, the Near East, the Transcaucasus, and Central Asia."* Russian National Security Blueprint, 1997, Unofficial Translation, <https://fas.org/nuke/guide/russia/doctrine/blueprint.html> (12.11.2018).

⁵⁸⁹ Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 410.

⁵⁹⁰ Trenin goes on stating that *"at the time, several Chechen separatist leaders whom Moscow had accused of terrorism were given political asylum in the United Kingdom and the United States, with publics in several NATO countries, from the Baltic States to Poland to Denmark, sympathizing with the 'Chechen cause.'"* Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," p. 12.

⁵⁹¹ Author's interview with Dmitri Trenin.

⁵⁹² Dov Lynch, Why Georgia Matters, Institute for Security Studies, Chaillot Paper, No. 86, 2006, p. 50, <http://ftp.infoeuropa.euroid.pt/database/000036001-000037000/000036733.pdf> (12.11.2018).

Russian claim that Russia has been the historical stabilizer of the near abroad and still remains the most capable actor to achieve this.



Table 5 - Main threat perceptions and their implications on Russian security interests

Main Categories of Threat Perceptions	Different Components in Each Category	Implications on Russia's existential security and secondary security interests
External Military Threats	(a) The US-NATO initiatives challenging the nuclear parity with Russia (b) NATO enlargement (c) Unilateral military operations by the US leadership and NATO	Threaten Russia's existential security by challenging nuclear and conventional balance (in theory) (a) (b) Increase the burden of national defense on the Russian economy and military planning, which may indirectly weaken its global influence (in practice) (a) (b) Serves for Russia's political and economic isolation from Europe and increases anti-Russian sentiments in the region (in practice) (b) Challenge Russian geopolitical and economic interests in significant regions vis a vis the US and its allies
Foreign Political Threats to the Regime Security	(a) Attempts to subvert regimes through interventions into domestic politics in the post-Soviet space (Color revolutions, mass protests following the elections, the Ukrainian revolution in 2014, etc.) (b) A similar color revolution scenario in the Russian Federation itself	Lead to the isolation of Russia from its near abroad by replacing the regimes with anti-Russian ones (a) Encourage regional states to challenge Russia's interests by overt and covert support (a) Discourage neighboring states from security cooperation with Russia (a) A destabilizing factor in Central Asia which may feed domestic threats and uprisings by Islamist/extremist groups (a) Although all of these represent secondary security threats, a Western manipulated regime change in Russia is seen as a challenge its sovereignty and survival in the official perspective (b)
Transnational Threats by Non-State Actors	(a) Terrorism, separatism and religious extremism (the most challenging ones- three evils defined by the SCO) (b) Drug trafficking, illegal migration, and organized cross-border crime, etc. (with links the ones above)	Lead to the destabilization of the near abroad, which makes it difficult for Russia to follow its political, economic interests in the region and to ensure the security of Russian citizens Provide a ground for intervention by outside powers for the sake of struggling against terrorism Provide opportunities for outside powers to manipulate them against Russia Possible repercussions of Russia's internal security which may destabilize Russia or challenge its statehood and territorial integrity (existential security)

Table 5 outlines the Russian Federation's main threat perceptions and emphasizes their implications on its regional security interests in its near abroad. If we look at Russia's official discourse, it is possible to define at least one element in each category as a direct threat to Russia's existential security. However, it is disputable whether such threats actually endangers the survival and territorial integrity of the Russian State, while those threat perceptions are seen politically useful to manipulate by the Russian government.⁵⁹³ Even if we accept those arguments on the existential threats facing Russia, it does not invalidate soft balancing theory's main assumptions on alignment formation. None of those threats require military alliances with other great powers in the traditional sense, given the fact that Russian official documents themselves outlaws the possibility of a major power war. In practice, however, all these threats put challenges to Russia's secondary security interests, which have the potential to weaken Russia's great power status and its global influence.

⁵⁹³ First of all, Russia's nuclear arsenal still plays a major politico-psychological role in self-conception of the country as a global great power in the perspective of Russian elites and mass public as well, who support the idea of retaining Russia's nuclear capabilities after the Cold War. Thus it becomes easier to legitimize Russia's nuclear weapon programs by linking them to the issue of Russia's survival as a great power. See Anne L Clunan, **The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests**, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2009, p. 178. Secondly, it is a fact that Western powers' concerns about human rights violations in Russia and their alignments with regional states on its borders makes it more complicated and harder for the Kremlin to struggle against terrorism and transnational threats. However without taking substantial economic and armed support, it seems highly unlikely that such threats could pose serious challenges to Russia's survival with its current borders. Yet, the argument that Western powers and their local allies aim at dismembering the country helps mobilizing masses to support the current government. See Paul, "Soft Balancing in the Age of Us Primacy," p. 56; and Mikhail Filippov, "Diversionary Role of the Georgia–Russia Conflict: International Constraints and Domestic Appeal". The last threat perception on a color revolution scenario in Russia seems to be most useful one for political propaganda, since it directly associates the current government's hold on power to Russia's survival as a sovereign and independent entity. Hereby, the Kremlin tries to legitimize its practices against domestic opposition in the country. Foreign powers which have stakes in domestic politics of other states may support certain political groups and actors to reach power. However, an empirical study puts forward that even if a foreign power achieves to subvert the regime of in another state, it does not generally improve relations between the intervener and the target and sometimes makes them worse. Alexander B. Downes and Lindsey A. O'Rourke, "You Can't Always Get What You Want: Why Foreign-Imposed Regime Change Seldom Improves Interstate Relations," **International Security**, Vol. 41, No. 2, 2016. It is because, while the intervening state wants the new government to follow policies that reflect its interests, once in power, the latter is focused on ensuring its own political survival. If the new government follows policies preferred by the intervener, it would face serious constraints by "*geopolitical realities, such as threats from neighboring states,*" and "*domestic opponents,*" which would imperil its political survival. **Ibid.** 44-45, 85. Our analysis on foreign policy change by the Yeltsin administration focusing on geopolitical realities and their domestic repercussions validates the importance of such constraints, though the government itself was not imposed by foreign powers. In this respect, it would be much harder for a foreign imposed government to survive as an 'omnibalancer,' by relying on foreign support to preserve its rule in Russia, a major state with a great power tradition. The bureaucratic and political culture in Russia would likely to force a foreign policy or government change, whenever an administration attempts to follow an agenda set by a foreign power.

B. Russia's Emphasis on its Great Power Status: Implications for the CIS Region

From the 1990s onwards, Russian senior officials have tended to use every opportunity to proclaim Russia's great power status, which has been an integral part of Russian foreign policy discourse. As this 'self-advertising' on Russia's great power status coincided with the Kremlin's declining status and influence in world politics after the Cold War, it was associated with anger, resentment and even 'inferiority complexes' among Russian officials.⁵⁹⁴ In the following years, this tendency has not disappeared but further strengthened. When Vladimir Putin came in power as the acting president in December 1999, he declared that "*Russia was and will remain a great power.*"⁵⁹⁵ According to him, Russia was facing a threat of falling to the second or third level of state for the first time in the last 200-300 years. To remove this threat Putin suggested that Russians must "*strain all intellectual, physical, and moral forces*"⁵⁹⁶ Therefore, the Putin leadership have put great efforts to retain Russia's historical great power status and its dominance over the former Soviet Union, as this region formed the basis of its past status.⁵⁹⁷

This study argues that there are close links between Russia's alignment strategies and its aim at consolidating itself as an indispensable great power in world politics, which was adopted as a principal foreign policy goal by the Putin administration.⁵⁹⁸ As noted in the introduction, great powers are defined with regard

⁵⁹⁴ Hannes Adomeit, "Russia as a 'Great Power' in World Affairs: Images and Reality," **International Affairs**, Vol. 71, No. 1, 1995, pp. 35-36.

⁵⁹⁵ Quoted in Deborah Welch Larson and Alexei Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," p. 88.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.* A short time after Putin's reach to power a Public Opinion Foundation poll revealed the fact that almost half of participants expressed their hope for Russia to return as a 'great and powerful' state. Quoted in Nikolas Gvosdev, "'Because It Is': Russia, The Existential Great Power," *National Interest*, 2006, https://www2.gwu.edu/~sigur/assets/docs/major_powers_091407/Gvosdev_on_%20Russia.pdf (17.11.2018). Being a great power seems to be also a question of identity and existence for Russia. *Ibid.* When a noted scholar who had served as a foreign policy advisor to Putin was asked, whether losing the sphere of influence over the CIS region would create risks for Russia's great power status or its statehood and survival, he replied as follows: "*Both. Russia have developed into a great power in order to survive.*" Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov.

⁵⁹⁷ See Anne L Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status," **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, Vol. 47, No. 3-4, 2014, p. 284.

⁵⁹⁸ For scholars underlining the primacy of this goal for the Putin administration see e.g. Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," p. 88; Bobo Lo, **Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy**, Middlesex: Blackwell Publishing, 2008; Lo, Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy, pp. 65-68; and Jeffrey Mankoff, **Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics**, New York Rowman & Littlefield, 2009, pp. 23-24.

to both their relevant capabilities and the role they play in international politics with regard to security issues. Jack Levy's definition indicates some operational indicators for great powers such as possession of a high level of power capabilities, admission to a formal or informal organization of powers, generally treatment as a relative equal by other great powers and recognition of such status in other great powers' images and perceptions.⁵⁹⁹ More recent studies on status and great powers acknowledge that besides material attributes of a state, such as status depends on others' perceptions and recognition by others.⁶⁰⁰ T.V. Paul et al. suggest that this recognition is concretized in the form of some status markers "*including membership in elite clubs such as the Group of 8 (G8), permanent membership in the UNSC, leadership positions in international organizations*" etc.⁶⁰¹ In addition, status provides deference to a state's concerns and interests. "*A great power is considered to have a droit de regard in neighboring areas. The assurance that others will acknowledge, respect, and defer to a state's special interests, not only in crises but in everyday interactions, is highly valued by major powers.*"⁶⁰²

Dmitri Trenin puts forward Russia's self-conception as a great power in coherence with the scholars quoted above. He suggests that:

*"Russia has been defining itself as a self-standing great power with global reach. ... Seen from that perspective, the former imperial borderlands of Russia are deemed to be both elements of its power center and a cushion to protect Russia itself from undesirable encroachments by other great powers. This says a lot about Russia's view of the world, ... its self-image (a great power in a global oligarchy, holding primacy in its own neighborhood), and intentions (to advance to a high seat at the global governance table, where the Group of 8, Group of 20, United Nations Security Council... are seated alongside the European Union and the United States). The aim is to bring about a less U.S./Western-centric system."*⁶⁰³

⁵⁹⁹ Jack S. Levy, "Alliance Formation and War Behavior: An Analysis of the Great Powers, 1495-1975," p. 585; Jack S. Levy, **War in the Modern Great Power System: 1495-1975**, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 1983, p. 17.

⁶⁰⁰ Deborah Welch Larson, T.V. Paul, and William C. Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," T.V. Paul, Deborah Welch Larson, and William C. Wohlforth (ed.), **Status in World Politics**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2014, pp. 8-10; Christina Stolte, **Brazil's Africa Strategy: Role Conception and the Drive for International Status**, pp. 20-22; Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 32.

⁶⁰¹ Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth, "Status and World Order," pp. 10-11.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁰³ Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," p. 4-5.

On the other side, Anne Clunan examines the construction of Russia's great power identity at the domestic level through the debates between Russian elites. She puts forward that the elite consensus on Russia's great power identity is based on two pillars: (i) the domestic validity of Russia's dominant status and behavior in the former Soviet Union, (ii) the domestic illegitimacy of a status subordinate to the West, which is seen inappropriate at best and humiliating at worst by statist nationalist perspective.⁶⁰⁴ These two pillars, Russia's aspirations to ensure a dominant position over its near abroad and to reach a higher and equal status with other great powers at the global level are in fact inseparable since there are inherent and causal links between them. However, the rest of this sub-section will specifically focus on the first pillar of Russia's great power status to explore its implications on its foreign policy towards the near abroad. The next subsection on 'multipolarity' will deal with the second because Russia's foreign policy discourse associates such a status also with systemic transformations at the global level.

One can find dozens of references among Russian and Western scholars, who link Russian great power status to its special interests in the CIS and its sphere of influence over the region. For example, Tatiana Shakleina from Moscow State Institute of International Relations suggests that great power politics become crucial when we look at regional subsystems. All the past and present major powers like Russia, China, Turkey, Brazil, and the US as a superpower have sought "*to establish their influence, first of all, in the region closest to them geographically and connected with them economically*".⁶⁰⁵ Some other scholars talk about Russia's desire to put into practice its own version of the Monroe Doctrine which was proclaimed by the United States over the American continents in the 19th Century.⁶⁰⁶ In this respect, Russia's plans and projects to reintegrate with the former Soviet Union are linked to its aspirations for a great power identity.⁶⁰⁷ Accordingly, Buzan and Waever suggest that Russian foreign

⁶⁰⁴ Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status."

⁶⁰⁵ Shakleina, "A Russian Perspective on Twenty-First-Century Challenges," p. 45. See also Alexander Gabuev, "Russian-U.S. Flashpoints in the Post-Soviet Space: The View From Moscow," US-Russia Insight, Carnegie Endowment of International Peace, February 23, 2018, p. 5, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Gabuev_Flashpoints_web.pdf (18.11.2018).

⁶⁰⁶ See Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," p. 93; and Hannes Adomeit, "Russian National Security Interest," p. 38.

⁶⁰⁷ David Kerr, "The New Eurasianism: The Rise of Geopolitics in Russia's Foreign Policy," **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 47, No. 6, 1995, p. 982. See also Steven Ward, "How Putin's Desire to Restore Russia to Great Power Status Matters," The Washington Post, March 6, 2014, https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/monkey-cage/wp/2014/03/06/how-putins-desire-to-restore-russia-to-great-power-status-matters/?utm_term=.1393f391631c (18.11.2018).

policy is driven by its target to remain in the global rank, namely to avoid falling to regional power status. Therefore problems and questions in the near abroad are generally defined in relation to Russia's global position. In the Russian perspective, there is a top-down logic: "[B]ecause we want to be a global power, we need to control our own region."⁶⁰⁸

It is possible to set alternative and complementary explanations for such a logical connection focusing on economic relations, integration, regional energy resources, pipeline politics or construction of Russia's identity as an Eurasian great power, etc. However, as this study is based on a realist theoretical perspective on alignments, we need to explore the relationship between Russia's dominant position over the CIS and the patterns of alignment formation in this regional context. Here it is argued that these two factors both contribute consolidation of Russia's great power status in the international system with respect to security-related issues. Among the theories examined in the previous chapter, balance of threat theory seems to be the most useful one to understand Russia's aim at consolidating its military influence in its neighborhood at the expense of rival powers. Given that the most worrisome external threats for great powers are ones sourced by other great powers and that power and threats wane over distance, it is in Russia's advantage to keep those threats as far as possible.

In Chapter One, we noted that before applying balance of threat theory one should pay attention to the unipolar distribution of power in the CIS, as a factor affecting the distribution of external threats in this region. This factor also enables Russia to play a key role of arbiter in regional conflict and peace processes, as local actors generally take care of their relations with this state serving as the security hub of the region. Unlike the Middle East, the distribution of regional power cut the possibility of successful balancing against this powerful neighbor by other local states through individual or group efforts. Russia's geographical and power advantages and its determination to protect its military and strategic interests in its neighborhood suggest that no actor can free-ride against the Kremlin for its security relying on allied support by other local actors or foreign powers. However the most crucial problem for Russia appears like that: Despite all of these advantages it holds now, regional

⁶⁰⁸ Buzan and Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, p. 435.

subsystems are not close to external penetrations, because it is impossible to isolate them totally from the international system in general. Such penetrations may result in changes in the distribution of power through military deployments and expansion of military alliances.

In general terms, external penetrations take the form of ‘security alignments,’ when an outside power establishes some sort of security cooperation ties with regional actors.⁶⁰⁹ However, as suggested by Buzan and Waever, one should make a separation between ‘mere penetration’ and ‘heavy penetration.’ The latter is rather characterized by the long-term stationing of great power armed forces within a given region. Therefore, it may lead to changes in structures and frontiers of regional subsystems: An outside great power may “*come to dominate a region so heavily that the local pattern of security relations virtually ceases to operate.*”⁶¹⁰ This situation is defined as an ‘overlay.’ Europe has been a typical example of this case during the Cold-War years, where superpower competition overlaid local security dynamics. Following the EU-NATO enlargement towards the Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania, such a transformation has also been observed in the Baltic region bordering Russia.⁶¹¹ As noted in the previous sub-section, the security of the Baltic States are deeply influenced by military problems between NATO and Russia not to mention the Ukraine crisis in 2014. Such crises bring along more military deployments on their territories and accordingly further fears about a possible attack by their powerful neighbor. These facts prove that their security relations with the Russian Federation are overlaid by a larger NATO-Russia competition.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

⁶¹¹ Scholars looking towards the region from Buzan and Waever’s perspective acknowledge that the Baltic Republics are no longer belong to the post-Soviet security complex and that they take place in the EU-Europe region, though they do not discuss the role and implications of such an overlay. See Barry Buzan and Lene Hansen, **The Evolution of International Security Studies**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009, p. 180; and Derrick Frazier and Robert Stewart-Ingersoll, "Regional Powers and Security: A Framework for Understanding Order within Regional Security Complexes," **European Journal of International Relations**, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2010, p 750. In fact, Buzan and Waever defined the Baltic region as a part of the post-Soviet regional security complex in their study published one year before the NATO enlargement. The Authors noted that the Kremlin’s concerns on the Baltic treatment of Russian minorities has served as a source of negative security interaction. They put down a future prospect that: “[i]f the enlargement of the EU and/or NATO continues, it is possible that Ukraine in future will replace the Baltic states in this role.” Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 431. Within a decade following the Baltic States’ joining under the NATO security umbrella, this scenario came to be true in a harsher way, as tensions with Ukraine and civil conflicts between Ukrainians and Russians led to Moscow’s occupation of this country.

Since 2004, the US and NATO's penetration continued towards the Black Sea and the Caucasus. The threat facing the Russian Federation is at minimum 'mere penetration' through informal alignments including no permanent military presence, i.e. the current situation, at maximum 'heavy penetration' which is most likely to appear through enlargement of NATO as a formal alliance. Even the process between two situations itself -supported by NATO's open-door policy is seen as a destabilizing factor by Russia, because penetration encourages balancing for the regional states through alignments with the Western powers. To hasten the process of NATO enlargement, Russia's neighbors like Ukraine and Georgia try to capitalize on threat perceptions from Russia and seek to join all possible arrangements of cooperation in political, economic and military terms, which generate new points of disagreements and conflicts with Moscow.⁶¹² On the other side 'heavy penetration' appears as the worst-case scenario for Moscow, as it would downsize the Russian sphere of influence and increase the number of free-riders for their security on Russia's borders. This would obviously decrease Russia's freedom of action in its foreign policy towards the region, therefore weaken its position in political bargains with regard to future meetings, agreements, accords on European security architecture.⁶¹³

When we turn to the Central Asian part of the post-Soviet regional subsystem, we see that security problems are generally more transnational than interstate in this region: *"No pattern of amity and enmity has formed among the states, except a traditional suspicion and competition for regional leadership between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan ... potentially intensified by the US support for Uzbekistan."*⁶¹⁴ In this respect, the US penetration into Central Asia after the 9/11 terrorist attacks has complicated alignment formation in this region, which posed challenges to Russia's regional dominant position. On the one side, regional states viewed their relations with

⁶¹² At this point, Igor Istomin emphasizes 'non-realist' and 'non-material' aspects of their threat perceptions from Russia. He underlines that to some extent those countries are in themselves interested in the Russian threat, as it serves as an instrument to ask for more political, military and economic assistance from NATO and the US. According to him, using such a discourse emphasizing that Russia's neighbors are "the last frontiers of the liberal democracy Europe" could bring some more economic and political benefits. Istomin argues that this is a missing point in Walt's analysis on alignment formation. Author's interview with Igor Istomin.

⁶¹³ For an analysis on the disputes about the European security architecture between Russia and NATO members with regard to NATO enlargement see Sharyl Cross, "Nato–Russia Security Challenges in the Aftermath of Ukraine Conflict: Managing Black Sea Security and Beyond," **Southeast European and Black Sea Studies**, Vol. 15, No. 2, 2015.

⁶¹⁴ Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 426.

the US and NATO as a counterweight to Russian influence over the region.⁶¹⁵ By pursuing multi-vector policies and maneuvering between different power centers, they tried to manipulate geopolitical rivalry to their advantage.⁶¹⁶ On the other side, some regional states sought an improvement in their position vis-à-vis other regional actors, by building closer cooperation with the United States. As examined later in this study, such a tendency has been mostly observed in Uzbekistan's strategic behavior, a local state with aspirations for a sub-regional dominance over Central Asian states. Until 2005, Uzbekistan closely cooperated with the United States on the basis of its military campaign in Afghanistan. In turn, the US treated Uzbekistan as 'the emergent hegemon' in Central Asia and provided political and material support for its aspirations.⁶¹⁷

Observing these facts in the early 2000s, Buzan and Waever suggested that if the states in the region consolidate and gain an ability to threaten each other more directly, Russia's dominance over the region is weakened and no other external great power fill the vacuum, then Central Asia may become regional security complex in its own right. The Authors defined increasing penetration by the United States as a contributing factor to such a transformation: "*If the USA hangs on with a few small bases becoming semi-permanent, this is likely actually to stimulate*" the establishment of an independent regional subsystem as "*it weakens Russian [dominance] while being insufficient to constitute an alternative source of external domination*"⁶¹⁸ The less likely scenario, on the other hand, was that if the US had significantly upgraded its presence in Central Asia might have become an arena for an odd mixture of interregional and global rivalry.⁶¹⁹ In two different scenarios, indeed, the Authors talk about the emergence of an independent regional subsystem structured by the local distribution of power, where Russia ceases to be a regional dominant actor to manage the security affairs. Due to the geographical facts, the Authors do not include the US in regional power calculations rather define it as an external penetrator complicating regional alignment formation. The heavier the United States penetrates in the region,

⁶¹⁵ Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1543.

⁶¹⁶ Anna Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," **European Security**, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2013, p. 493.

⁶¹⁷ Ruth Deyermond, "Matrioshka Hegemony? Multi-Levelled Hegemonic Competition and Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2009, p. 163.

⁶¹⁸ Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, pp. 428-429.

⁶¹⁹ **Ibid.**, p. 429.

the more complicated alignment formation becomes.⁶²⁰ In this regard, the second scenario seems to be the closest one to the situation observed in the Middle East, as a typical multipolar subsystem with great power penetration.

In the following fifteen years, none of these scenarios has come to be true at least for three reasons: (i) Central Asian States distanced themselves from the US due to its democracy promotion strategy and color revolutions, (ii) Russia further consolidated its dominant position through political and military cooperation with regional states, and (iii) Washington became disenchanted with overambitious projects on military engagement and democracy promotion in Eurasia. The first two reasons make a direct relevance to this study which focuses on Russia's alignment strategies since the 2000s. Although these scenarios have never come true, they remain useful to put forward the rationale in Russia's alignment behavior in its neighborhood. In the absence of close political and military alignments between Russia and regional states, foreign penetration could have intensified great power competition to a greater extent. In addition, external challenges to the regime security and political crises might have fed the non-state threats in the region. Whenever it emerges, such a geopolitical competition over clients in Russia's near abroad including the threat of subversion would clearly matter at least as much as the current power competition over the Middle East. In this respect, a growing competition in the CIS has the potential to move Russia's military and diplomatic focus into its near abroad, and therefore to complicate its power projections further into the international system.

In fact, realist alignment theories do not examine in detail why great powers are so sensitive to penetration by other great powers into their own region.⁶²¹

⁶²⁰ Besides acknowledging this, Istomin also suggests that it is a natural tendency in international politics that states seek to diversify their foreign relations in cooperation with available actors. Therefore, as regional security dynamics become more complicated, it gets more difficult to manage them. Author's interview with Igor Istomin.

⁶²¹ Although it does not offer an original theory of alignment, John Mearsheimer's study represents one of the most developed theoretical explanation in the realist school for the typical great power behavior in regions bordering them. John J. Mearsheimer, **The Tragedy of Great Power Politics**. According to Mearsheimer, since great powers are mostly sensitive to nearby threats, they tend to seek regional hegemony in their own regions, which has been achieved only by the United States in modern history. Once a state secures a regional hegemony, the second step is that it seeks to prevent great powers in other regions from achieving the same. It is "*because they fear that a rival great power that dominates its own region will be an especially powerful foe that is essentially free to cause trouble in some other regions or maybe even in the hegemon's backyard.*" **Ibid.**, pp. 41-42. Thus regional hegemons contain their rivals, by gaining allies in other great power regions. Offshore powers like Britain and the US used their geographical location as an advantage in this sense to preserve their supremacy in the system.

Specifically, balance of threat theory underlines such concerns of great powers by emphasizing proximity as a factor increasing the level of threat. Yet, Walt takes such a threat perception as given.⁶²² The previous analysis of Russia's main threat perceptions and the examination on the impacts of foreign intervention into Russia's 'backyard' put forward how such a penetration could pose challenges to a great power as it advances towards its borders. Those challenges such as military deployments, subversion of regimes, civil conflicts and destabilization in Central Asia are seen as serious dangers by Russian security elites, which bring about additional tasks for Russia's military and extra burdens for its economy. As a noted Russian analyst on post-Soviet security suggests, the United States tends to treat Russia merely as a regional power, while Russia views itself more than a regional power with international recognition and global reach.⁶²³ To consolidate such a status, Russia first needs to block challenges to its freedom of action in its own region and expand its international influence towards the other regions in the world. Such power projections are crucial for Russia's great power identity because it asserts a responsible and reliable stabilizer role in international politics for itself, which will be jointly conducted with other leading major powers in a 'multipolar world'.⁶²⁴

C. Russia's Search for Multipolarity: A Balance of Power System or A Great Power Concert?

Besides proclaiming special interests and responsibility over the post-Soviet region, the Putin leadership has been rhetorically committed to promoting 'multipolarity' at the international system level.⁶²⁵ Although multipolarity has been developed into a central concept in Russian foreign policy discourse, the term polarity itself was originally invented as a theoretical concept in international relations by American scholarship.⁶²⁶ Many theoreticians have similar descriptions of polarity

⁶²² In general, balance of threat takes this relationship as given by equating proximity with the ability to project power and aggression. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, p. 23-24. In more distant regions, Walt talks about external threats to one's 'regional position' posed by penetration of another power but he does not discuss security implications of such a penetration. *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶²³ Author's interview with Yulia Nikitina.

⁶²⁴ Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status," p. 287, Clunan, **The Social Construction of Russia's Resurgence: Aspirations, Identity, and Security Interests**, p. 92.

⁶²⁵ Martin A Smith, "Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War," **East European Politics**, Vol. 29, No. 1, 2013, p. 45.

⁶²⁶ Petr Kratochvíl, "Multipolarity: American Theory and Russian Practice," Paper presented at Annual CEEISA Convention Moscow, 2002, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/31431/2002-00-Multipolarity.pdf> (18.11.2018).

based on international distribution of capabilities: The number of great powers at the top of the power hierarchy defines the polarity. However, they disagree on which type of polarity -multipolarity bipolarity or unipolarity represents a more stable and peaceful structure than others.⁶²⁷ As examined in the First Chapter, realist scholars have a common view that the distribution of power in the 21st Century renders the international system as unipolar, while they have controversial ideas about its durability. Common realist discourse seems to expect that the rise of China will revert the structure of power to bipolarity.⁶²⁸ Yet, there are other scenarios that uneven growth rates in the world, which lead to the rise of new major powers like China, Brazil, India and the self-abiding nature of excessive expansion strategy followed by the United States would lead to an incremental transition towards multipolarity.⁶²⁹

In this regard, contemporary realists adhere to neorealist definition of unipolarity with regard to the distribution of capabilities at the international system level. However, Russian official discourse seems to equate the concept with hegemonic and unilateral tendencies by the United States, which does not regard interests of other members of the international system. For example, the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia which was approved in June 2000 suggests that there is a growing trend towards the formation of “*a unipolar structure*” in the international system “*with the economic and power domination of the United States. In solving principal questions of international security, the stakes are being placed on western institutions and forums of limited composition, and on weakening the role of the U.N. Security Council.*”⁶³⁰ Later, in his milestone speech at Munich Security Conference in 2007, Vladimir Putin clarified Russia’s viewpoint stating that “*a unipolar world ... refers to one type of situation, namely one centre of authority, one centre of force, one centre of decision-making ... one master, one sovereign*”⁶³¹ Similarly, the next Russian President Dmitry Medvedev who took over the office between 2008 and 2012,

⁶²⁷ For a literature review on this debate see Pan Zhongqi and Chen Zhimin, "Which Multipolarity? Power and World Order," Mario Telo (ed.), **Globalisation, Multilateralism, Europe**, New York: Routledge, 2016.

⁶²⁸ Barry R. Posen, "From Unipolarity to Multipolarity: Transition in Sight?," John Ikenberry, Michael Mastanduno, and William C Wohlforth (ed.), **International Relations Theory and the Consequences of Unipolarity**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2011, p. 319.

⁶²⁹ See *Ibid.*, pp. 319, 333-341.

⁶³⁰ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000. Two other major concepts adopted in 2000, following the Kosovo operation, include a similar emphasis. See National Security Concept of the Russian Federation, 2000; and Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2000.

⁶³¹ “Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy”.

suggested that “[t]he world should be multi-polar. Unipolarity is unacceptable, domination is impermissible. We cannot accept a world order in which all decisions are taken by one country, even such a serious and authoritative country as the United States.”⁶³²

While unipolarity is associated with unilateralism, definitions of multipolarity by Russian officials generally make references to the UN system, sovereignty rule, international law, and multilateral frameworks to manage international security. In this respect, Putin suggests that, “[i]f we want the world to be more predictable, more prognosticated, and then safer, it has to be multipolar, and all the participants of international intercourse have to abide by certain rules, namely, the rules of international law”⁶³³ According to the President, the fact that “the world is becoming or has already become multipolar” requires to recreate the importance of international global institutes such as the United Nations. Such a world needs to “be based on the UN Charter and on everything that was achieved in the past decades, on mutual trust – and one needs to handle the rest of trust with care, to learn to listen, hear and respect each other and be ready to find compromises.”⁶³⁴ In the Russian perspective, with the rise of new power centers transformation towards multipolarity has become evident but failure to recognize this reality seriously aggravates tensions in different parts of the world. Most recently, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov accused the US in this respect referring to the American approach towards critical international security problems related to Ukraine, Syria, Iran and North Korea. He asserted that Americans “still want to operate only on the basis of dictating policy, issuing ultimatums, they do not want to hear the perspectives of other centers of world politics.”⁶³⁵

⁶³² Quoted in Andrew Radin and Clint Reach, "Russian Views of the International Order," Rand Corporation, 2017, p. 15. Retrieved from: https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR1826.html (19.11.2018). In fact, such a view towards unipolarity by the Presidents has been also shared by Russian senior officials such as Foreign Minister and General of the Army and some prominent intellectuals on international affairs as well. For several quotes about polarity see the whole research report. **Ibid.**

⁶³³ Quoted in Anton Barbashin, “How Russia Sees the Multipolar World,” Intersection, August 30, 2016, <http://intersectionproject.eu/article/russia-world/how-russia-sees-multipolar-world> (19.11.2018).

⁶³⁴ “Meeting of the Valdai International Discussion Club,” October 18, 2018, Sochi, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/58848> (19.11.2018).

⁶³⁵ “Russia's Sergei Lavrov Slams US for Ignoring 'Multipolar' World,” Deutsche Welle, January 15, 2018, <https://www.dw.com/en/russias-sergei-lavrov-slams-us-for-ignoring-multipolar-world/a-42150394>; “US Failing to Recognise Emerging Multipolar World: Russia,” The News, January 16, 2018, <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/269057-us-failing-to-recognise-emerging-multipolar-world-russia> (19.11.2018).

Observing such a discourse, Martin Smith argues that the term multipolarity is often used by Russians polemically in the political arena to criticize the allegedly overweening dominance of the United States in international affairs.⁶³⁶ This detaches the concept from its original theoretical usage in the realist literature. As indicated in the previous chapter, neorealists have generally a pessimistic view of multipolarity which associates it with uncertainties and instability. This is because neorealism defines multipolarity in *realpolitik* terms with regard to balance of power. However, for the variety of Russian discourses, multipolarity is mostly about the management of global diversity.⁶³⁷ In fact, such a world system can be better described with the term ‘multilateralism.’ As Andrey Kortunov suggests “*multipolarity involves building a new world order on the basis of power, while multilateralism is based on [divergent] interests.*”⁶³⁸ In this respect, Andrey Makarychev is right to argue that:

*“Russia, having indeed borrowed some of the key concepts from the (neo)realist vocabulary, attaches to them quite different and non-realist meanings. Russia’s understanding of multipolarity – the key question for Russian foreign policy since mid-1990s – sheds light on this conceptual deviation from Realpolitik vision of the world.”*⁶³⁹

Furthermore, the Kremlin’s championing of a multipolar world has coincided with the verbal repudiation of the balance of power politics which is associated with the Cold War years.⁶⁴⁰ According to some analysts, it is because Russian leaders increasingly realize that Russia is not enough strong enough to make a competitive multipolarity work in its own interest, especially considering its demographic decline and limited economic capabilities.⁶⁴¹ Relying on alliances to reassemble the global balance of power is not seen as a viable option either, because it would result in Russia’s submission to China as a junior partner and eventually damage Russia’s

⁶³⁶ Martin A. Smith, "Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War," p. 36.

⁶³⁷ Andrey Makarychev, "Russia in a Multipolar World: Role Identities and “Cognitive Maps”,” **Revista CIDOB d’afers Internacionals**, Vol. 96, No. 12, 2011, p. 2.

⁶³⁸ See Andrey Kortunov, “Why the World is not Becoming Multipolar,” Russian International Affairs Council, June 27, 2018, <http://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/why-the-world-is-not-becoming-multipolar/> (19.11.2018).

⁶³⁹ Makarychev, "Russia in a Multipolar World: Role Identities and “Cognitive Maps”,” p. 2.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁶⁴¹ Martin A. Smith, "Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War," p. 47.

international position.⁶⁴² Such a concern is evident in Vladimir Putin's view towards alliances:

*"Russia is fortunately not a member of any alliance. This is also a guarantee of our sovereignty. Any nation that is part of an alliance gives up part of its sovereignty. This does not always meet the national interests of a given country, but this is their sovereign decision. We expect our national legal interests to be respected, while any controversies that always exist, to be resolved only through diplomatic efforts, by means of negotiations."*⁶⁴³

While portraying alliances in such a negative fashion, President Putin leaves out the fact that Russia is a party of a military alliance with several post-Soviet states. This is maybe because he has only traditional military alliances in mind, where parties come together to guarantee their survival. In fact, this phrase just follows the President's assessment that there is no direct military threat to Russia's sovereignty and territorial integrity thanks to the strategic balance in nuclear forces.⁶⁴⁴ Nevertheless, these suggestions run parallel to our theoretical framework, as Putin puts forward Russia's negative attitude towards sacrificing autonomy for the sake of security cooperation. This would only happen under the framework of a symmetrical alliance with a major power, while asymmetrical alliances have a quite opposite function which further enhance autonomy of major powers. In addition to that, Russia's all-encompassing negative attitude towards building a new multipolar world on the basis of balance of power echoes with some assumptions by realist scholars on great power balancing behavior under unipolarity. The weaker position of Russia vis-à-vis the United States and China as well discourages it to follow confrontational balance of power strategies to restore the global equilibrium. In the absence of a direct military threat to Russia's existential security such a revisionist strategy at the system-level is viewed as both costly and dangerous, which may undermine the country's economic security and international position further. All these considerations by Russia make relevance to the soft balancing perspective rather than balance of power theory.

⁶⁴² Makarychev, "Russia in a Multipolar World: Role Identities and "Cognitive Maps"," p. 4; Dmitri Trenin, "True partners? How Russia and China See each other," Center for European Reform, February 2012, p. 30, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Trenin_CER_Eng.pdf (19.11.2018).

⁶⁴³ "Security Council meeting -Vladimir Putin chaired a Security Council meeting in the Kremlin," July 22, 2014, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/46305> (19.11.2018).

⁶⁴⁴ Ibid.

On the other side, the fact that Russia actively cooperated with the United States at the beginning of the 2000s, when the latter enjoyed a greater relative power advantage in the international system, runs contrary to balance of power theory. It was because terrorist attacks against the United States on September 11, 2001, were seen as an extraordinary opportunity by the Putin administration to prove that Russia was an indispensable player in international security.⁶⁴⁵ The Kremlin believed that the US would recognize it needed Russia's cooperation for its war against international terrorism, as a state which had greater stakes and experience in the region of Afghanistan than any other state.⁶⁴⁶ In addition, the willingness by the US and NATO to combat against the Taliban was seen as a contributing factor for its security, while Russia was maintaining its own 'war on terror' in Chechnya against the separatists which were supported by radical forces in Afghanistan.⁶⁴⁷ Soon after the 9/11 attacks, Putin and the US President George W. Bush declared their relations as 'a strategic partnership', while Russia provided valuable and extensive support to the US war on terror including sharing political and military intelligence about terrorists, opening Russian airfield to American planes, participating in international search and rescue missions, providing logistical support to an anti-Taliban force in Afghanistan.⁶⁴⁸ Russia's cooperation with the US and NATO was further extended to some geopolitical concessions as Moscow agreed on the US military bases in Central Asia on a temporary basis.⁶⁴⁹ However, this was not the only concession in its kind:

"In addition ... Putin made several unilateral concessions indicating that the geopolitical rivalry between the United States and Russia was over. ... He withdrew from a large Russian electronic intelligence gathering and military base in Cuba and a naval base in Cam Ranh Bay, Vietnam. Putin reacted mildly to the U.S. withdrawal from the Antiballistic Missile treaty—one of the few remaining symbols of Russian equality—calling it a 'mistake' because it would

⁶⁴⁵ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," p. 88.

⁶⁴⁶ Vyacheslav Nikonov, "Back to the Concert," **Russia in Global Affairs**, November, 2002, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_12

⁶⁴⁷ On the one hand, the Putin administration expected the United States to express political and diplomatic support to Russia with regard to its military intervention into Chechnya which is known as the Second Chechnya War (1999-2009) and to withhold its criticism against human rights violations in this conflict. Ted Hopf, "Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia," **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 31, No. S1, 2005, p. 242. On the other hand, the US fighting against the Taliban in Afghanistan have declined the latter's capability to threat Russia's domestic security in the North Caucasus region and from its southern borders via Central Asia. See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1542; and Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 491.

⁶⁴⁸ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to Us Primacy," p. 88.

⁶⁴⁹ **Ibid.** See also Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," p. 10.

*hurt arms control, not because it would damage Russian security. Putin adopted a softer position toward admission of the Baltic states to NATO. He accepted the creation of the NATO-Russia Council as a vehicle for cooperation, although it did not give Russia a vote. Finally, he accepted a strategic arms reduction treaty that allowed the United States to store dismantled warheads.”*⁶⁵⁰

In fact, the unilateral nature of these concessions evokes some past actions by the Kremlin taken in the Yeltsin years. Yet, this time Putin did not define the US as a natural ally on the basis of a shared identity or common values but emphasized some common strategic goals and long-term interests against various threats to international security.⁶⁵¹ Maybe more importantly, Putin expected the US to recognize Moscow's primacy and interests over the former Soviet Union except for the Baltic States.⁶⁵² However, Russia's attempts to build an equal partnership status with the US again failed due to some following unilateral actions by Washington. The US invaded Iraq without the authorization of the UN Security Council or any consultation with Putin, and Washington supported 'color revolutions' which subverted regimes in Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁵³ As a result, the Putin administration faced an increasing domestic criticism by Russian political and military representatives, as well as large sections of the public. They “*wanted Putin to avoid repeating the mistakes of Gorbachev and Yeltsin who had made concessions to the West and received very little in return.*”⁶⁵⁴ By the mid-2005, Russia-Western relations again turned into a competition over divergent security interests.

Nonetheless, Russian officials continued conceptualizing and advocating a multipolar order as an ideal system with reference to the nature of great power relations. Russia's Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov contributed these efforts through some of his pieces about the international order, which was published in a prominent Russian magazine on international relations, *Russia in Global Affairs*. Following the Russia-Georgia War which led to one of the most significant crises in Russia-Western

⁶⁵⁰ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy," p. 89.

⁶⁵¹ See Hopf, "Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia," p. 241.

⁶⁵² Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," p. 10.

⁶⁵³ Larson and Shevchenko, "Status Seekers: Chinese and Russian Responses to US Primacy," p. 90. As Clunan suggests color revolutions played a much greater role in the collapse of the so-called strategic partnership, giving the fact that Russian-American relations were not severely damaged until 2004. During the same year, the West expressed a muted response to the terrorist attacks in Beslan in North Caucasus and continued criticizing Russia over Chechnya. Clunan, "Historical Aspirations and the Domestic Politics of Russia's Pursuit of International Status," p. 288.

⁶⁵⁴ Lionel Ponsard, "Homeland Security and the Russian Approach," **Information and Security An International Journal**, Vol. 17, 2006, pp. 55-56.

relations up to that date, Lavrov suggested that “[e]veryone needs security – and now, rather than sometime in the future, which must be built largely through a universal feeling of ‘equal and equally guaranteed security.’”⁶⁵⁵ In another piece, he cited Henry Kissinger’s assessment that “Russia should be perceived as an essential element of any new global equilibrium, not primarily as a threat to the United States” and suggested that Moscow supports this kind of an approach which “requires respect by both sides of the vital values and interest of the other.”⁶⁵⁶ Lavrov also advocated extending such principles to Russia’s relations with all significant power centers driving on a metaphor based on “a global orchestra of the leading powers.” Such an orchestra “would be able to consolidate the collective principles in global politics and put an end to the practice of creating various kinds of balances of forces in the world” through collective leadership which “would be welcomed by an overwhelming majority of states.”⁶⁵⁷

Based on such a discourse, some Western and Russian scholars draw a historical analogy between the 19th Century Concert of Europe and Russia’s contemporary attitude towards great power relations.⁶⁵⁸ According to them, Russia’s

⁶⁵⁵ Sergey Lavrov, “The Euro-Atlantic Region: Equal Security for All,” **Russia in Global Affairs**, July 2010, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/The_Euro-Atlantic_Region:_Equal_Security_for_All-14888 (19.11.2018). Accordingly, President Medvedev sought to promote a legally binding European Security Treaty, during his term between 2008 and 2012, which was based on the principle of ‘indivisibility and equality of security.’ First of all, the draft treaty prepared by Russia suggested that no party (states, international organizations or military alliances) shall seek to strengthen its security at the expense of the security of other parties to the treaty. “Should a party believe that any legislative, administrative, or organizational measure taken by another party might affect its security, it may request relevant information.” The draft treaty also proposed “a consultation mechanism to settle any disputes that arise concerning the interpretation of the principle of indivisible security in evaluating the measures in question.” Andrei Zagorski, “The Russian Proposal for a Treaty on European Security: From the Medvedev Initiative to the Corfu Process,” (ed.), **Osce Yearbook**, Hamburg: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2009, p. 59. However this draft treaty was not welcomed by NATO and Western powers, as it was seen an initiative to weaken the role of the Alliance identified as the cornerstone of Euro-Atlantic security. For Western reactions see Bobo Lo, “Medvedev and the new European security architecture,” Center for European Reform, Research Report, July 2009, https://www.cer.eu/sites/default/files/publications/attachments/pdf/2011/pbrief_medvedev_july09-741.pdf; and Richard Weitz, “The Rise and Fall of Medvedev’s European Security Treaty,” German Marshall Fund of United States, May 2012, <http://www.gmfus.org/file/2657/download> (19.11.2018).

⁶⁵⁶ Sergey Lavrov, “Russia’s Foreign Policy in a Historical Perspective,” **Russia in Global Affairs**, March 2016, <http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Russias-Foreign-Policy-in-a-Historical-Perspective-18067> (19.11.2018).

⁶⁵⁷ Sergey Lavrov, “The Rise of Asia, and the Eastern Vector of Russia’s Foreign Policy,” **Russia in Global Affairs**, July 2006, http://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_6865 (19.11.2018).

⁶⁵⁸ For example see Nikonov, “Back to the Concert”; Dmitri Trenin, “The Mythical Alliance: Russia’s Syria Policy,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 20, 2013, p. 10, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/mythical_alliance.pdf (19.11.2018); Sergei Karaganov, “The 21st Century Concert of Vienna,” The Valdai Discussion Club, June 22, 2015, http://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the_21st_century_concert_of_vienna/ (19.11.2018); Martin A. Smith, “Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War,” pp. 37-38; Lo, **Vladimir Putin and**

approach towards multipolarity does not make relevance to the general power competition which led to the emergence of balances of power and interstate wars in modern European history. Rather it reminds of the characteristics of great power relations during a special time-period in the 19th Century following the Napoleon wars (1799-1815). Facing the threat of French hegemony over the European Continent, the victors of war (i.e. Austria, Prussia, the United Kingdom, and the Russian Empire) came together under the framework of the Quadruple Alliance which aimed at preserving international stability and status quo.⁶⁵⁹ While keeping the balance of power between themselves became a main concern of the members of the new system, they also decided to struggle collectively against the nationalist ideology which was seen as a major source of instability and war at that time. Therefore these four monarchies agreed to police the peace, and to be prepared to take collective military action should a nationalist revolution emerge anywhere in Europe, which is defined as a 'transnational' threat associated with 'regicide, terror, and aggressive war.'⁶⁶⁰ With the integration of France to the so-called Vienna Congress, the members of the great power system defined as the 'Big Five' arrogated for themselves the governance of European security through a series of multilateral congresses. Any significant change in the status quo was to be accomplished with the consent of the five great powers who had to consult each other face to face before undertaking major foreign policy initiatives including war.⁶⁶¹ In this respect, the great powers were not constrained by their own power but their interests as well.⁶⁶² Thereby, they managed to avoid major conflicts which might have adversely affected most or all of them, during a relatively long period in the 19th Century.⁶⁶³

This framework of great power relations in the era of the European Concert makes relevance to Russia's contemporary approach towards an ideal multipolar world where formally equal and fully sovereign great powers would be the upholders of the

the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy, pp.77-78; and Mankoff, **Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics**, p. 129.

⁶⁵⁹ See Nikonov, "Back to the Concert".

⁶⁶⁰ Holsti, **Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648-1989**, pp. 116-117.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 135. For the rules and norms of diplomacy in this period see Richard B. Elrod, "The Concert of Europe: A Fresh Look at an International System," **World Politics**, Vol. 28, No. 2, 1976. Like Holsti, Elrod argues that these diplomatic procedures continued to function effectively in general between 1815 and the middle of 19th Century, while the Crimean War (1853-56) became a significant breaking point. *Ibid.*, pp. 160-161, Holsti, **Peace and War: Armed Conflicts and International Order 1648-1989**, p. 136.

⁶⁶² See Mankoff, **Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics**, p. 129.

⁶⁶³ See Martin A. Smith, "Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War," p. 37.

international order. Those states shall possess enough, military, political and economic resources to be able to act autonomously, or even independently.⁶⁶⁴ They all would come to agree that it is unhealthy for any one nation to dominate the others as it risks international peace and stability and everyone should respect the legitimate interests of other parties, in particular Russia.⁶⁶⁵ All participant major powers should uphold norms and institutions which formalize the existence of the great power concert, especially the UN Security Council.⁶⁶⁶ In addition, great powers should come together periodically through semi-institutionalized mechanisms of consultation in order to regulate international relations with regard to shared core interests.⁶⁶⁷

Sure there are significant differences between the current international system and the 19th Century world order, where preserving balance of power was the common concern of great powers to prevent the emergence of devastating wars between themselves. In the 21st Century World, great powers feel much more secure against external threats by other states. However, disagreements and conflictual relations between them continue to threaten international peace and security in different regions. In the Russian perspective, it is because great powers play geopolitical games by forming opposing groups and manipulating smaller countries against each other to get support in achieving their preferential goals.⁶⁶⁸ Accordingly, the Kremlin contends that Russia faces a containment policy by the US and its allies, which undermines regional and global stability, therefore, runs contrary to the long-term interests of all sides.⁶⁶⁹ In this regard, great powers should come to an understanding that it is better to work together to create a structural cooperation in the face of the growing need for cooperation and addressing transnational challenges in the contemporary world.⁶⁷⁰ At the beginning of the 21st Century, September 11 events put forward the fact that every country in the world is vulnerable to a common enemy which is called international

⁶⁶⁴ Mankoff, **Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics**, p. 129; Martin A. Smith, "Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War," p. 38. Smith suggests that "[i]n an international system of this kind, there would be a small number of mutually recognized Great Powers (more than two, but probably no more than six)." *Ibid.* Bobo Lo counts would-be members for such a great power club as the United States, Russia, Britain, Germany, France, China, Japan; while Nikanov argues that no concert is possible without the participation of the US, Russia, China and India. Lo, **Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 77; Nikonov, "Back to the Concert".

⁶⁶⁵ See Lo, **Vladimir Putin and the Evolution of Russian Foreign Policy**, p. 78.

⁶⁶⁶ Mankoff, **Russian Foreign Policy: The Return of Great Power Politics**, p. 129.

⁶⁶⁷ Smith, "Russia and Multipolarity since the End of the Cold War," p. 38.

⁶⁶⁸ See Shackleina, "A Russian Perspective on Twenty-First-Century Challenges," p. 60.

⁶⁶⁹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*; Shackleina, "A Russian Perspective on Twenty-First-Century Challenges," p. 60.

terrorism. International cooperation against this global threat could serve as the basis of a 21st Century great power concert.⁶⁷¹ The transnational nature of this threat requires creating a broad and inclusive international coalition that would promote an effective cooperation against terrorism, “*without any political considerations or double standards, above all to prevent terrorism and extremism and counter the spread of radical ideas.*”⁶⁷²

In fact, Russia possesses neither sufficient hard power capabilities nor enough soft power potential to build any grand design in the international system. As Andrey Kortunov suggests, a relatively weak state vis-à-vis other great powers “*should try to grasp opportunities and adjust its goals to that of powerful nations.*”⁶⁷³ This reflects on the Russian idea of the concert system, as the Kremlin does not prefer exclusive alliances but wants to create inclusive structures for consultations and cooperation like the SCO including China and India which have decades-old bilateral tensions with each other.⁶⁷⁴ On the other side, Russian official discourse suggests that “*existing military and political alliances are not capable of countering the full range of challenges and threats the world is currently facing.*”⁶⁷⁵ The interconnectedness between countries and people renders attempts to ensure stability and security in a single territory as doomed to fail. Therefore the world needs a more “*flexible approach to participating in multilateral mechanisms for the sake of finding effective solutions to common issues.*”⁶⁷⁶

However, as Nikonov points out, a concert-type world order in the current age will be senseless without the participation of the US -the strongest state in the system with power projections into various parts of the globe.⁶⁷⁷ He underlines that unless it includes the United States, such a concert initiative would inherently turn into an anti-American scheme. In fact, while Russia tried to build a strategic partnership with the US, at the beginning of the 2000s, it was also trying to develop its security cooperation with China through the SCO framework. Therefore, Russia seems to be willing to develop such kind of security cooperation based on the multilateralism principle with

⁶⁷¹ Nikonov, “Back to the Concert”.

⁶⁷² Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016.

⁶⁷³ Kortunov, “Russian National Interests: The State of Discussion,” p. 45.

⁶⁷⁴ Author’s interview with Igor Istomin.

⁶⁷⁵ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016.

⁶⁷⁶ **Ibid.**

⁶⁷⁷ Nikonov, “Back to the Concert”.

all available significant actors in world politics, which respect Russia's great power status and its self-claimed legitimate security interests in its own neighborhood. Yet, as the US does not accept such a framework for dialogue and cooperation proposed by the Kremlin, Russia's security cooperation with other actors sharing common concerns against the American unilateralism and similar conceptions of 'multipolarity' turns into what is termed as soft balancing. That is why we set our argument that Russia's flexible alignment strategy towards the major powers combined with soft balancing against the US could best serve to its interest in establishing a 'multipolar world' corresponding to Moscow's ideal definition.

The examination of Russia's foreign policy perspective in this chapter put forward that there are many coherent points between assumptions of the alignment theories chosen for the analysis and Russian approach towards the international system alignment relations within. Our review of realist theories of alignment and the Kremlin's foreign policy discourse has contributed to our understanding of main strategic objectives in Russia's alignment behavior. However, Russia faces many problems and handicaps while implementing its foreign policy and does not always reach the outcomes it prefers. In addition, Russia's alignment relations with other major powers include their own contradictions and inner dilemmas and there are certain limits of the security conducted within the SCO framework. The next task in Part Two is conducting an in-depth analysis of Russia's alignment relations with individual states under consideration with reference to most significant international developments. Examining the actual practice of security cooperation between Russia and its allies will contribute to a better understanding of the impacts of Russia's alignment strategies on regional politics and the international system.

PART II - ANALYZING RUSSIA'S ALIGNMENT RELATIONS IN EURASIA: THE POST SOVIET SPACE AND BEYOND

CHAPTER ONE - REGIONAL THREATS AND ALIGNMENT FORMATION IN THE CIS: RUSSIA'S LEADING ROLE IN THE POST-SOVIET SECURITY

Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain.

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation.⁶⁷⁸

I. Russian-led Initiatives for Security Integration within the Post-Soviet Region

The collapse of the Soviet Union put significant challenges to the security of the newly independent states in the early 1990s. First of all, the post-Soviet states except Russia lacked national armies controlled by their governments. At the same time, the rising ethnic and civil wars in the region posed challenges to the security and survival of those states and their individual citizens as well. Although Russia was still a major military power, in theory, Moscow needed an extensive cooperation with its neighbors to maintain that strength.⁶⁷⁹ Following the dissolution of the USSR, many of Russia's strategic and tactical nuclear weapons were dispersed across the territories Ukraine, Kazakhstan, and Belarus.⁶⁸⁰ Accordingly, the majority of first-class ground troops left in border areas of some countries located at the outside circle of the Soviet

⁶⁷⁸ Quoted in Andrew S. Weiss, "Five Myths about Vladimir Putin," Washington Post, March 2, 2012, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/five-myths-about-vladimir-putin/2012/02/29/gIQAchg8mR_story.html (30.10.2019).

⁶⁷⁹ Adam Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," **Whitehead J. Dipl. & Int'l Rel.**, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2007, pp. 168-169.

⁶⁸⁰ By November 1996, the transfer of strategic weapons to Russia was successfully completed through bilateral agreements signed with these states and the establishment of a single command for nuclear forces under Russian authority that remained open to consultations with other CIS members. See Richard Sakwa and Mark Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival," **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 51, No. 3, 1999, pp. 381-382.

Union such as the Baltic States, Belarus, Ukraine, and the Caucasian Republics.⁶⁸¹ Besides these problems, Russia's fear of the spill-over of civil conflicts towards its borders led Moscow to increase its engagement into its near abroad through some frameworks of interstate cooperation for regional security.⁶⁸²

This section outlines Russian-led initiatives for political and security integration in the former Soviet Union from the early 1990s to the present. It also provides technical information about bilateral and institutional arrangements for regional security cooperation and post-Soviet states' membership to those frameworks. Then we examine how the CSTO functions as an asymmetrical military alliance in Russia's strategy to consolidate its dominant position in the region and discuss the limits of Moscow's military and political influence over the member states.

A. The Commonwealth of Independent States and its Security Dimension

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the ongoing need for cooperation between the fledgling states and Russia gave way to the foundation of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), which managed to bring the twelve of fifteen post-Soviet States together.⁶⁸³ In fact, the CIS did not emerge as a body of security cooperation but it was established as a response to the functional necessity of policy coordination and cooperation in various areas such as *"the creation of a common economic space, transport and communications systems ... migration policy and the suppression of organized crime."*⁶⁸⁴ After the foreign policy change in the

⁶⁸¹ Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 168.

⁶⁸² See Dov Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, London: Macmillan, 2000, pp. 49-50.

⁶⁸³ On 8 December 1991, the leaders of the Russian Federation, Belarus and Ukraine signed the agreement which established the Commonwealth of the Independent States, and therefore, marked the end of the Soviet Union. On 21 December, the rest of the former Soviet Republics joined the CIS except three Baltic States and Georgia. Tbilisi signed the agreement later in December 1993. Therefore, the number of CIS countries increased to twelve. Nicole J Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the Cis: Theories, Debates and Actions**, New York: Routledge, 2003, p. 53. Fifteen years later, Georgia withdrew from the CIS, as a result of Russia-Georgia war in August 2008. On the other side, Ukraine stated the course of withdrawal from the CIS following Russia's annexation of Crimea in March 2014. Kiev finally recalled its all representatives from the CIS bodies in May 2018. Faisal Javaid and Asghar Ali Dashti, "Reviewing the Role of Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) with Special Reference to US Rivalry towards Central Asia," **New Horizons**, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2018, p. 74; "Ukraine Suspends Participation in CIS Coordination Councils - Security Council," TASS, May 2, 2018, <http://tass.com/world/1002678> (15.12.1018).

⁶⁸⁴ Sakwa and Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival," p. 381. In 2005, Russian President Vladimir Putin also acknowledged that CIS did not promote advanced cooperation in military and political spheres. The President further argued that, *"in reality the CIS was established so as to make the process of the USSR's dissolution the most civilized"*

early 1990s examined in the previous chapter, Russia sought ways to utilize this organization to promote eventual positive integration of the former Soviet Republics in various areas including security. At the end, the CIS has become successful in facilitating the process of the dissolution of the Soviet Union. However, it has been much less successful in security integration, at least, at the whole-CIS level.⁶⁸⁵

In the early 1990s, Russia led to the establishment of some political-military bodies on the basis of the CIS Charter and specific agreements signed by the member states. The Council of the Heads of States (CHS) was established as the primary body in the CIS taking all intergovernmental decisions including those on political-military issues.⁶⁸⁶ On the other side, the Council of Ministers of Defense (CMD) was created as the key body to deal with security issues such as military policy and cooperation. It was planned that main activities of the CMD would be supported by two bodies; a secretariat for bureaucratic needs and a Headquarters for coordination of military cooperation among the CIS members. The latter gave way to the establishment of General Headquarters of the Joint Armed Forces of the CIS (GHJADS) which intended to bring top military representatives of members together.⁶⁸⁷ However, in practice, only some CIS members have joined the meetings of the Headquarters, until its eventual abolishment in 2004.⁶⁸⁸

The Russian Federation also attempted to preserve a unified air defense system over the post-Soviet space through signing bilateral agreements with the former Soviet Republics. In February 1995, those agreements were incorporated into the CIS framework with the creation of the CIS Joint Air Defense System (JADS). In the beginning, this structure included ten of twelve CIS members as Moldova and

and smooth one, with the fewest losses in the economic and humanitarian spheres" Quoted in Irina Kobrinskaya, "The Post-Soviet Space: From the USSR to the Commonwealth of Independent States and Beyond," Katlijn Malfliet, Lien Verpoest, and Evgeny Vinokurov (ed.), **The CIS, the EU and Russia**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007, pp. 14-15.

⁶⁸⁵ Alyson J. K. Bailes, Vladimir Baranovsky, and Pál Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (ed.), **Sipri Yearbook 2007: Armament, Disarmament and International Security**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 171.

⁶⁸⁶ Andrei Zagorski, "CIS Regional Security Policy Structures," Roy Allison and Christoph Bluth (ed.), **Security Dilemmas in Russia and Eurasia**, London: Royal Institute of International Affairs, 1998, pp. 282-283.

⁶⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 283; Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p. 171.

⁶⁸⁸ Bailes et al. note that Ukraine was the most notable absentee among the other members. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

Azerbaijan refused to take part.⁶⁸⁹ In the following years, four participants (i.e. Ukraine, Georgia, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan) have withdrawn due to either their problems with Moscow or because they have lost their interest in participating in the JADS.⁶⁹⁰ Yet, the CIS Joint Air Defense was never abolished which currently operates with the six members of CSTO. On the other side, Uzbekistan as an ex-member still participates in the JADS exercises.⁶⁹¹

In addition to that, Russia tried to underpin the collective security dimension of the CIS with the creation of the CIS Peacekeeping forces. It was declared as the main multilateral framework to deal with ethnic and civil conflicts which had broken out after the Soviet collapse. However, Russia undertook the main responsibility and leadership in all operations conducted in the post-Soviet space. Accordingly, Russian troops had a preponderance in multinational peacekeeping forces created under the CIS mandate.⁶⁹² The CIS carried out peacekeeping operations in the Tajik civil war and the Abkhazian conflict in Georgia. Besides, Russia conducted peacekeeping operations in South Ossetia and Transnistria on the basis of bilateral agreements signed with Georgia and Moldova.⁶⁹³

As Roy Allison suggests, Russia's involvement in regional conflicts could not be convincingly transformed into 'CIS peacekeeping,' since all these initiatives turned into unilateral peace enforcement operations led by a regional great power.⁶⁹⁴ In the Tajik civil war, Russian forces engaged in standard military operations as an active participant in the domestic conflict against radical Islamist groups.⁶⁹⁵ As examined later in detail, Russia has strategically dealt with the ethnic conflicts in Georgia and

⁶⁸⁹ Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, p. 7.

⁶⁹⁰ Léo-Paul Jacob, "The CIS Plans to Strengthen its Joint-Air Defence System," NATO Association of Canada, October 30, 2017, <http://natoassociation.ca/the-cis-plans-to-strengthen-its-joint-air-defence-system/> (14.12.2018).

⁶⁹¹ See *Ibid.*; and Justin Tomczyk, "Opfor, Blufor: A Comparative Analysis of NATO and the CSTO," **The Illini Journal Of International Security**, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2018, pp. 21-22.

⁶⁹² See Maxim Shashenkov, "Russian Peacekeeping in the 'Near Abroad'," **Survival**, Vol. 36, No. 3, 1994, pp. 51-55; and Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, p. 3.

⁶⁹³ See Yulia Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," ISPI Analysis, No. 152, January 23, 2013, p. 2. Retrieved from: https://www.ispionline.it/it/documents/Analysis_152_2013.pdf; and Sergey Minasian, "CIS: Building a Collective Security System," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol. 1, 2003, Retrieved from: https://www.ca-c.org/journal/2003/journal_eng/cac-01/16.mineng.shtml (11.12.2018).

⁶⁹⁴ Roy Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," **International Affairs**, Vol. 80, No. 3, 2004, p. 470.

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*

Moldova which were both unwilling to join an alliance relationship with Moscow. In both cases, Russia used its military involvement to put strategic pressure on these states to alter their behavior with regard to its interests and to assert some influence in its near abroad.⁶⁹⁶ Towards the mid-1990s Russia managed to freeze regional conflicts in the CIS but continued to use its military presence in regional states as ‘peacekeepers’ strategically against their governments.

In this respect, terming Russian military involvement into post-Soviet ethnic and civil conflicts as ‘peacekeeping’ initiatives may be misleading, given the fact that this concept has been originally developed under the UN framework.⁶⁹⁷ In the early 1990s, Russia carried out diplomatic activities to obtain an authorization by the UN and CSCE for the CIS peacekeeping operations, which all failed.⁶⁹⁸ As a result, Russia’s peacekeeping operations have developed free from constraints by institutional mechanisms and international standards. The Russian military was free to act to restore Moscow’s influence over the post-Soviet states and establish its own security objectives.⁶⁹⁹ Therefore, this study identifies Russia’s peacekeeping initiatives as tools of power projections which have been utilized in its strategy to manipulate regional threats against local states seeking to balance Russia.

Besides the aforementioned bodies and agreements, the CIS produced a remarkable output in terms of treaties, documents, summits, and proclamations addressing security problems in the post-Soviet space. However, those all emerged as Russian-led defensive initiatives to preserve Soviet-era ties rather than practical tools for actual problem solving.⁷⁰⁰ Therefore, the members found it difficult to implement

⁶⁹⁶ See Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, pp. 3-5.

⁶⁹⁷ The UN peacekeeping operations were generally entrusted with rather limited goals such as contributing to implementation of peace settlements, verifying human rights and delivering humanitarian aid. Accordingly, the UN peacekeeping embraces impartiality and minimum use of force as two main principles, which are often disregarded by Russian peacekeepers. See Domitilla Sagramoso, "Russian Peacekeeping Policies," John Mackinlay and Peter Cross (ed.), **Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping**, New York: United Nations Publications, 2003, pp. 13-14.

⁶⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁹⁹ See Ted Hopf, "Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia’s Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia," **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 31, No. S1, 2005, p. 239. Accordingly, the rules of engagement were never clearly spelled out in the CIS peacekeeping. This enabled Russian forces to use high degree of force, when necessary. Sagramoso, "Russian Peacekeeping Policies," p. 15; Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, p. 3.

⁷⁰⁰ Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p. 174; Alexander Cooley, "Whose Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet

many agreements promoted by the CIS. Towards the end of the 1990s, problems of achieving consensus among twelve member states became more complicated, as the members had increasingly divergent agendas and interests. All those problems combined with the organization's weak and inefficient institutions led to the stagnation and steady decline of the CIS.⁷⁰¹ In the summer of 2000, the Putin administration attempted to promote security cooperation among the members against the rising terrorist threats from Afghanistan by creating a CIS Counter-Terrorism Center in Bishkek. In the post-9/11 security environment, however, Russia decided to focus on security cooperation with a smaller group of pro-Russian CIS members, which were the remaining parties of an alliance treaty signed with Moscow in the early 1990s.⁷⁰²

B. From the Tashkent Treaty to the Collective Security Treaty Organization

On 15 May 1992, the representatives of Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan in Tashkent signed the Collective Security Treaty (CST).⁷⁰³ Unlike the Commonwealth of Independent States, the CST was established as a formal military alliance that meets the criteria of our definition set in Part One, Chapter One. Article 1 of the Treaty declares that the participants “*shall not enter military alliances or take part in any groups of the states, as well as in the actions, against other Member State.*”⁷⁰⁴ The Second Article codifies the consultation commitment of the members through creating joint mechanisms in case of a threat “*to safety, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty of one or several Member States.*” Finally, Article 4 declares the military character and commitment of the Treaty noting that in the event “*of aggression to any of the Member States, all the other Member States at request of this Member State shall immediately provide the latter with the necessary help, including military one ... in accordance with the right to collective defence pursuant to article 51 of the UN Charter.*”⁷⁰⁵

States," Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, June 30, 2017, p. 4. Retrieved from: http://carnegieendowment.org/files/6302017_AlexanderCooley_WhoseRules.pdf, (15.09.2018).

⁷⁰¹ Richard Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," *Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, Vol. 8, No. 3, 2006, p. 12.

⁷⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 11-12.

⁷⁰³ Minasian, "CIS: Building a Collective Security System,"

⁷⁰⁴ Collective Security Treaty, May 15, 1992, Official Translation, http://odkb-csto.org/documents/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1897 (08.12.2018).

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

The Tashkent Treaty was created on the presumption that it would be joined by all post-Soviet states, and it would become part of a general and comprehensive security system in Eurasia.⁷⁰⁶ As examined later in this chapter, Russia itself worked for the enlargement of the CST and formulated its policy towards certain states in its neighborhood with regard to this strategic goal. The CST was subsequently joined by Azerbaijan (24 September 1993) and Georgia (9 December 1993) which submitted to Russia's strategic pressure in order to avoid further losses in their security. After a short time, Belarus gave up its self-declared military neutrality and signed the agreement on January 3, 1994. However, Ukraine, Moldova, and Turkmenistan rejected participating in the treaty on the basis of the neutral position they proclaimed in the early aftermath of the Cold War, thus remained outside of the CST.⁷⁰⁷

As the Tashkent Treaty was considered as a military component of the CIS, it initially run with the bodies of this organization dealing with political-military issues such as the Council of Defense Ministers and the General Headquarters of Joint Armed Forces.⁷⁰⁸ In December 1993, the CST members also established a Collective Security Council consisting of the heads of the participant states and the commander in chief of the GHJAF of the CIS. After all nine participants completed the ratification of the Treaty in accordance with their domestic procedures, the Tashkent Agreement entered into force on April 20, 1994, for a five-year period. The increasing number of the common members to the CIS and the CST led to a visible and formal institutionalization of the Tashkent Agreement.⁷⁰⁹

After five years, however, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan refused to extend the Collective Security Treaty including some binding commitments with regard to their external security relations. Therefore, they became the former military allies of the Russian Federation.⁷¹⁰ Furthermore, these three states joined Moldova and

⁷⁰⁶ Minasian, "CIS: Building a Collective Security System,"

⁷⁰⁷ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," **Vestnik Mezhdunarodnykh Organizatsii - International Organisations Research Journal**, Vol. 13, No. 1, 2018, p. 194.

⁷⁰⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 195.

⁷⁰⁹ Zagorski, "CIS Regional Security Policy Structures," p. 283.

⁷¹⁰ Zh.M. Kembaev, "Legal Framework and the Document Approval Process within CSTO," A.F. Douhan and A.V. Rusakovich (ed.), **Collective Security Treaty Organization and Contingency Planning after 2014**, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2016, p. 122. Although Uzbekistan became a member of the CSTO on June 23, 2006, -after the suppression of anti-government protests in Andijan, it remained as a party of the alliance only for six years. On

Ukraine and formed GUUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan, Moldova) group which focuses on promoting political and economic cooperation and integration between the members and Euro-Atlantic structures.⁷¹¹ On April 20, 1999, the other six members both renewed the CST and decided that the Treaty will be automatically extended for successive periods of five years.⁷¹² It is a fact that the defection of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Uzbekistan complicated the efforts for regional security integration in the post-Soviet space. Yet, the reduction of CST membership to Russia and five regional states supporting the Kremlin's security and defense policies enabled the members to establish a classical military and political alliance under the Russian leadership.⁷¹³

Towards the end of the 1990s, the increasing level of regional threats underlined the post-Soviet states' motivations for security cooperation with Russia. In September 1996, the Taliban, a radical Islamist organization, captured Kabul and established an Islamic Caliphate in Afghanistan. Russia which had just completed its first military campaign in Chechnya viewed it as both a national security threat and geopolitical threat challenging the regional stability in Central Asia. On the other side, Central Asian republics saw the Taliban's victory and its extremist ideology as a threat to their secular regimes and domestic stability.⁷¹⁴ These overlapping threat perceptions were further consolidated by infiltrations of armed groups from Afghanistan into

December 19, 2012, Uzbekistan's membership was officially suspended by the CSTO on the basis of its own demand, thus it became again a former military ally of Russia. See *ibid.*, pp. 127, 130.

⁷¹¹ For an analysis on the emergence of GUUAM with reference to regional balancing initiatives against Russia, see Flemming Splidsboel-Hansen, "GUUAM and the Future of CIS Military Cooperation," *European Security*, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2000, pp. 96-99. In October 1997, Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, and Moldova established the GUAM group. In April 1999, Uzbekistan joined the group, therefore it began to be abbreviated as GUUAM. In May 2005, the organization once again turned to GUAM due to Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the group. One year later, GUAM was transformed into an international institution which is called as the Organization for Democracy and Economic Development (ODED-GUAM). Vladimir Papava, "On the Role of the "Caucasian Tandem" in GUAM," *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, Vol., No. 3-4, 2008, p. 49.

⁷¹² Kembaev, "Legal Framework and the Document Approval Process within CSTO," p. 122.

⁷¹³ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 196.

⁷¹⁴ See Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," pp. 170-171. However Weinstein also notes that this threat failed to provoke a unified reaction by Central Asian states, as Uzbekistan refused furthering its security cooperation with Russia thinking that the Kremlin was willing to exploit the Taliban's victory as a pretext to assert its influence in Central Asia. *Ibid.*

Central Asian states, which revealed that the Taliban was willing to expand its zone of influence towards the north beyond the Afghan borders.⁷¹⁵

After the 9/11 terrorist attacks, those states cooperated with the US in its military campaign in Afghanistan. In the eve of the Iraq war, American attention turned towards the Middle East, therefore, regional states renewed their interest in cooperation with Russia.⁷¹⁶ On the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Tashkent Treaty, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Belarus and Armenia and Russia came together to discuss the ways to further security cooperation between them. Following the consultations, they decided to establish a new institutional military alliance on the basis of the CST, namely the Collective Security Treaty Organization.⁷¹⁷ The CSTO's Charter was signed on October 7, 2002. The agreement came into force following ratification by all member states on 18 September 2003.⁷¹⁸

Main Functions and the Structure of the CSTO

The CSTO emerged as a multidimensional framework for active security cooperation between its members, as the core group of post-Soviet states which maintain the closest ties with each other. First of all, the CSTO seeks to ensure collective security by consolidating the member states' efforts and resources of which in turn improves "*the defense capabilities, combat readiness and combat capability of [their] armed forces.*"⁷¹⁹ Secondly, the CSTO contributes national and multilateral efforts against new threats and challenges by non-state actors such as terrorism,

⁷¹⁵ See Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 196; Yulia Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 3; and Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p. 175.

⁷¹⁶ Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 173.

⁷¹⁷ Nikolai Bordyuzha, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization: A Brief Overview," (ed.), **Osce Yearbook**, Hamburg: Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft, 2011, p. 339; A.V. Tihomirov, "Approaches of the Main Actors in the Development of CSTO after 2014 (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)," A.F. Douhan and A.V. Rusakovich (ed.), **Collective Security Treaty Organization and Contingency Planning after 2014**, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2016, p. 36

⁷¹⁸ Bordyuzha, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization: A Brief Overview," p. 339. Article 2 of the Charter declared that "*Provisions of the [Tashkent] Treaty and the international treaties and resolutions of the Council for Collective Security ... shall be binding for the Member States of the Organization ... and the Organization itself.*" Hereby, the Charter incorporated the CST, past agreements and regulations adopted by the member states into the newly established CSTO. Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, October 7, 2002, Official Translation, http://www.odkb-csto.org/documents/detail.php?ELEMENT_ID=1896 (09.12.2018).

⁷¹⁹ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 199.

extremism, illegal drug trafficking, illegal migration, which has been stressed as one of its primary functions from the beginning.⁷²⁰ In addition to that, CSTO's crisis management system is suggested as a key element in the implementation of the collective security strategy. It is identified as "*a combination of interstate interaction mechanisms aimed at prompt management of crises that threaten the security, stability, territorial integrity and sovereignty of CSTO members.*"⁷²¹ Last but not least, the CSTO seeks to coordinate and expand general cooperation between the member countries in the realms of military and political affairs.⁷²²

In order to manage the implementation of such security tasks, a number of multilateral bodies and mechanisms were created within the CSTO.⁷²³ The Council on Collective Security (CCS) is the primary decision-making body of the organization which consists of the heads of the member states. The main duty of the Council is to review important issues with regard to CSTO's activities and to decide what shall be done to accomplish the tasks facing the organization. The chairman of the CCS is the head representative of the country where the Council organizes the meeting unless the members decide otherwise. Its permanent structure comprising of plenipotentiary representatives enables the CCS to coordinate interactions between the members in order to implement decisions taken by the CSTO.⁷²⁴ The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs is a consultative and executive body of the CSTO, which seeks to coordinate joint activities of the member states with regard to foreign policy issues. Another consultative and executive body, the Council of Ministers of Defense aims at coordinating military policies of the member states and seeks to promote "*joint*

⁷²⁰ **Ibid.**, pp. 199-200; Alexander I. Nikitin, "Post-Soviet Military-Political Integration: The Collective Security Treaty Organization and its Relations with the EU and NATO," **China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly**, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2007, p. 35.

⁷²¹ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 199.

⁷²² Hooman Peimani, **Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus**, Santa Barbara: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009, p. 313. Because main functions of the CSTO makes a direct relevance to Russia's security assistance to the members and the related trade-offs in this asymmetrical alliance, they are examined in the next section in more detail, which focuses on dynamics of security cooperation between Russia and its regional allies.

⁷²³ See Bordyuzha, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization: A Brief Overview," p. 340-341; and J.H. Saat, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization," Defence Academy of the United Kingdom, Conflict Studies Research Centre, Central Asian Series 5/9, 2005, pp. 5-7. Retrieved from: https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/92581/05_Mar.pdf (15.12.2018).

⁷²⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 6.

*activities in the field of military policy, military construction, and cooperation in military technology.”*⁷²⁵

These main bodies are assisted by the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Councils and a Secretary-General who is responsible for the day-to-day management of the Organization. The Councils and the Committee of Secretaries organize regular meetings to discuss significant issues concerning the CSTO or its individual members. All decisions (except procedural issues) are taken on the basis of consensus within these bodies, while any member shall have one vote.⁷²⁶ The Charter of the CSTO declares that it is open to membership of any country which shares the organization’s purposes and principles provided that it is prepared to undertake membership obligations and international agreements falling within the CSTO mandate. Acceptation to membership is possible on the basis of a decision taken with the consensus of the present members.⁷²⁷

Military Cooperation within the CSTO Framework

As a contemporary military alliance, the CSTO identifies itself “*as a defensive military organization with no aggressive policy or plan toward any country*”⁷²⁸ Should a military conflict threatening its members occur, the organization first encourages political measures to end the conflict. According to the CSTO Charter dealing with such kind of a situation “*by military means should be the last resort, used only in the event of the failure of nonmilitary measures.*”⁷²⁹ Although the CSTO members do not consider the possibility of external aggression as a primary threat to their national security, the organization’s aim at fighting against contemporary threats and challenges such as terrorism and regional conflicts led to the development of the military dimension of the organization.

In 2001, before the creation of the CSTO, the parties of the Tashkent Treaty decided to create the Collective Rapid Deployment Forces (CRDF) for Central Asia in order to respond to threats by groups of armed insurgents coming from the Afghan

⁷²⁵ Bordyuzha, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization: A Brief Overview," p. 341.

⁷²⁶ See Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization; and Saat, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization," pp. 5-6.

⁷²⁷ Charter of the Collective Security Treaty Organization.

⁷²⁸ Peimani, **Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus**, , p. 313.

⁷²⁹ **Ibid.**

territory.⁷³⁰ The CRDF was formed on a multilateral basis including national battalions from Russia, Tajikistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan while its headquarters was established in Bishkek, the Capital of Kyrgyzstan.⁷³¹ On the other side, the air force component of the CRDF was deployed at the Russian military base in Kant in Kyrgyzstan.⁷³² From then on, those military units have conducted regular exercises to advance their capabilities for carrying out counterterrorism tasks.⁷³³ After its formal inauguration in September 2003, the CSTO has taken over the charge of the CRDF and transformed military units into a standing force governed by a small group of multinational staff and a mobile command center.⁷³⁴

Towards the mid-2000s, the chain of color revolutions in the post-Soviet region has increased regime security concerns in Central Asian Republics, which induced them to further their security cooperation with Russia. In June 2005, CSTO members decided to strengthen the organization's military potential in the region, increasing the number of personnel in the CRDF from 4000 to 11000.⁷³⁵ In addition, Moscow declared that its military allies would be able to purchase Russian-made arms and defense equipment for their CRDF battalions at domestic prices charged the Russian army.⁷³⁶ This was later extended to all military equipment delivered by Russia to the CSTO states. On the other side, the CIS Joint Air Defense System started to be gradually transferred to the CSTO alliance, which promoted comprehensive plans on the coordination of defense strategies of the members.⁷³⁷

In 2009, the CSTO countries launched another type of collective forces, the Collective Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF). These 20.000 forces were trained to deal with *“different kinds of threats ranging from terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking*

⁷³⁰ Yulia Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 3.

⁷³¹ Minasian, "CIS: Building a Collective Security System,"

⁷³² Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p. 176

⁷³³ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 198.

⁷³⁴ Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 11.

⁷³⁵ See Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," pp. 175-176.

⁷³⁶ Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 11.

⁷³⁷ Such plans on collective defense also included the establishment of a joint system against threats which are related to biological and chemical weapons. For that reason, the Council of Ministers of Defense settled *“a Coordination Committee of commanders of chemical, biological and radiation protection forces and services.”* Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p.176.

and organized crime to military aggression [and] emergencies with the exception of interstate conflicts."⁷³⁸ A.V. Tihomirov associates the decision to establish the CRRF with the US plans on withdrawal from Afghanistan, arguing that it was created with regard to the possibility of a further deterioration of the situation in that country.⁷³⁹ In addition to that, the CRRF included military contingents of all CSTO members including Armenia and Belarus, while Collective Rapid Deployment Forces were formed only for the Central Asian region. In September 2012, the CSTO members organized a military exercise with the participation of 8.000 troops in Armenia.⁷⁴⁰ Therefore, the CSTO alliance could test the operational capability of the CRRF in the Caucasus for the first time. However, as the CSTO Secretary-General Nikolai Bordyuzha suggests, these forces were established to end small armed conflicts. *"If it is an issue of a considerable threat to the territorial integrity of the CSTO member states and a large-scale war, it will be addressed by existing groups of forces – Russian-Armenian and Russian Belarusian."*⁷⁴¹ These regional army groups were founded on the basis of bilateral agreements between Russia and its local allies, which promoted institutional cooperation for the joint defense of the participants.⁷⁴²

During the 2000s, the CSTO has also developed plans to establish peacekeeping forces of its own to be able to take an active role with regard to ethnic and civil conflicts in the post-Soviet region. At the 2007 Dushanbe summit, the members signed an agreement for the creation of the CSTO peacekeeping forces on a permanent basis up to 5.000 troops.⁷⁴³ This agreement calls the participants to act

⁷³⁸ Yulia Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 3.

⁷³⁹ Tihomirov, "Approaches of the Main Actors in the Development of CSTO after 2014 (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)," p. 38.

⁷⁴⁰ Roger McDermott, "CSTO Exercises Rapid Reaction Forces in Armenia," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 9, No. 169, September 18, 2012, <https://jamestown.org/program/csto-exercises-rapid-reaction-forces-in-armenia/> (15.12.2018).

⁷⁴¹ Quoted in Anatoliy A. Rozanov, "CSTO Political and Military Dimensions," Anatoliy A. Rozanov and Elena F. Dovgan (ed.), **Collective Security Treaty Organization 2002-2009**, Geneva: Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, 2010, p. 65.

⁷⁴² For more information on those agreements, see "Armenian Parliament Approves New Defense Agreement with Russia," The Armenian Weekly, October 5, 2017, <https://armenianweekly.com/2017/10/05/armenian-parliament-approves-new-defense-agreement-russia/>; "Cooperation with Russian Armed Forces," Ministry of Defense – Republic of Belarus, http://www.mil.by/en/military_policy/cooperation_RF/#rgvs; and Kamil Całus et.al, "Interdependencies of Eastern Partnership Countries with the EU and Russia: Three Case Studies," EU-STRAT, Working Paper Series, No. 10, 2018, p. 33. Retrieved from: <https://refubium.fu-berlin.de/bitstream/handle/fub188/22526/EU-STRAT-Working-Paper-No-10.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>; and (15.12.2018).

⁷⁴³ Alexander Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," **China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly**, Vol.

collectively by employing military, police and civilian personnel “to prevent, deter and terminate military activities between states or within a state in the case of intervention by a third country.”⁷⁴⁴ If a peacekeeping operation is to be conducted within the territory of a member state the decision will be taken by the Collective Security Council on the basis of an official request. On the other side, an operation conducted outside of the CSTO area of membership could be possible, on the basis of a decision of authorization by the UN Security Council.⁷⁴⁵ The CSTO secretariat signed a memorandum of understanding with the UN Department of Peacekeeping which is currently being implemented and aimed at training the CSTO peacekeeping forces with regard to the UN standards and international experience within the UN framework. Although these forces meet once a year for exercise, they have not taken part yet in any real operation within the CSTO area or somewhere else under the UN mandate.⁷⁴⁶

Besides these multilateral arrangements within the CSTO framework, Russia has developed military cooperation with its allies also at the bilateral level on significant issues such as joint protection of the external borders and military-technical cooperation. In the Eastern European and Caucasian regions of the CSTO, Russia formed regional army groups with Belarus and Armenia.⁷⁴⁷ Because granting military facilities to a foreign state is an issue of domestic sovereignty, Russia signed some other bilateral agreements to establish and utilize bases in some countries in its

7, No. 3, 2009, p. 94. The CSTO peacekeeping forces were finally created in 2011. Yulia Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 3.

⁷⁴⁴ Rozanov, "CSTO Political and Military Dimensions," p. 61.

⁷⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-62.

⁷⁴⁶ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 200; Yulia Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 3.

⁷⁴⁷ See Tihomirov, "Approaches of the Main Actors in the Development of CSTO after 2014 (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)," p. 35; and Andrei Kazantsev, "Russian Policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea Region," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 60, No. 6, 2008, p. 1077. As Alena Vieira and Syuzanna Vasilyan note "*Russia-Belarus military alliance established by the Union Treaty (1997) has with time evolved into a common defence system, including air defence and joint military planning. Russia-Armenia security relations initially based on a Friendship Treaty (1997) for mutual assistance in case of a potential military attack, allowing Russian guards to protect Armenia's borders with Iran and Turkey have more recently developed towards a joint air defence system agreement (2015) and a Joint Task Force agreement (2016).*" Alena Vieira and Syuzanna Vasilyan, "Armenia and Belarus: Caught between the EU's and Russia's Conditionalities?," *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 19, No. 4, 2018, 486.

neighborhood such as Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.⁷⁴⁸ It is obvious that Russia increases its autonomous capability to follow its interests in the near abroad through the CSTO alliance and such additional arrangements. In turn, the Kremlin provides security assistance to its regional allies against various threats and challenges they face. This enables us to examine the CSTO as an asymmetrical alliance with reference to Morrow's model elaborated in Part One, Chapter One.

C. The CSTO as an Asymmetrical Military Alliance

James Morrow suggests that there is usually a security-autonomy trade-off in asymmetrical alliances formed between minor and major powers: While the weaker side receives security assistance, the stronger side gain more autonomy through concessions provided by its minor allies.⁷⁴⁹ The relative power distribution in the CSTO enables Russia to utilize this military alliance in such a way. Russia is the largest and the strongest member of the CSTO, thus its policies have largely defined its development. The CSTO Secretariat is located in Moscow and employs mostly Russian citizens.⁷⁵⁰ Between 2003 and 2016, the organization had a Russian Secretary-General; Nikolai Bordyuzha, -who has served for Soviet-Russian military institutions through his past-carrier.⁷⁵¹ The position is still held by another Russian citizen Valery Semerikov who serves as the acting Secretary-General of the CSTO.⁷⁵² As the engine of the CSTO, Russia provides a variety of resources to sustain the organization. In 2012, for example, Russia's share in funding the alliance accounted for 50% of the

⁷⁴⁸ Ruth Deyermund, "Matrioshka Hegemony? Multi-Levelled Hegemonic Competition and Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," **Review of International Studies**, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2009, p. 170 and Anna Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," **European Security**, Vol. 22, No. 4, 2013, pp. 483-485.

⁷⁴⁹ See James D Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," **American Journal of Political Science**, Vol. 35, No. 4, 1991.

⁷⁵⁰ Elena Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 68, No. 9, 2016, p. 1527.

⁷⁵¹ Alexander Cooley, "Whose Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States," p. 5.

⁷⁵² Following the end of Bordyuzha's term on January 1, 2017, he was replaced by Yuri Khachaturov, the former Chief of the General Staff of Armenia. In November 2018, Khachaturov was recalled from that position by the Armenian government, as he was charged with supporting anti-government protests following the presidential elections in Armenia. The CSTO's Deputy Secretary-General, Valery Semerikov was appointed to that position until the end of Armenia's three-year tenure on January 1, 2020. It was protested by Belarus which was the next country in the rotation system for the appointment of the CSTO Secretary-General based on alphabetical order. However, Minsk's objection fell short of achieving Semerikov's replacement with a Belarussian official. See "CSTO Chief Leaves Post After Being Charged in Armenia," RFE/RL, November 2, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/yerevan-likely-to-recall-csto-chief-who-was-charged-at-home/29577173.html> (09.07.2019); Sargis Harutyunyan, "Armenia 'Still Blocking' New Head Of CSTO," Azatutyun, February 22, 2019, <https://www.azatutyun.am/a/29785295.html> (09.07.2019).

total contributions to the CSTO.⁷⁵³ In addition, Russia bears the main burden of troop delivery for special CSTO forces noted above, which underlines its overwhelming military power in this asymmetrical alliance.⁷⁵⁴

The Russian Federation invests in the CSTO mainly for two reasons. First, the organization promotes interstate security cooperation, which is a pragmatic way for Russia to pursue its genuine interest with regard to regional stability.⁷⁵⁵ Secondly, Moscow tries to use the CSTO instrumentally to consolidate its sphere of influence in its near abroad, which serves for Russia's great power status. One of the strongest signs that Russia wants to utilize the organization in this respect is the CSTO's approach towards NATO. Since the organization's establishment, Russians have sought ways to sign formal agreements on cooperation between CSTO and NATO, which would provide the latter's recognition of the former as an international organization responsible for the security of its area of membership.⁷⁵⁶ In July 2004, for example, the CSTO Secretary General authorized by the Council on Collective Security sent a letter to the Headquarters of NATO, which proposed cooperation in struggling against international terrorism, extremism, and illegal drugs and arms trafficking. In the following years, the CSTO made additional declarations on its interests to establish formal dialogue and joint bureaucratic channels to promote strategic cooperation against common threat perceptions such as international terrorism, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, and the problem of unstable and failed states.⁷⁵⁷

It is clear that Russia has sought institutional cooperation between NATO and the CSTO, because such arrangements would formally acknowledge political and military symmetry between two alliances. This echoes with Moscow's aspirations to obtain a recognition by the US and NATO of Russia's special interests and influence over the former Soviet Union.⁷⁵⁸ On the other side, NATO members who were aware

⁷⁵³ Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1527; Tihomirov, "Approaches of the Main Actors in the Development of CSTO after 2014 (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)," p. 37.

⁷⁵⁴ Marcel De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 1, 2017 p. 13.

⁷⁵⁵ See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1533.

⁷⁵⁶ See Rozanov, "CSTO Political and Military Dimensions," pp. 58-60.

⁷⁵⁷ See *ibid.*; and Nikitin, "Post-Soviet Military-Political Integration: The Collective Security Treaty Organization and its Relations with the EU and NATO," pp. 40-41.

⁷⁵⁸ See Rozanov, "CSTO Political and Military Dimensions," pp. 58-59.

of Russia's strategic objective rejected all the proposals of institutional cooperation between two organizations. Since Western powers view the CSTO as an ineffective security institution dominated by Russia, they prefer bilateral dialogue and cooperation with individual post-Soviet states.⁷⁵⁹ Russia has been excluded from such bilateral meetings between Western powers and CSTO members aiming at furthering Western interests in the region.⁷⁶⁰ In one of his statements, Russia's Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov criticized this approach noting that "[a]lthough the NATO wants to cover the eyes against the Collective Security Treaty Organization and its role in the regional matters, its issue has already been decided ... I would like to remind our partners from the NATO that the Central Asia and Transcaucasia is a CSTO responsibility zone."⁷⁶¹

The establishment of a formal cooperation between NATO and CSTO would correspond with the multipolar world order defined as a Russian ideal. As Russia's proposals for equal partnership between two organizations failed, the CSTO continued to function as a significant balancing instrument against the expansion of foreign influence towards Russia's near abroad. Scholars agree that the CSTO alliance is used by Russia for the purpose of power projection to sustain its position in the region under the conditions of a great power game.⁷⁶² The CSTO grant Russia a constant military presence, while other global and regional powers aim at penetrating its area of membership. Russia has often used the organization to legitimize its military presence and bases on the territories of member states by formally associating them with the

⁷⁵⁹ Yulia Nikitina, "Measuring the Efficiency of Regional Institutions in Eurasia: Is There a Role for Public Diplomacy?," **Russian Politics & Law**, Vol. 54, No. 5-6, 2016, p. 478. Accordingly, John A. Mowchan from the US Army War College suggests that the US and NATO should eschew any formalized relations with the CSTO and rather opt to improve "*bilateral relationships with individual member states ... [which] could help widen diverging national interests of CSTO members with Russia and prevent the alliance from gaining a high degree of international legitimacy as an effective regional security apparatus.*" John A. Mowchan, "The Militarization of the Collective Security Treaty Organization," Center for Strategic Leadership, Issue Paper, Vol 6-09, p. 5. Retrieved from: https://csl.armywarcollege.edu/usacsl/publications/IP_6_09_Militarization_of_the_CSTO.pdf (18.12.2018).

⁷⁶⁰ See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1531; and, p. 301.

⁷⁶¹ Quoted in Gražvydas Jasutis, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Military Integration Problems and Perspectives in the Cis Space," **Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review**, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2008, p. 155.

⁷⁶² Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1530. See also Charles E Ziegler, "Russia in Central Asia: The Dynamics of Great-Power Politics in a Volatile Region," **Asian Perspective**, Vol. 38, No. 4, 2014, p. 599. Tomczyk, "Opfor, Blufor: A Comparative Analysis of NATO and the CSTO," p. 1; Stefan Meister, "Hedging and Wedging: Strategies to Contest Russia's Leadership in Post-Soviet Eurasia," Hannes Ebert and Flandes Daniel (ed.), **Regional Powers and Contested Leadership**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 301.

CSTO.⁷⁶³ Furthermore, the CSTO December 2011 summit declared that a third state outside the alliance could establish military bases on the territory of a member only with the consent of all members.⁷⁶⁴ This further constrained the CSTO's member's relations with other actors and thus consolidated Russia's position against foreign powers interested in military engagement towards the region.

For all these reasons, the CSTO increases Russia's influence in the post-Soviet region and provide Moscow with the ability to assert some control over military policies of the member states. The CSTO also promotes diplomatic cooperation and coordination in foreign policy issues.⁷⁶⁵ However, Russia's political influence is much weaker compared to its dominant position in regional military affairs.⁷⁶⁶ The CSTO members are interested in diversifying their foreign relations with available Western and other powers that would support their political, economic and security goals. In this regard, the CSTO members avoid following Russia's position on some international issues especially when their interests do not converge with that of Russia.⁷⁶⁷

In August 2008, for example, the CSTO condemned Georgia's attempt to resolve the conflict in South Ossetia by force and approved Russia's 'peacekeeping' efforts. However, Moscow failed to persuade the members to recognize the

⁷⁶³ In October 2003, for example, Russia decided to open a new air base at Kant in Kyrgyzstan claiming that it would be used for the purpose of providing air support for the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces. However, it employs military personnel from Russian Urals Air Force who in practice contribute to activities of Russia's Air Defense Army headquartered in Ekaterinburg. Russian military base in Tajikistan is also ostensibly defined as a CSTO facility by the Kremlin's officials. Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," p. 472; Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 11.

⁷⁶⁴ Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 493.

⁷⁶⁵ Since the establishment of the CSTO members supported Russia's position on different international issues. For example, the declaration of the CSTO Summit of 2012 criticized the US plans for missile deployments. In 2007, before Russia's withdrawal from the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe, the CSTO called for ratification of the adaptations by NATO states. The CSTO members have also endorsed Russia's position on Syria defending of the existing government. Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1532. In Autumn 2015, however, no member of the alliance supported Russia's statement on the crisis with Turkey following the downing of a Russian Su-24 bomber by Turkish air forces. The Kremlin also failed to organize an emergency meeting of the CSTO Permanent Council. Later in 2017, Russia could not persuade Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan for deployment of their military personnel as CSTO peacekeepers in the Syrian civil war, which did not want to engage into this conflict directly to support wider Russian geopolitical interests. Roy Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," *The Chinese Journal of International Politics*, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2018, pp. 323-324.

⁷⁶⁶ De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 13.

⁷⁶⁷ Author's interview with Mikhail Troitskiy.

secessionist territories in that country as independent states. Accordingly, the proposal by the CSTO's Secretary-General on the admission of Abkhazia and South Ossetia into the collective security system was not welcomed by Russia's allies.⁷⁶⁸ In February 2014, the unconstitutional regime change in Ukraine underlined the CSTO members' concerns on their regime security. Yet, the CSTO members avoided expressing open support to Russia's subsequent actions in that country not to mention the annexation of Crimea. In both cases, the Kremlin's support to separatists worried its regional allies, while Kazakhstan became especially disturbed by Moscow's attitude towards ethnic Russians as a state having a large amount of Russian minority. Despite showing some acceptance of the representativeness of the referendum held in Crimea on joining Russia, therefore, no CSTO states formally recognized Russia's annexation of that region as with almost all other states in the international community.⁷⁶⁹

Besides not supporting Moscow's position on such critical foreign policy and security issues, the CSTO states try to follow a multi-vector foreign policy in general by maneuvering between all actors having interests in the region including the US, the EU, China, and Russia as well.⁷⁷⁰ In this respect, they aim at both securing more power and independence against Russia and furthering their political and economic interests. In addition, the cooperation between the CSTO members and Western powers also

⁷⁶⁸ Tihomirov, "Approaches of the Main Actors in the Development of CSTO after 2014 (Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan)," p. 37. See also Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 328-329.

⁷⁶⁹ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 330-331. For example, Kazakhstan declared the Crimean referendum as the free expression of the will of Autonomous Republic's people. However, Kazakh officials explicitly emphasized that their states recognize neither the referendum nor the annexation. In addition, Belarus which is one of the closest allies of Russia avoided any discourse implying an understanding of Russian actions in Crimea, while its President Lukashenko proceeded to develop cordial relations with the new Ukrainian leader Poroshenko who reached power after the fall of pro-Russian Yanukovych regime. Most apparently, Armenia supported Russian interpretation of the referendum on the basis of the self-determination right of the Crimean People to justify its position on the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict but it also stopped short of an official recognition of the annexation. Roy Allison, "Russia and the Post-2014 International Legal Order: Revisionism and Realpolitik," *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, 2017, pp. 532-533. Last but not least, in both conflicts in Georgia and Ukraine, Russia's military allies remained neutral, while some CSTO members worried that they could have been entrapped into the latter through the deployment of the Rapid Reaction Forces. As a result, the CSTO Secretariat felt obliged to make a formal declaration that this was not possible because Ukraine was not a member of the alliance. See Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 330-331. All these facts invalidate the argument that Russia forms alignments with regional states to support its revisionist goals in the CIS region, which could be explained in Schweller's balance of interest perspective.

⁷⁷⁰ For a detailed analysis about this multi-vector foreign policy followed by Russia's military allies and other CIS states, see Meister, "Hedging and Wedging: Strategies to Contest Russia's Leadership in Post-Soviet Eurasia".

extends to security realm through NATO's Peace for Partnership Program and some other agreements.⁷⁷¹ Accordingly, the CSTO members resisted against some Russian attempts to further centralize military cooperation. As noted in Part One, Chapter Two, the Warsaw Pact promoted systemic integration of national armies under a joint command structure controlled by the Soviet officers. However, the CSTO members refused the Russian proposal on establishing a joint military coordination body within the Russian General Staff fearing that it would undermine their sovereignty in the area of national defense.⁷⁷²

Under these conditions, it is not possible to talk about a regional hegemony established by Russia over the CSTO area, let alone the whole post-Soviet space. As Elena Kropatcheva suggests:

*"The build-up of another military Soviet Union is not on Russia's CSTO agenda, due to the conflicting views and interests of the other member states, the lack of a common enemy and of a shared ideology/ identity, as well as ... the increasing [activities] of other global and regional powers in Central Asia, especially China. Russia aims not at expansion but, rather, at prevention of defection in the sense of a military, political or economic exit from the zone of influence of a big power."*⁷⁷³

As noted earlier, the CSTO is somewhat analogous to Warsaw Pact as an asymmetrical alliance which legitimizes Russia's long-standing military presence in the region and provides Moscow with some control over military and foreign policies of the member states. However, Russia's political influence over its current military allies remains much more limited. During the Cold War, the Kremlin established a regional hegemony over Eastern Europe, which have not only coordinated foreign policy decisions in the Warsaw Pact but also limited the member's sovereignty in the

⁷⁷¹ All the CSTO members hold their PfP membership albeit they continue a low profile cooperation with NATO. Most notably, Kazakhstan has carried its cooperation to the level of Individual Partnership Action Plan. Astana has joined annual military exercises of NATO in recent years, while Kazakh troops have taken military training from NATO to be able to join international peacekeeping operations. Tajikistan, on the other hand, has shown a growing interest cooperation with NATO on the security of its border with Afghanistan. See Arif Bağbaşıoğlu, "Beyond Afghanistan NATO's Partnership with Central Asia and South Caucasus: A Tangled Partnership?," **Journal of Eurasian Studies**, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2014, pp. 91-93.

⁷⁷² Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 12.

⁷⁷³ Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1533. (All references and punctuations related to direct citations are removed.)

realm of domestic politics.⁷⁷⁴ In the CSTO case, however, Russia rather takes reactionary steps to prevent further expansion of foreign political and military influences towards its neighborhood. In this respect, we can identify the post-Soviet area as a unipolar regional subsystem only in terms of the distribution of capabilities. As neorealists suggest for the unipolarity at the international system level, Russia's power advantage does not automatically extend to relations of political influence under this regional context.⁷⁷⁵

Nonetheless, the CSTO states do not give up close security cooperation with Russia through such an alliance treaty with binding commitments. This cannot be explained as an involuntary choice by regional states facing Russian external pressure. In fact, the CSTO members preserve their alliance ties with Moscow, because they welcome Russian security assistance against various threats risking their national security and regime survival. The next section addresses the questions of why and how its members appreciate the CSTO with regard to different alliance trade-offs between Russia and individual post-Soviet states.

II. Russian Security Support to the CSTO Members against Different Threats and Challenges

As we noted in Part One, Chapter One, Russia *"has the strategic character of a 'hub' to which former Soviet states are joined by a more strategically significant relationship than any pair of such states can have with each other."*⁷⁷⁶ Roy Allison applies this argument to the CSTO member states arguing that this military alliance *"acts as 'a club' of countries in bilateral military-political relationships with Russia rather than with each other."*⁷⁷⁷ Below, we examine these special relations between Russia and other members of the CSTO alliance. The following pages underline

⁷⁷⁴ For a detailed analysis on the foreign policy convergence between the members of the Warsaw pact. See Edwina Moreton, "Foreign Policy Goals," David Holloway and Jane M. O. Sharp (ed.), **The Warsaw Pact: Alliance in Transition**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1984.

⁷⁷⁵ However, the regional unipolarity in the CIS has an obvious impact on alignment formation, established practices of use of force, and conflict and peace processes in the region. Those are all examined in the conclusion part of this study discussing theoretical implications of the study in light of all research findings.

⁷⁷⁶ Alyson J. K. Bailes, Vladimir Baranovsky, and Pál Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," Stockholm International Peace and Research Institute (ed.), **SIPRI Yearbook 2007: Armament, Disarmament and International Security**, New York: Oxford University Press, 2007, p. 168.

⁷⁷⁷ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 308.

Russia's military and political support to the CSTO members with regard to the security deficit in the region and some definite threats faced by these regional states. The analysis is presented in three main categories, which follows a similar suit with our examination of Russia's main threat perceptions in the previous chapter.

A. External Threats and the Risk of Interstate Conflict

Although Tashkent Treaty includes open commitments on mutual defense, the collective defense character of the CST and CSTO has long been questioned by scholars, given the members' divergent interests in the realm of security, the lack of strong common values that would ensure keeping the parties together in the long term, and above all, the absence of a serious common external threat towards the alliance's area of membership which would render common defense necessary.⁷⁷⁸ However, it is possible to discern some ways through which the CSTO contributes the interstate security in its area of responsibility. The CSTO functions in this sense not only for specific states which seriously need Russia's military protection against external threats (especially Armenia) but also for all of its members through contributing them to enforce national defense capabilities and preventing the emergence of interstate conflicts in its area of membership.

First of all, the post-Soviet republics which have participated in the military alliance with Russia have received greater and selective assistance by Moscow to develop and maintain their national armies since the early 1990s.⁷⁷⁹ This support was crucial for those states which entered into the international system without full-fledged armies to defend their borders. Accordingly, Kazakhstan and most Central Asian states have viewed Russia as the main guarantor of their security against China due to border disputes.⁷⁸⁰ Since the establishment of the CSTO, the members have had the opportunity to purchase Russian arms and defense equipment at domestic prices charged for the Russian army, which induced them to strengthen their military ties

⁷⁷⁸ Zagorski, "CIS Regional Security Policy Structures," p. 286; Weinstein, "Russian Phoenix: The Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 170.

⁷⁷⁹ See Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 195; and Zagorski, "CIS Regional Security Policy Structures," p. 287.

⁷⁸⁰ **Ibid.**

with Russia at the expense of alternative power centers.⁷⁸¹ Some scholars also underline that the CSTO militaries increase their performance and capabilities through joint training education and exercises with Russia that is a robust military power. Furthermore, official documents of the Russian Federation declare that it would use nuclear weapons to defend its allies in case of an external attack.⁷⁸²

All this security support by Russia to the national defense of the CSTO members against various external and non-state threats, as well as, a would-be aggression by an outside actor, which remains possible in theory due to the uncertain nature of international politics. Maybe more importantly, the CSTO and Russian leadership in this military alliance ensure the security of its members by undermining the possibility of armed conflicts between post-Soviet states themselves. Below we examine this argument and underline how the CSTO plays a role in interstate security under different sub-regional contexts in the post-Soviet area.

The CSTO and the Risk of Armed Conflict in Central Asia

As Elena Kropatcheva suggests, Russia uses the CSTO as an instrument to address –if not resolve disputes and conflicts between the members.⁷⁸³ Accordingly, regional states' participation in the CSTO alliance derives from their aspiration that this institutional setting and their allied relations with Russia may assist them in addressing problems with neighboring states.⁷⁸⁴ This is especially true for the Central Asian states which have disputes and conflicts with each other over energy, water sources, and border issues. Because the borders in the region were drawn arbitrarily without paying regard to ethnic and political realities, Central Asia features many disputed border areas including people from the same ethnic and religious groups on both sides.⁷⁸⁵ In recent years, this situation has repeatedly escalated into armed clashes

⁷⁸¹ Robert Śmigielski, "The Role of Arms Exports in the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," Polish Institute of International Affairs, Bulletin No. 54, p. 249. Retrieved from: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/116269/a130-2010.pdf> (12.02.2019).

⁷⁸² De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 13; Minasian, "CIS: Building a Collective Security System,"

⁷⁸³ Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1534.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁵ See Marcel De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2016, pp. 219-221. The Author adds that those "*states were not formed on an ethnic or national principle, as the very concept of 'nationality' was understood only in relative terms. Therefore, not a single border between [the Central Asian states] resembles borders like those in Europe.*" *Ibid.*, p. 219.

between border guards of regional states including Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which are participants of the same military alliance.⁷⁸⁶

Uzbekistan as an ex-member of the CSTO also has had serious political disputes and border clashes with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The withdrawal of Uzbekistan as a strong regional power from the Russian-led military alliance (in 1999 and again later in 2012) implies that the CSTO also provides deterrence against possible interstate conflicts between Uzbekistan and the neighboring Central Asian states. As Roy Allison suggests, if this function becomes obvious, it may lead to alienation of Uzbekistan and further regional fractionation. Given the Uzbek regional hegemonic aspirations, however, *“if deterrence fails then Russia would face the unprecedented challenge of entanglement in regional wars within Central Asia.”*⁷⁸⁷ In 2002, Russia faced such a difficult situation when Uzbek-Tajik relations deteriorated to the point of possible military confrontation. This would be the worst-case scenario for Russia and the CSTO as it would require some kind of response. Therefore, Moscow felt obliged to assume a mediator role between the two states.⁷⁸⁸

As Marcel de Haas underlines there has never been a common security policy followed by the Central Asian states to address regional disputes and problems together and a corresponding institution established by themselves. This task is undertaken mainly by the CSTO alliance under the Russian leadership, while the SCO also plays a role to a lesser extent. This is primarily because Central Asian states *“feel comfortable in the current security settings of [these institutions], which saves them from organizing their own collective security entity”* in the absence of unity among themselves.⁷⁸⁹ The alliance framework, in turn, contributes Russia to play the role of mediator to settle or at least contain regional disputes in Central Asia as the only great power of its own region. In this respect, the CSTO as an asymmetrical alliance plays a role to prevent escalation of interstate conflicts between its allies, as it constraints

⁷⁸⁶ De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 13 and Paul Goble, "Kyrgyz-Tajik Territorial Disputes Threaten Regional Stability," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 14, No. 155, November 30, 2017, <https://jamestown.org/program/kyrgyz-tajik-territorial-disputes-threaten-regional-stability/> (12.02.2019).

⁷⁸⁷ Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," p. 471.

⁷⁸⁸ Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 494.

⁷⁸⁹ De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges," pp. 222-223.

actions by regional states which rely on Russia for their security.⁷⁹⁰ On the other side, the CSTO also functions as deterrence factor vis-à-vis other regional states that do not participate in the treaty given the formal commitments on mutual defense in this Russian-led military alliance.

The Western Flank: Armenia and Belarus

When we turn to the Caucasus region, Armenia appears as a unique example as a post-Soviet state which appreciates the military alliance with Russia mostly due to the threat of aggression by a proximate country i.e. Azerbaijan.⁷⁹¹ This threat perception has remarkably grown since the early 2000s, as Azerbaijan has adopted a threatening discourse against Armenia, touching upon the possibility that it may use military force to settle the Nagorno Karabakh conflict.⁷⁹² Because this conflict remains inside of the Azerbaijani borders which led to the occupation of this country by Armenian forces, it is elaborated later in the third section dealing with Russia's policies towards its former military ally Azerbaijan. Here, we need to underline how the CSTO functions for Armenian security and its interests in preserving the status quo in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict against the threat by neighboring Azerbaijan.

Unlike Abkhazia and South Ossetia conflicts in the Caucasus region, Russia could never ensure a military presence in the Nagorno Karabakh region through deploying peacekeepers, which would have enabled Moscow to assert its direct control over the conflict zone. Under these conditions, Russia turned to Armenia, its military

⁷⁹⁰ Such a function by the Russian-led asymmetrical alliance should come to no surprise given that the Trans-Atlantic Alliance and the US military involvement into Europe have been legitimized on the basis of prevention of another war between European States after the World War II. For example see Peter Haldén, "Understanding the EU, the US and their External Spheres of Rule: Republican Synergies, Destructive Feedbacks and Dependencies," **Journal of Political Power**, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2011, p. 438. Accordingly, NATO has also been credited to prevent the emergence of a conflict between Greece and Turkey -two neighboring states holding membership to the same alliance and having disputes over the Aegean Sea and Cyprus problem. See Pal Dunay, "NATO and the East: A Sea of Mysteries," **World Policy Journal**, Vol. 11, No. 3, 1994, p. 126. For an empirical study suggesting that shared alliance ties decrease the possibility of the outbreak of an armed conflict between allied states, see Kim Hyung Min, Woo Jungmoo, and Lee Jae Chul, "What Is the Relationship between Alliance and Militarized Conflict? Analysis of Reciprocal Causation," **Armed Forces & Society**, 2019, pp. 1-25.

⁷⁹¹ See Zagorski, "CIS Regional Security Policy Structures," p. 287. Because the conflict over the Nagorno Karabakh region remains inside of the Azerbaijani borders, which led to occupation of this country by Armenian forces, it is elaborated later in the third section dealing with Russia's policies towards its former military ally Azerbaijan.

⁷⁹² See Nona Mikhelidze, "The Azerbaijan-Russia-Turkey Energy Triangle and Its Impact on the Future of Nagorno-Karabakh," Istituto Affari Internazionali, Documenti IAI, 10/18, September 2010, p. 3. Retrieved from: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/124984/iai1018.pdf> (23.02.2019).

ally, which was willing to support the maintenance of Russian military presence in the Caucasus. In 1995, Armenia signed a bilateral agreement with Russia giving Moscow the right to maintain a military base in Gyumri, which enforced Russian influence in the region.⁷⁹³ Armenia also relied on the CST alliance against possible external threats by neighboring states. After Azerbaijan's withdrawal from the CST in 1999, Armenia's position in the region was further strengthened. Since the CSTO's establishment, Armenia's membership to this organization continues to imply a security guarantee for Yerevan.⁷⁹⁴

According to some scholars, it is disputable whether the CSTO would intervene into a renewed conflict over Nagorno Karabakh, as this region is de jure a part of Azerbaijan's territory thus located outside of the alliance's area of responsibility.⁷⁹⁵ The CSTO would feel obliged to intervene only if a renewed conflict expands beyond the Karabakh region and towards the inside of the Armenian territory. In the case of conflict, however, Yerevan still enjoys a substantial advantage that it could make retaliatory attacks further into Azerbaijan's territory (e.g. oil and industrial facilities in Baku), while Azerbaijan could not respond by attacking towards Armenian territory without getting the CSTO's involved.⁷⁹⁶ Escalation of a wide-scaled conflict could also reach Russia's military positions in the region, which would eventually pose a threat to the stability and security of the whole Caucasus. In this case, Russia's strategic and military interests might even lead a unilateral intervention without the participation of the CSTO. Given Russia's leading role both in the CSTO and the CIS region, Armenia does not only rely on the commitments of the Collective Security Treaty but also seeks to develop its alliance relations with Moscow on a bilateral basis. After the four-day conflict over the Karabakh region in April 2016, Russia and

⁷⁹³ See Suha Bolukbasi, "The Controversy over the Caspian Sea Mineral Resources: Conflicting Perceptions, Clashing Interests," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3, 1998, p. 401; and Tracey German, "Securing the South Caucasus: Military Aspects of Russian Policy Towards the Region since 2008," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 64, No. 9, 2012, p. 1660. In 2010, two states signed an agreement extending the operation of the 102nd Russian military base at Gyumri until 2044. See *ibid.*

⁷⁹⁴ See Gaidz Minassian, "Armenia, a Russian Outpost in the Caucasus?," *Russie. Nei. Visions*, Russia/NIS Center, No. 27, February 2008, p. 11. Retrieved from: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/ifri_RNV_minassian_Armenie_Russie_ANG_fevr2008.pdf (23.02.2019).

⁷⁹⁵ Tracey German, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia: Security Issues in the Caucasus," *Journal of Muslim Minority Affairs*, Vol. 32, No. 2, 2012, p. 221; Joshua Kucera, "Armenia, the CSTO and Collective Security," *Eurasianet*, May 23, 2011, <https://eurasianet.org/armenia-the-csto-and-collective-security> (23.02.2019).

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*

Armenia signed an additional agreement that included mutual defense commitments and established new joint forces to ensure the security of Russia and Armenia in the Caucasus.⁷⁹⁷

In this regard, it should be noted that Armenian increasing threat perceptions have resulted in a heavier reliance on Russia in recent years, which reduced Armenia's maneuvering space and rendered it more difficult for Yerevan to pursue a multi-vector foreign policy. There is a second factor constraining Armenian foreign policy maneuvers: the rising geopolitical contention between Russia and the West.⁷⁹⁸ Under these conditions, the relative balance between the West and Russia in Armenian foreign policy in the 1990s could not be sustained and Yerevan tilted much more towards Russia, the main provider of its national security. In Anahit Shirinyan's words, the more Armenia "*invested in its alliance with Russia (at the expense of relations with other partners), the less symmetrical this alliance became.*"⁷⁹⁹ Besides the security realm, Russia's domination of the Armenian energy sector and economy were also used by Moscow for pressuring Armenia into abandoning its efforts to sign an association agreement with the EU. Instead, in 2013, Armenia chose integration into the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union, which reinforced Russia's influence on Yerevan's foreign and domestic policies.⁸⁰⁰ Therefore, the case of Russia-Armenia alliance represents a unique example for Russia's strategy of utilizing regional threats faced by its neighbors to build stronger asymmetrical alliance ties in the region.

Last but not least, Belarus appears as a state with some worries on the possibility of conflict escalation on the borders of the CSTO's area of membership.

⁷⁹⁷ "Armenian Parliament Approves New Defense Agreement with Russia," The Armenian Weekly, October 5, 2017, <https://armenianweekly.com/2017/10/05/armenian-parliament-approves-new-defense-agreement-russia/> In peacetime, it is declared that, the Russian-Armenian group of forces in the Caucasus will be commanded by the Armenian General Staff, while in any period of hostilities, all the command and leadership in this area will be transferred to the Command of Southern Military District of Russia's national army. Nikolai Litovkin, "Russia and Armenia to Create Joint Defense Force in Caucasus," Russia Beyond, November 16, 2016, https://www.rbth.com/defence/2016/11/16/russia-and-armenia-to-create-joint-defense-force-in-caucasus_648317 (23.02.2019).

⁷⁹⁸ Anahit Shirinyan, "Armenia's Foreign Policy Balancing in an Age of Uncertainty," Chatham House, March 14, 2019, p. 4. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/armenia-s-foreign-policy-balancing-age-uncertainty> (14.07.2019).

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10, 18. On 3 September 2013, Armenia joined into Russia-led Eurasian Custom Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan. This union was then developed into the Eurasian Economic Union which became formally operative on 1 January 2015. For detailed information see Vahram Ter-Matevosyan et al., "Armenia in the Eurasian Economic Union: Reasons for Joining and Its Consequences," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 58, No. 3, 2017.

This, in turn, induces Minsk to maintain strong military ties with Russia also at the bilateral level.⁸⁰¹ As we argued in the previous chapter, the overlay of Russia-NATO competition over small regional states induces fears on the Baltic Republics that they might be the target of aggression in case of a military conflict involving great powers caused by uncertainties or misunderstanding. The same seems to be valid for Belarus which is located on the frontier of this geopolitical competition as the only state which made its choice to join a formal military alliance with Russia. As Alexander Lanoszka puts it, this creates fear of entrapment for Belarus into a military conflict with NATO states which Minsk would prefer to avoid.⁸⁰²

In fact, Belarus adopted a virulent criticism of NATO's expansion towards Eastern Europe since the 1990s. The enlargement of NATO towards Poland and the Baltic Republics meant that three of five Belarus's neighbors became the members of the Alliance –except Russia and Ukraine. The Belarussian President Alexander Lukashenko complained that the country was encircled by NATO's forces patrolling its borders and even echoed Russia's opposition to Ukraine's aspirations for membership in that alliance.⁸⁰³ In fact, Lukashenko uses such a rhetoric also for manipulating domestic support to its government. Furthermore, it allows Belarus to portray itself as the bulwark of Russia's external security on its western flank, which is successfully traded for economic benefits and political support by the Lukashenko regime.⁸⁰⁴ It is obvious that the possibility of conflict between NATO and Russia increase external threat perceptions by Belarus to some extent. However, threats to regime security seem to play a greater role in Belarus's alignment with Russia, as they pose much imminent challenges to the current government.

⁸⁰¹ In June 2016, President Alexander Lukashenko criticized NATO's deployment of new contingents nearby the borders of Belarus and Russia and underlined that Russian-Belarussian joint group of forces ensures the safety of both countries. In President's words, "[t]his group is based on the Belarussian army units. In case of a conflict, they are the first to come into battle, bringing an opportunity for the troops concentrated in the west of the Russian Federation to catch up shortly." "Lukashenka: Belarus and Russia Have Joint Group of Forces on Western Border," Charter97, June 7, 2016, <https://charter97.org/en/news/2016/6/7/207968/> (23.02.2019).

⁸⁰² Alexander Lanoszka, "The Belarus Factor in European Security," *Parameters*, Vol. 47, No. 4, 2017, p. 83.

⁸⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 77; Roy Allison, Stephen White, and Margot Light, "Belarus between East and West," *Journal of Communist Studies and Transition Politics*, Vol. 21, No. 4, 2005, p. 492.

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 492.

B. Foreign and Domestic-Level Threats to Regime Security

For the CSTO members and many other post-Soviet states, threat perceptions by political leaders towards their regime security have played decisive roles in their alignment strategies vis-à-vis external powers.⁸⁰⁵ The emergence of color revolutions in the 2000s has boosted concerns on regime survival in the former Soviet Union - from Belarus which was identified as the last remaining dictatorship in Europe by the US administration, to the Central Asian states that face serious problems of democratic legitimacy and Islamist opposition movements.⁸⁰⁶ Even for Armenia, which needs Russia as an ally due to its conflict with Azerbaijan, regime security also came to play a crucial factor in shaping its external relations. After color revolutions, Yerevan's use of military and police forces against public demonstrations led to a decline in public trust in democratic processes in the country, which negatively influenced Armenian attempts to break its isolation from Europe.⁸⁰⁷ More recently, domestic uprisings in the Middle East since the beginning of the Arab Spring in 2010 have only increased the CSTO members' concerns over regime security and survival.⁸⁰⁸

There are different dimensions of threat perceptions towards regime security by the governments of the post-Soviet states allied with Russia. First of all, they fear of 'foreign interferences into domestic politics' by Western powers. The most important reason for this is the fact that Western support for democracy-building initiatives in the CIS contributed to the emergence of galvanizing opposition movements which managed to overthrow the regime in some regional states. This type

⁸⁰⁵ Although regime security plays a critical factor in alignment decisions of all post-Soviet states including those that have never signed a formal alliance treaty with Moscow, the focus in this part will be on Russia's support to the governments of the allied states within the CSTO. For an analysis on alignment formation in the CIS region referencing David's omnibalancing theory see Eric A. Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, Hampshire: Ashgate 2006.

⁸⁰⁶ See Allison, White, and Light, "Belarus between East and West," p. 488; and De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges," pp. 203-226. As a result, governments began to take some measurements against civil society in those countries which harassed local NGOs, political opposition parties, independent media outlets and limited their relations with the Western world. For such moves by Belarus, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, as well as Russia see Thomas Carothers, "The Backlash against Democracy Promotion," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 2, 2006, p. 57.

⁸⁰⁷ See Licinia Simão, **The EU's Neighbourhood Policy Towards the South Caucasus: Expanding the European Security Community**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, pp. 147-184.

⁸⁰⁸ That is why, the CSTO launched cybersecurity and information-space initiatives following the Arab Spring, which were "*designed to monitor and undermine the Internet activities of regime opponents.*" See Cooley, "Whose Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States," p. 4.

of unconstitutional regime changes is called as ‘color revolutions’ in the CIS region.⁸⁰⁹ Secondly, the leaders of CSTO states generally view different elements of ‘domestic political opposition’ such as civil society organizations, competitive opposition parties, political movements and public protests themselves as threats against their rule and domestic stability. In democratic states, political opposition against governments is never seen as a ‘security threat’ but a normal and inherent part of political life, as those countries experience government changes through established and peaceful processes. However, this is not the case for the countries where political legitimacy is weak and government changes usually take place through unconstitutional practices which put the individual security and wealth of political leaders at stake.⁸¹⁰ In this respect, the leaderships of the CSTO states prefer to assert a strict control over civil society and political parties using the state apparatus and try to curtail their ability to challenge the government, either through repressive methods or limiting the resources available to them.⁸¹¹

Thirdly, there are other ‘radical groups’ which try to undermine the regime by appealing to ‘terrorist tactics and use of armed force.’ Those groups represent the most critical internal threats since they aim at the destruction of the government’s authority,

⁸⁰⁹ See Eric A Miller and Arkady Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," **Security Studies**, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2005, pp. 334-336. Portraying color revolutions as American plots directly engineered by foreign agents would be an overstated argument. Scholars generally suggest that the US-Western democracy assistance programs helped people’s will to arise following the electoral frauds they faced in their countries -i.e. Georgia, Ukraine and Kyrgyzstan. Before the revolutions, the US and some European states provided financial assistance and other assistance to NGOs and private media outlets in the CIS, which mobilized people around opposition. The Western NGOs in collaboration with their local counterparts undertook crucial election monitoring activities that revealed the facts around electoral frauds. In addition, the US-based Soros Foundation’s funding and training of youth opposition movements about peaceful protests played a decisive role in the successful completion of color revolutions. For different views on the US-Western involvement into civil revolutions in the CIS, see Lincoln A Mitchell, **The Color Revolutions**, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012; Graeme P. Herd, "Colorful Revolutions and the Cis:" Manufactured" Versus" Managed" Democracy?," **Problems of post-communism**, Vol. 52, No. 2, 2005; Taras Kuzio, "Civil Society, Youth and Societal Mobilization in Democratic Revolutions," **Communist and Post-Communist Studies**, Vol. 39, No. 3, 2006; and David Anable, "The Role of Georgia’s Media—and Western Aid—in the Rose Revolution," **Harvard International Journal of Press/Politics**, Vol. 11, No. 3, 2006.

⁸¹⁰ That is why, Steven David suggests that omnibalancing theory is only applicable to alignment preferences of Third World states facing such problems. In such states, losing power for the leader of state may result in ‘death, imprisonment, or exile,’ which also make relevance to concerns on the CIS political leaders. See Steven R David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991, pp. 10-18. Miller and Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," pp. 334-335.

⁸¹¹ Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, p. 28.

which may lead to the escalation of domestic conflicts as observed in the Tajik civil war in the 1990s.⁸¹² Such a categorization seems necessary because Russia's support to the regime security of its allies takes different forms with regard to these distinct threats and challenges towards regime security. Foreign and domestic level political threats against regime survival induce regional states to strengthen their alignments with Russia through developing cooperation in the political and diplomatic realm. Yet, the military dimension of the CSTO alliance and other bilateral agreements on military security seem applicable only against the third group of internal threats associated with terrorism and armed opposition.⁸¹³

Russia's Political and Diplomatic Support to Regime Security in the CSTO

Russia's political support to the governments of its regional allies gets highly appreciated when the leaders of the CSTO states in the face of rising domestic challenges against their rule. The fear of losing power and possible consequences often induce leaders to appeal some heavy-handed tactics against the opposition which might include for example cracking down on media outlets, jailing opposition leaders and rigging the elections. However such moves are also likely to isolate them from the West, which has attached higher value on political freedom and democratic reform processes after their independence compared to Russia.⁸¹⁴ When the CSTO leaders need to feel welcome as the top-representative of their states internationally and they are denied by the Western powers, they tend to turn Russia to obtain such a recognition. Furthermore, the Kremlin provides financial assistance to its allies and promotes economic cooperation frameworks in the CIS, which favor economic interests of its allies and increase the leaders' ability to maintain domestic loyalty towards their government among elites and the public.⁸¹⁵

In fact, Russia does not only contribute regime security at the unit level, through granting political support to its individual allies, which contributes to legitimate their domestic political practices; but also "*at the macro-regional level to*

⁸¹² See Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, pp. 150-172.

⁸¹³ The argument on this separation was developed through Author's interview with Mikhail Troitskiy.

⁸¹⁴ Miller and Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," p. 336.

⁸¹⁵ **Ibid.**; Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," p. 469.

sustain a conservative sovereignty-focused normative framework."⁸¹⁶ This helps regional states to resist alternative normative pressures from other states advocating Western liberal values. The Kremlin's emphasis on the 'sovereign democracy' concept is significant in this sense, which advocates that each country shall follow a distinct path for developing its democratic system and domestic political institutions suiting its own political culture and historical experiences.⁸¹⁷ The CSTO members view the Russian model of sovereign democracy as attractive since it subordinates human rights, democracy and humanitarian intervention to the stability of government and societies.⁸¹⁸ Through promoting close regime to regime relationships with regional states and advocating the sovereignty norm in international relations, therefore, the Kremlin sends messages to the leaders of post-Soviet states that the security and survival of regimes can be best served by maintaining their alignments with Russia. This situation makes relevance to David's omnibalancing theory.⁸¹⁹

As Roy Allison suggests, the CSTO as a multilateral regional institution also contributes to regime security of the members by promoting a 'protective integration.' The CSTO "*seeks to reinforce but not pool sovereignty; and it validates rather than transforms state policies.*"⁸²⁰ This military alliance furthers 'political solidarity' among its members on certain norms such as giving priority to regime security, defending distinct political and cultural values, supporting the principle of non-intervention and traditional Westphalian sovereignty. The institutional framework of the CSTO -together with that of the SCO examined in the next chapter- create and legitimate pathways of interstate cooperation but also hinder deeper integration to the extent that is seen in the Western regional organizations.⁸²¹ Beyond these functions,

⁸¹⁶ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 309.

⁸¹⁷ The Russian 'sovereign democracy' model was domestically developed to oppose foreign interferences and the possibility of a civil revolution in the Russian Federation itself. For different views from Western and Russian perspectives, see Ivan Krastev, "'Sovereign Democracy' Russian-style," *Open Democracy*, November 16, 2006, https://www.opendemocracy.net/globalization-institutions/government/sovereign_democracy_4104.jsp (24.02.2019); and Dmitrii Orlov, "The New Russian Age and Sovereign Democracy," *Russian Politics & Law*, Vol. 46, No. 5, 2008.

⁸¹⁸ According to Herd, furthermore, this model suggests that "*authoritarianism is the solution to instability rather than its cause.*" Graeme P. Herd, "The 'Battle of Ideas, Concepts, and Geopolitical Projects' in Central Asia: Implications for Russo-Chinese Relations?," (ed.), *Shifting Priorities in Russia's Foreign and Security Policy*, New York: Routledge, 2014, p. 183.

⁸¹⁹ See David, *Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World*, p. 24.

⁸²⁰ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 309.

⁸²¹ Nicole J Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 66, No. 2, 2014, p. 200.

some scholars further assert that the CSTO peacekeeping forces and Russian troops deployed into the region under the guise of the alliance framework could offer limited military assistance against domestic revolts and revolutionary situations in member states, especially when radical Islamist groups appear as dominant.⁸²²

Kyrgyzstan's Government Crisis in 2010: A Test Case for Military Intervention

The possibility of intervention by the CSTO into a domestic political crisis in a member state came into discussion during and after the unconstitutional regime change experienced in Kyrgyzstan in April 2010. Later in June, the government crisis escalated into interethnic clashes in the southern regions of the country between Uzbek minority and Kyrgyz people who were supporting the overthrown leader Kurmanbek Bakiyev.⁸²³ The interim government in Bishkek led by Roza Otunbayeva first demanded intervention by the CSTO peacekeeping forces to promote peace and stability and then asked for a limited unilateral involvement by the Russian armed forces.⁸²⁴ At the beginning of the crisis, Russia remained indifferent towards the events, as Moscow was not displeased at the fall of Bakiyev with whom its relations had already deteriorated.⁸²⁵ In addition to that, Russia did not positively respond to the acting president's requests and avoided a direct intervention into the subsequent civil conflict in Kyrgyzstan. Instead, it concentrated on humanitarian relief measures and

⁸²² See Roy Allison, **Russia, the West, and Military Intervention**, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013, p. 140; and Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 12.

⁸²³ Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," pp. 1538-1540; and Nicole J Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 66, No. 2, 2014, p. 195 According to official sources those events led to approximately 400 deaths and 400,000 people were displaced, while unofficial numbers were higher. **Ibid.**

⁸²⁴ **Ibid.**; Evgeny Troitskiy, "Turmoil in Kyrgyzstan: A Challenge to Russian Foreign Policy," The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, Occasional Papers, No. 8, 2012, pp. 24-25. Retrieved from: <https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/turmoil-in-kyrgyzstan-a-challenge-to-russian-foreign-policy-min.pdf> (23.02.2019).

⁸²⁵ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 325. In fact, Bakiyev reached power through the 'Tulip Revolution' which is known as one of the color revolutions within the post-Soviet states. However given the geopolitical realities and the dependency relations between Bishkek and Moscow, there was no significant change in Kyrgyz foreign policy after the revolution and the country remained as a member of the CSTO. See Yasar Sari, "Foreign Policy of Kyrgyzstan under Askar Akayev and Kurmanbek Bakiyev," **Perceptions**, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2012. However, there were some problems between Bishkek and Moscow not to mention the Kremlin's opposition to maintenance of the US basing rights in the country, while Russian media started an anti-Bakiyev campaign just before the fall of his regime. Erica Marat, "Russian Mass Media Attack Bakiyev," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 7, No. 63, April 1, 2010, <https://jamestown.org/program/russian-mass-media-attack-bakiyev/> (25.02.2019).

gave political advice to restore order as soon as possible.⁸²⁶ Russia hoped that the situation would normalize on its own or at least would not expand beyond Kyrgyzstan's borders. After a fragile stability was restored, Moscow's decision not to intervene turned out to be well advised; - yet Russia's reputation as the stabilizer of the region was damaged.⁸²⁷

There are different reasons behind Russia's avoidance from intervention into Kyrgyzstan domestic crisis after the regime change. First, another military intervention by Moscow into a post-Soviet state in the aftermath of the Russia-Georgia war of 2008 could trigger international criticism and encourage Western claims on Russian hegemonic and expansionist ambitions. Such a risk appeared to be unbearable considering the geopolitical realities of the region: Kyrgyzstan shares no border with Russia and there is no possibility of expansion of a foreign military alliance towards this country.⁸²⁸ In addition, Russia feared that a direct intervention into a political crisis would have further complicated the situation as well as its relations with Kyrgyzstan and other regional states. During such an operation, peacekeeping forces might have inevitably done something wrong which could have fired anti-Russian nationalist senses among local people.⁸²⁹ The Russian leadership must have acknowledged these risks pertaining to military intervention into a political turmoil in Central Asia, especially when there is no clear exit strategy.⁸³⁰

Besides Russia's position, there are other reasons for non-intervention by the CSTO associated with the structure of the Alliance and other members' attitudes towards such an operation. Since Russia did nothing to protect the Bakiyev regime, Central Asian leaders do not fully trust that Moscow would take their side in major

⁸²⁶ Those measures included sending humanitarian supplies, providing emergency evacuation and assisting with medical forensic examinations. Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 486.

⁸²⁷ Evgeny Troitskiy, "Turmoil in Kyrgyzstan..." pp. 24-25.

⁸²⁸ See Anna Matveeva, "Violence in Kyrgyzstan, Vacuum in the Region: The Case for Russia-EU Joint Crisis Management," LSE Civil Society & Human Security Research Unit Working Paper, December 2011, pp. 9-10. Retrieved from: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/internationalDevelopment/research/CSHS/pdfs/workingPapers/violenceInKyrgyzstan.pdf> (24.02.2019); and Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," p. 196.

⁸²⁹ Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 487. In addition, Kropatcheva talks about the danger of retaliation by local people against Russia's communities in Kyrgyzstan. Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p.1539.

⁸³⁰ Allison, **Russia, the West, and Military Intervention**, p. 141.

crises of political authority if Russia intervenes militarily.⁸³¹ This makes it very difficult to reach a consensus-based decision which is necessary for a CSTO intervention, given the negative attitude of regional states which put a strong emphasis on their sovereignty.⁸³² In this respect, the lack of CSTO's direct action towards the Kyrgyzstan domestic crisis was in accordance with its political and security norms.⁸³³ Therefore the CSTO Secretary General Bordyuzha felt obliged in early 2014 to state that the alliance "*will not intervene in political life, political fight, and political actions within states, and it will not be used for solving some political tasks.*"⁸³⁴ For all those reasons above, besides the foreign policy realm, Russia also seems not to assert a hegemony over the domestic politics of the CSTO members. Under these conditions, it seems highly unlikely that Russia would conduct military interventions to influence domestic political processes of its allies, which was occasionally observed in the Warsaw pact.

There are some arguments that the CSTO has proven itself as an ineffective and weak regional security organization, as it missed the chance to intervene in the domestic crisis in Kyrgyzstan at the government's request.⁸³⁵ However, the analysis in the previous pages shows how CSTO practically functions to contribute to the regime security of allied states. All military alliances involve a dimension of political alignment between its members but not vice versa because alignment is a broader phenomenon that may not necessarily develop into a formal treaty. Therefore, we should shift our focus to what CSTO actually do in the political realm -namely to its

⁸³¹ See Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 325.

⁸³² See Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 4; Johan Norberg, "High Ambitions, Harsh Realities: Gradually Building CSTO's Capacity for Military Intervention in Crises," FOI-R-3668-SE, Stockholm, May 2013, pp. 30-33. Retrieved from: <https://www.foi.se/report-search/pdf?fileName=D%3A%5CReportSearch%5CFiles%5Cc2618f23-299f-42f5-b076-e383ca0eeb57.pdf> (24.02.2019).

⁸³³ Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," pp. 196-197. Following the crisis the CSTO members acknowledged the establishment of a 'crisis management system' within the alliance based only on political means of preventing and settling crises including the appointment of an authorized person behalf of the organization and procedures for providing humanitarian and other assistance. Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 200.

⁸³⁴ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 325.

⁸³⁵ See Cooley, "Whose Rules, Whose Sphere? Russian Governance and Influence in Post-Soviet States," p. 5; and Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," pp. 3-4.

role as conveyor and legitimator of statist norms. The member's cooperation on regime security appears not only reactive to specific cases but has been developed into "*a proactive form of collective political solidarity directed against unwelcome international political processes and agendas, especially since ... [color] revolutions.*"⁸³⁶ In this respect, participation in a formal alliance with Russia by some regional states is a strong indicator that they are willing to have closer relations with Moscow.⁸³⁷ As examined in the next section, Uzbekistan's participation in the CSTO in 2006 in the aftermath of Andican anti-government protests proves that military alliance ties are expected to promote deeper political solidarity between regimes.

Russian Military Support to Regime Security against Terrorist Groups and Armed Opposition

As suggested above, the military dimension of the CSTO and other bilateral treaties between Russia and regional states make more relevance vis-à-vis the third group of internal threats, namely terrorist organizations and other organized crime groups which appeal to armed opposition against the state authority. Promoting military cooperation with Russia against Islamist extremist groups seems to be much easier given the common threat perceptions of secular governments in Central Asian Republics.

The most significant example in this sense has been the development of alliance relations between Russia and Tajikistan. In the aftermath of the Soviet collapse, Russia actively supported the Emomali Rakhmonov government in the Tajik civil war which took five years between 1992 and 1997.⁸³⁸ The newly-settled regime in Tajikistan faced by a rebellion by a mixture of regional and religious groups including the Islamic Renaissance Party which was emerged as the most effective armed force.⁸³⁹ Russia militarily intervened in the country on the basis of CST and bilateral agreements, as Moscow worried that the Islamist revolutionary movements might spill over into Central Asia. Three other regional states, namely Kazakhstan,

⁸³⁶ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 310.

⁸³⁷ See Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, p. 27.

⁸³⁸ Miller and Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," p. 334.

⁸³⁹ Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, pp. 152-153.

Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan supported the Rakhmonov government to the extent that they sent contingents into the country which were later incorporated into the CIS peacekeeping operation created in September 1993. These states also made troop contributions to the multinational border guards protecting Tajikistan's border with Afghanistan and joined formal political mechanisms for conflict resolution between the Tajik government and members of opposition groups.⁸⁴⁰

After the civil war and the establishment of fragile stability, the Tajik government has continued to appreciate Russia's military assistance.⁸⁴¹ Tajikistan still hosts Russia's largest military base abroad containing 6000-7500 troops who are formally charged with training and assisting Tajik security forces to ensure the country's security and the defense of the Tajik-Afghan border.⁸⁴² Although the civil war years are over, Tajikistan's capabilities to deal with the challenges of Islamic extremism spreading from Pakistan and Afghanistan remains a significant cause of concern.⁸⁴³ Maintenance of military and political alignment ties between Tajikistan and Russia seems crucial for the regime, which tries to consolidate itself by campaigning that *"reckless actions like protests, meetings, or the formation of new social movements or political parties would only create dangerous divisions and could even throw Tajikistan into a civil conflict just like Syria."*⁸⁴⁴

There are some indicators that the CSTO may commit itself to intervene in a member country should the regime faces armed opposition by terrorist groups. The members signaled that they could agree for such an operation during the CSTO Rubezh-2006 exercise in Kazakhstan. This exercise was based on a scenario that

⁸⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 151-157.

⁸⁴¹ In 2004, Tajik Defense Ministry suggested that they would stand for stronger cooperation with the Russian army. There was another declaration later in 2006 underlining that Russia has been their main security partner and that *"the Tajik armed forces have been set up thanks to Russia's assistance and contribution."* Quoted in Deyermond, "Matrioshka Hegemony? Multi-Levelled Hegemonic Competition and Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," p. 170.

⁸⁴² See "Russian Military Bases Abroad: How Many and Where?" Sputnik, December 12, 2015, <https://sputniknews.com/military/201512191032030941-russian-bases-abroad/> (24.02.2019). The use of this base by Russia was extended by three decades though an agreement ratified by Tajikistan in October 2013. Raushan Nurshayeva, "Russian Border Guards' Return to Tajikistan 'Not on Agenda': Official," Reuters, November 12, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-tajikistan-border/russian-border-guards-return-to-tajikistan-not-on-agenda-official-idUSKCN0T10BY20151112> (24.02.2019).

⁸⁴³ Christian Bleuer, "Instability in Tajikistan? The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and the Afghanistan Factor," Central Asia Security Policy Brief, No. 7, OSCE Academy, February 15, 2012, p. 3. Retrieved from: http://www.osce-academy.net/upload/file/bleuer_policy_brief7.pdf (24.02.2019).

⁸⁴⁴ Christian Bleuer, "The Tajik Civil War: 20 Years Later," The Diplomat, June 01, 2017, <https://thediplomat.com/2017/06/the-tajik-civil-war-20-years-later/> (24.02.2019).

Astana appeals to Article 4 of the CSTO Charter and requests assistance, because ‘terrorist organizations’ were “*not satisfied with the results of presidential elections and seek to seize power.*”⁸⁴⁵ Later in 2013, the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces (CRRF) and the Regional Group of Forces of Russia and Belarus conducted a joint exercise “*against imagined foreign extremists aiming to carry out terrorist attacks and destabilize the situation.*”⁸⁴⁶

To sum, it seems possible that CSTO could intervene to support the government of a member state with its special forces in case of an armed rebellion led by terrorist groups. Such an operation could only be considered if there comes an official request from the government of that country and a consensus could be reached in the CSTO. However, for all those reasons mentioned above, military intervention into domestic political crises in member states including civilian groups (e.g. political parties, public protestors or ethnic clans having stakes in a power conflict) remains highly unlikely. This kind of an operation conducted by the CSTO or unilaterally by Moscow would attract serious international criticism and might further complicate the situation in such domestic crises.

C. Transnational Threats to Regional Stability

Besides promoting collective defense against external threats and consolidating regime security of the allied states, the CSTO also functions to contribute to the struggle against transnational threats and challenges such as terrorism, extremism, illegal drug trafficking and illegal migration.⁸⁴⁷ All those threats put challenges both to regional stability and regime security of allied states which is examined above. However, as countering transnational threats has been a central pillar for the military cooperation within the CSTO, we should separately focus on how the alliance functions vis-à-vis such threats in the region-wide scale.

Given the instability around the Afghanistan region, transnational threats have been much more challenging for Central Asian states than the other members of the

⁸⁴⁵ Jasutis, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Military Integration Problems and Perspectives in the Cis Space," p. 168.

⁸⁴⁶ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 315-316.

⁸⁴⁷ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," pp. 199-200.

CSTO, i.e. Armenia and Belarus. Many extremist organizations targeting Central Asian states such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan are collaborating with terrorist groups in Afghanistan and provided with safe havens and camps in that country. There is a serious drug trafficking problem from the Afghan territory involved by those extremist groups while increasing numbers of Central Asian citizens are getting trained by terrorist organizations in Afghanistan.⁸⁴⁸ Furthermore, the armed incursions by radical Islamist groups at the turn of the century into Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan put forward the necessity of regional security cooperation against such kind of transnational threats.⁸⁴⁹

As noted in Part One, Chapter One, omnibalancing theory suggests that Third World states seek alignments with external powers that would increase their capability to fight against such non-state threats facing them. Those external powers' ability to 'transfer of large amounts of arms' and their willingness for 'direct intervention' remain as critical considerations for regional states when evaluating a prospective ally.⁸⁵⁰ In this regard, the Russian military industry seems to be a point of attraction for the CSTO members that could buy Russian made arms on advantageous terms.⁸⁵¹ Russia also provides significant military aid to the CSTO members, which increases their armies' capability to ensure border security.⁸⁵² Furthermore, joint training and exercises with Russia increase regional states' military performance. Last but not least, the CSTO Rapid Reaction Forces are held at disposal of member states in case of large-scale armed attacks by extremist groups towards their territory.⁸⁵³

⁸⁴⁸ See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1543; and Svante E. Cornell, "The Narcotics Threat in Greater Central Asia: From Crime-Terror Nexus to State Infiltration?," **China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly**, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2006, pp. 44-47.

⁸⁴⁹ See Bailes, Baranovsky, and Dunay, "Regional Security Cooperation in the Former Soviet Area," p. 175; and Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 196.

⁸⁵⁰ David, **Choosing Sides: Alignment and Realignment in the Third World**, p. 24.

⁸⁵¹ Robert Śmigielski, "The Role of Arms Exports in the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation," p. 249.

⁸⁵² Tajikistan has been the recipient of the greatest military assistance from Russia especially after the US announced its plans to withdraw from Afghanistan. For the content of this military aid including helicopters, armored personnel vehicles, and tanks, see Nadin Bahrom, "Kremlin's Heightened Military Interest in Tajikistan Raises 'Greater Russia' Alarm," Caravanserai, January 19, 2018, http://central.asia-news.com/en_GB/articles/cnmi_ca/features/2018/01/19/feature-02 (10.03.2019).

⁸⁵³ See De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges," pp. 216-217; De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 13.

While the CSTO members are interested in Russian made arms and joint training with the Russian army, they generally do not have a positive attitude towards the idea of direct military intervention by Russia –unless there is an imminent threat which cannot be possibly dealt with alone.⁸⁵⁴ For example, the CSTO members prefer to undertake border security and defense missions by their own forces due to their sovereignty concerns. In this respect, Central Asian states avoid providing Russia with the right to deploy its border guards on a permanent basis. Following the relative consolidation of the regime and the US operation into Afghanistan, the Tajik leadership advocated the withdrawal of the Russian troops protecting the country's border with Afghanistan.⁸⁵⁵ After the negotiations, Russia completed removing its border troops in 2005 -except a small group of border security advisers. This led to a remarkable decrease in security incidents and drug seizures, while terrorist groups were supposedly massed nearby the Tajik border, which were involved in drug trafficking. Although Moscow called for the redeployment of Russian border troops later in 2011, this has not been possible so far due to Tajikistan's negative attitude towards this issue.⁸⁵⁶

Paradoxically, the US withdrawal from Afghanistan beginning in 2014 also put a challenge to Russia's regional security interests. Moscow has worried that expansion and consolidation of the Taliban's control over the country might increase drug-flow towards Russia via Central Asia and facilitate the spread of Islamist radicalism in the region.⁸⁵⁷ However, both Russia and the CSTO take a defensive stance towards the security problems in Afghanistan, as none of the members want to step in militarily. They rather concentrate on cooperating for border security through the ways

⁸⁵⁴ Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," p. 472.

⁸⁵⁵ Anna Matveeva, "Tajikistan: Evolution of the Security Sector and the War on Terror," Anja H. Ebnöther, Maj Ernst M. Felberbauer, and Martin Malek (ed.), **Facing the Terrorist Challenge: Central Asia's Role in Regional and International Cooperation**, Vienna and Geneva: Bureau for Security Policy at the Austrian Ministry of Defence, National Defence Academy Vienna; and Geneva Centre for the Democratic Control of Armed Forces, Geneva; in co-operation with PfP-Consortium of Defence Academies and Security Studies Institutes, 2005, pp. 145-146.

⁸⁵⁶ Kazantsev, "Russian Policy in Central Asia and the Caspian Sea Region," p. 1083; Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," pp. 482-483; Raushan Nurshayeva, "Russian Border Guards' Return to Tajikistan 'not on Agenda': Official," Reuters, November 12, 2015, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-russia-tajikistan-border/russian-border-guards-return-to-tajikistan-not-on-agenda-official-idUSKCN0T10BY20151112> (10.03.2019).

⁸⁵⁷ See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," pp. 1543-1544; and Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 491.

mentioned above.⁸⁵⁸ In addition, since 2003, the CSTO conducts a special operation against drug trafficking called as Kanal (Channel), which has been recognized by United Nations “*as the largest and the most effective operation in counteracting Afghan trafficking.*”⁸⁵⁹ The operation has seized more than 360 tons of drugs since the beginning, while it has attracted many observers from different regions such as China, Columbia, Italy, Spain, the United States, and Interpol, etc.⁸⁶⁰ Furthermore, the alliance carries out the ‘Nelegal’ operation against illegal migrants from the outside of the CSTO area, and the ‘PROKSI’ operation which aims at detecting and closing down websites including extremist content.⁸⁶¹

The CSTO members’ cooperation on the basis of combatting against terrorists and extremists also expands to the political and diplomatic realm, which has recently developed further due to the ISIS challenge towards the region. For example, at the end of 2015, the Committee of Secretaries of the Security Councils considered how the CSTO states could prevent their citizens from being recruited by terrorist organizations. This followed the meeting of CSTO Heads of State which called for the establishment of a broad international coalition to fight against the ISIS and other terrorist organizations.⁸⁶² The CSTO meeting in October 2016 created a joint crisis response center in order to exchange information on common threats such as terrorism. The meeting also resolved a list of terrorist groups and organizations that are active in the CSTO area and a related database, which would be significant for strengthening a region-wide cooperation against such transnational threats.⁸⁶³

To conclude, the regional states in the CSTO maintain their military alliance ties with Russia to ensure Moscow’s support against various threats challenging regional peace and stability and their regime security as well. However, Russia’s military allies still maintain their concerns on sovereignty vis-à-vis Moscow in their domestic space to a remarkable extent -despite the concessions they have already made

⁸⁵⁸ See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1543.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 1544.

⁸⁶⁰ “US Joins Post-Soviet Security Bloc’s Anti-Drug Operation,” TASS, February 08, 2018, <http://tass.com/defense/989017> (10.03.2019); Nikitina, "Security Cooperation in the Post-Soviet Area within the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 3.

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁸⁶² Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 318.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

to Russia. While such concerns have often hindered Russian initiatives to further military cooperation, they have also underpinned decisions of withdrawal from the Moscow-led alliance by some regional states -especially Uzbekistan.

III. Russia's Relations with its Former Military Allies: Uzbekistan, Georgia, and Azerbaijan

After analyzing the dynamics of alignments between Russia and its formal allies, the rest of this chapter will examine how balancing efforts by other regional states remaining outside of the CSTO have put challenges to Russia's regional security interests. For example, Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CST and later the CSTO beclouded regional security cooperation for the stability of Central Asia, while the lack of allied relations with Azerbaijan and Georgia complicated Russia's efforts to fight against separatism on its Caucasian borders. On the other side, we should also examine foreign policy changes by some regional actors after color revolutions. These foreign policy changes led to some regional crises and accordingly serious problems in Russian-Western relations. All these developments will support our analysis of Russia's main threat perceptions presented in the previous chapter.

Last but not least, the following pages also test our second main assumption that Russia manipulates regional threats against local balancers in order to push them to take a more neutral position or at least to block the expansion of foreign military alliances towards the region. In this respect, the following sections discuss how much Russia became successful in its threatening policies against local balancers in the Caucasus and Black Sea region by examining the regional conflicts and the most significant developments through a historical perspective.

A. Russian-Uzbek Relations and Tashkent's Position towards the CSTO

Uzbekistan has a predominant position among Central Asian countries with regard to its population and military power. The population of Uzbekistan is around 32 million which makes up 45% of the total population of Central Asia.⁸⁶⁴ In addition, there is a remarkable number of ethnic Uzbek people living in neighboring countries

⁸⁶⁴ See "DataBank World Development Indicators," The World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SP.POP.TOTL&country> (10.03.2019).

who can be used as an instrument for influence by Tashkent, although Uzbekistan has refrained from doing this so far.⁸⁶⁵ Geopolitically, the country represents the region's center of gravity, as it shares borders all four other Central Asian states and Afghanistan but not with Russia and China i.e. two proximate great powers.⁸⁶⁶ Above all, Uzbekistan has the largest military power in the region, which creates a space for maneuvering its foreign and security policy in a more independent and proactive manner.⁸⁶⁷ All those facts have generally hindered the strengthening of the military alliance between Russia and Uzbekistan and created some problems in bilateral relations.

In the early independence period, however, Uzbekistan chose to follow a pro-Russian foreign policy. President Islam Karimov fully understood the importance of cooperating with Russia in the short term, given the lack of experience for independence and a self-sufficient national military army in Uzbekistan.⁸⁶⁸ Tashkent signed the CST alliance in May 1992, as it sought Russia's support to struggling against the terrorist and Islamist threats in the region. This alliance was first tested when the Tajik civil war broke out with a threat of spill-over into Uzbekistan. The Karimov government not only sent peacekeeping troops into Tajikistan but also joined the political process and to help to build a peace arrangement. In a few years, Russia's cooperation with Uzbekistan bordering Tajikistan came to be so critical that some argued Tajikistan turned into a 'Russian-Uzbek protectorate.'⁸⁶⁹

Nonetheless, Russia-Uzbekistan relations worsened in the second half of the 1990s, as Moscow failed to deliver the promised aid and economic assistance to Tashkent due to its financial problems, which was crucial for the state-building process

⁸⁶⁵ Uzbeks represent roughly about 15% of the overall populations in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, while there are smaller, but by no means irrelevant, Uzbek minorities in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan (around less than half a million in each countries.) See Matteo Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks Abroad'," *Central Asian Survey*, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2007, pp. 106-109.

⁸⁶⁶ Paul Stronski, "Uzbekistan at Twenty-Five: What Next?" Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, March 21, 2016, p. 1: Retrieved from: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Stronsky_Uzbekistan.pdf (10.03.2019); Tugce Varol Sevim and Alexander Rozanov, "Ups and Downs in Foreign Policy of Uzbekistan towards Security Approach of Russia," *Khazar Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, Vol. 17, No. 3, 2014, p. 19.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁶⁸ Miller, *To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, pp. 47-51.

⁸⁶⁹ See Barnett R. Rubin, "Tajikistan: From Soviet Republic to Russian-Uzbek Protectorate," Michael Mandelbaum (ed.), *Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Turkmenistan*, New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 1994.

in Uzbekistan.⁸⁷⁰ Maybe more importantly, the peace arrangements ending the Tajik civil war rendered Uzbek role in this country only as peripheral excluding the majority of Tashkent-supported groups from the government. This dissatisfaction led Uzbekistan to view Russia as a ‘competitor’ in the region.⁸⁷¹ In January 1999, Karimov asserted that Russia was trying to impose its will on the regional states in the CIS where all issues turned to be “*dictated by Russia.*”⁸⁷² Accordingly, Uzbekistan’s rationale for not renewing the CST in 1999 was put forward by the Uzbek Foreign Ministry spokesman who noted that “*the treaty does not meet the requirements of the times and ... Tashkent objects to Russia’s military activity in certain CIS states.*”⁸⁷³

In this respect, Uzbekistan’s aspirations for regional dominance in Central Asia have played a significant factor in its decision to leave the Russian-led military alliance and adopt a flexible alignment strategy through maneuvering between alternative power centers. Uzbekistan has not avoided to designate itself as the regional leader of Central Asia relying on its demographic and military might.⁸⁷⁴ When its strategic interests have been at stake, Tashkent has not refrained also from using its military power in the region let alone its support to the CIS mission in Tajikistan. Since 1999, Uzbekistan has conducted some unauthorized operations beyond its borders in pursuit of extremist militant groups, while it has unilaterally demarcated and mined state borders with neighboring countries.⁸⁷⁵ Such assertive moves by Uzbekistan created worries that a state dispute could potentially lead a domino effect of violence and instability in Central Asia -given the ethnic complexity of the border areas and especially Fergana Valley shared by Uzbek, Tajik and Kyrgyz territories. If Tashkent adopts a proactive approach towards the Uzbeks abroad, the neighboring countries

⁸⁷⁰ Aleksandr Pikalov, "Uzbekistan between the Great Powers: A Balancing Act or a Multi-Vectorial Approach?," **Central Asian Survey**, Vol. 33, No. 3, 2014, p. 305.

⁸⁷¹ See *ibid.* p. 306; Matteo Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignments in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," **International Political Science Review**, Vol. 28, No. 3, 2007, p. 256; Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks Abroad'," pp. 113-114.

⁸⁷² Quoted in Miller and Toritsyn, "Bringing the Leader Back In: Internal Threats and Alignment Theory in the Commonwealth of Independent States," p. 355.

⁸⁷³ Quoted in *ibid.*

⁸⁷⁴ See Stuart Horsman, "Uzbekistan's Involvement in the Tajik Civil War 1992-97: Domestic Considerations," **Central Asian Survey**, Vol. 18, No. 1, 1999, pp. 44-45; and De Haas, "Security Policy and Developments in Central Asia: Security Documents Compared with Security Challenges," p. 206.

⁸⁷⁵ See Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks Abroad'," p. 107. In addition, Uzbekistan has also expelled residents from border areas and regularly cut off energy supplies to its neighbors due to water problems with upstream countries i.e. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Annette Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order," **International Affairs**, Vol. 80, No. 3, 2004, p. 495.

may possibly retaliate by harsh responses against their Uzbek minorities and supporting other minorities in Uzbekistan as well. This represents the worst-case scenario which could inflame the region and lead many inter and intra-state crises.⁸⁷⁶

In fact, Uzbekistan's aspirations for regional dominance were enhanced by the US engagement in Central Asia after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Soon Washington recognized Uzbekistan as the 'pivotal state' in the region on the basis of geographical facts and its military capabilities.⁸⁷⁷ In exchange for its support to the war on terror in Afghanistan and providing the US with the largest military base in the region, Uzbekistan received twice as much assistance as any other Central Asian state. This created an even sharper imbalance between the military power of Uzbekistan and its neighbors.⁸⁷⁸ The US' willingness to fight against Islamist extremist groups in the region supported the regime security and stability in Uzbekistan. Furthermore, the US material assistance helped Uzbekistan to modernize its armed forces, boosted the foreign policy ambitions of Karimov and therefore encouraged some assertive moves mentioned above.⁸⁷⁹ The US-Uzbek security cooperation also led to signing a declaration on 'Strategic Partnership and Cooperation', in 2002, which fell short a military alliance but suggested that the US would regard any external threat to the national security and territorial integrity of Uzbekistan with 'grave concern.'⁸⁸⁰

However, this turned to be a short-lived strategic partnership, as the Uzbek government moved increasingly away from the conviction that Washington could be relied on against various threats and challenges to the regime security. In the face of color revolutions expanding in the CIS region, Tashkent became disturbed by the US government's pressure to implement democratic reforms. In this respect, the armed and bloody repression of anti-Karimov protests in Andijan in May 2005 was the turning point for Uzbek-Western relations. The US and Western powers boosted their

⁸⁷⁶ Fumagalli, "Ethnicity, State Formation and Foreign Policy: Uzbekistan and 'Uzbeks Abroad'," pp. 107-108.

⁸⁷⁷ Deyermond, "Matrioshka Hegemony? Multi-Levelled Hegemonic Competition and Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia," pp. 162-163.

⁸⁷⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 164 and Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order," p. 492.

⁸⁷⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 492-494; and Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke, "Chinese-Russian Convergence and Central Asia," *Geopolitics*, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2011, p. 878.

⁸⁸⁰ "Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework between the United States of America and the Republic of Uzbekistan," US Department of State Archive, July 8, 2002, <https://2001-2009.state.gov/p/eur/rls/or/2002/11711.htm> (13.03.2019).

criticism on human rights violations in Uzbekistan and called for a formal inquiry by an independent committee authorized by the UN.⁸⁸¹ On the other side, Russia did not join this international campaign but tried to use the Uzbek leadership's rising threat perceptions against the regime security to renew its alliance relations with this country. Uzbekistan welcomed Moscow's political and diplomatic support to the regime and thus oriented towards a pro-Russian foreign policy.

In August 2005, the Uzbek government called the US to vacate the military base at Karshi-Khanabad within six months.⁸⁸² On the same day American forces completed the withdrawal (November 14, 2005), Uzbekistan formally allied with Russia through a bilateral treaty including mutual defense commitment.⁸⁸³ In a joint statement with Vladimir Putin, Karimov said that "[b]y signing the alliance agreement, Uzbekistan once again precisely showed whose interests coincide with ours and with whom we wish to build our future ... Russia was and remains Uzbekistan's most important bulwark and ally."⁸⁸⁴ This strategic move by Tashkent shows us the symbolic value and instrumentality of a military alliance to expand political and diplomatic cooperation between allied governments, which make relevance to the broader phenomenon of alignment.

In the following months, Moscow continued its efforts to utilize Tashkent's threat perceptions on regime security to bring the country in its orbit and pressured Uzbekistan to join the CSTO.⁸⁸⁵ In August 2006, Tashkent finally joined the CSTO but it remained only as a nominal member thereafter. Uzbekistan did not ratify any additional agreement adopted by the alliance and avoided attending joint military exercises with the member states. In June 2012, Tashkent officially suspended its participation in the CSTO, while its *de jure* membership status lasted until

⁸⁸¹ See Azamat S. Sulimanov and Albert V. Beloglazov, "Bilateral Relations between Uzbekistan and the USA in the 21st Century," *Ad Alta-Journal of Interdisciplinary Research*, Vol. 8, No. 1, 2018, pp. 349-350; and Pikalov, "Uzbekistan between the Great Powers: A Balancing Act or a Multi-Vectorial Approach?," p. 307.

⁸⁸² Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Chinese-Russian Convergence and Central Asia," p. 880.

⁸⁸³ Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignment in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," p. 253, 263.

⁸⁸⁴ Quoted in Pikalov, "Uzbekistan between the Great Powers: A Balancing Act or a Multi-Vectorial Approach?," p. 307.

⁸⁸⁵ Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignment in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," p. 254. For further information about this pressure and Uzbekistan's unwillingness to increase its security cooperation with Russia. See Sergei Blagov, "Uzbekistan Sets Limits for Cooperation with Russia," Eurasianet, February 24, 2006, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-sets-limits-for-cooperation-with-russia> (11.03.2019).

December.⁸⁸⁶ Scholars indicate to different factors and developments within the CSTO to explain the timing and rationale of Uzbek decision to withdraw. First of all, Uzbekistan did not welcome the creation of Collective Rapid Reaction Forces in 2009, because Tashkent was not willing to strengthen military cooperation with the alliance members. In addition, Uzbekistan disturbed to see that the CSTO's focus was moving from countering external threats to responding to possible crises and conflicts over the territory of member states.⁸⁸⁷ Furthermore, the CSTO's resolution taken in December 2011, which conditioned the opening of a new military base by foreign states on the territory of alliance members to the consensus of all members also run contrary to the Uzbek concerns of sovereignty.⁸⁸⁸

Last but not least, Russia's plans to open a second military base in Kyrgyzstan's Osh city fed Tashkent's feeling of containment by Russia, as the city was located in the Fergana Valley nearby the Uzbek border. This also signaled Uzbekistan's renewed regional competition with Russia and other Central Asian states as well.⁸⁸⁹ According to an Uzbekistan-based political scientist, Tashkent's decision to leave the CSTO was also motivated by its assumption that "*bilateral military and political interaction between Uzbekistan and CSTO member-states can be settled faster and more effectively in the present situation, without coordination with the CSTO*"⁸⁹⁰ However, there remain several areas of friction between Uzbekistan and its neighbors, concerning border issues, minorities, energy supplies, water resources,

⁸⁸⁶ Farkhod Tolipov, "Uzbekistan without the CSTO," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, February 20, 2013, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12652-uzbekistan-without-the-csto.html> (21.03.2019).

⁸⁸⁷ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 198; Allison, **Russia, the West, and Military Intervention**, p. 147; Pikalov, "Uzbekistan between the Great Powers: A Balancing Act or a Multi-Vectorial Approach?," p. 304.

⁸⁸⁸ Zeng Xianghong, "Uzbekistan and the CSTO: A Tumultuous Ride," **China International Studies**, Vol. 9, No. 38, 2013, p. 129.

⁸⁸⁹ In opposing those plans revealed in 2009, the Uzbek Foreign Ministry suggested that "*the implementation of such projects on complex and unpredictable territory may give impetus to the strengthening of militarization processes and initiate all kinds of nationalistic confrontations.*" Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 131. For a discussion on possible implications of those plans including containing of Uzbekistan and providing a measurement against Tashkent's aggressive border security operations, see Azizullah Ghazi, "A New Russian Base in Southern Kyrgyzstan: Containing Uzbekistan?" Naval Postgraduate School, Program for Culture and Conflict Studies, 2009, <https://my.nps.edu/documents/105988371/107571254/Central+Asia+article+Russia.pdf/eed65e4f-9aa8-4738-8f86-2c8b44cc0a62> (11.03.2019).

⁸⁹⁰ Rafik Saifulin, "How Myths Are Born: A View from Tashkent on the CSTO and Central Asia," *Russia in Global Affairs*, October 7, 2012, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/How-Myths-Are-Born-15693> (11.03.2019).

etc.⁸⁹¹ Since the 2000s, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as neighbors of Uzbekistan have often felt threatened by heavy-handed behavior of this militarily preponderant regional power. This challenge has shaped their orientation to regional political, economic and security organizations, including the CSTO which still implies a security guarantee against Uzbekistan.⁸⁹² In this respect, Uzbekistan's withdrawal from the CSTO reinforced such frictions and complicated Russian efforts to settle issues undermining the stability of Central Asia through a region-wide cooperation under its assumed role as the key stabilizer in the region.

The fact that the Western criticism and isolation campaign over the Karimov regime was weakened and then suspended around 2010 also enabled Uzbekistan to follow a more independent foreign policy, as Tashkent regained its maneuvering space between alternative power centers.⁸⁹³ Yet, Uzbekistan has not entirely relied entirely on the US or another power after leaving the CSTO. The Foreign Policy Concept of Uzbekistan adopted in 2012 affirmed that the country would not provide foreign military bases on its territory and refrain from joining any military block. At the same time, however, it also rejected mediation by 'external powers' in the resolution of Central Asian regional conflicts.⁸⁹⁴ Besides the rapprochement with the US and NATO powers, Uzbekistan balanced the eastern vector of its foreign policy by cooperating

⁸⁹¹ See Norberg, "High Ambitions, Harsh Realities: Gradually Building CSTO's Capacity for Military Intervention in Crises," p. 31. Cucciolla contends that the risk of an armed conflict between Uzbekistan and two upstream countries – Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan due to disputes over water and electricity supply is serious. Riccardo Cucciolla, "Uzbekistan, a Key Player in the Post 2014 Scenario". In September 2012, the President Karimov warned with a harsh rhetoric that those countries' efforts for constructing hydroelectric power stations on trans-border rivers could spark regional wars in Central Asia. Joanna Lillis, "Uzbekistan Leader Warns of Water Wars in Central Asia," Eurasianet, September 7, 2012, <https://eurasianet.org/uzbekistan-leader-warns-of-water-wars-in-central-asia> (12.03.2019).

⁸⁹² See Bohr, "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order," p. 494; Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," p. 468; and Tolipov, "Uzbekistan without the CSTO"

⁸⁹³ This was marked with high level official visits to Tashkent and the increasing international recognition of the regime by the US and other Western states which prioritized their strategic interests, while the US military aid began to flow into Uzbekistan again in 2011. Xianghong, "Uzbekistan and the CSTO: A Tumultuous Ride," pp. 132-133; Riccardo Mario Cucciolla, "Uzbekistan, a Key Player in the Post 2014 Scenario," ISPI Analysis, No. 263, June 18, 2014, p. 7. Retrieved from: https://www.ispionline.it/sites/default/files/publicazioni/analysis_263_2014_0.pdf (13.03.2019).

⁸⁹⁴ Farkhod Tolipov, "Uzbekistan's new Foreign Policy Concept: No Base, No Blocks but National Interests First," The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, September 5, 2012, <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12557-analytical-articles-> (13.03.2019).

with Russia and China through some bilateral relations and institutional mechanisms like the CIS and SCO.⁸⁹⁵

After the death of Karimov in September 2016, the successor President Shavkat Mirziyoyev continued to follow a multi-vector foreign policy to further the country's interests, while preserving Uzbekistan's concerns on national sovereignty and regime stability.⁸⁹⁶ In addition, Mirziyoyev focused on Uzbekistan's relations with Central Asian states and sought to transform those relations based on mutual trust and good-neighborliness –an objective underlined by his comprehensive speech delivered to the Uzbek parliament in December 2017.⁸⁹⁷ In May 2018, Shavkat Mirziyoyev paid an official visit to the United States, which has been characterized as a historic step for the Uzbek-American relations. During the visit, Uzbekistan agreed on a five-year plan about security affairs which aimed at building a bilateral partnership concerning peace and stability in the region and especially Afghanistan.⁸⁹⁸ Yet Mirziyoyev has also sought to regulate its relations with Russia recognizing it as the most powerful political actor in Central Asia.⁸⁹⁹ Russian-Uzbek relations have also expanded to the level of ad hoc security and military cooperation, as two states organized joint military

⁸⁹⁵ While holding its membership to the SCO, Tashkent maintained a security dialogue with Russia and other states in the CIS by sending delegates to meetings of the CIS Council of Defense Ministers. In addition, Uzbekistan has not pulled out of the CIS joint air defense system. Xianghong, "Uzbekistan and the CSTO: A Tumultuous Ride," p. 136; "President of Uzbekistan meets with CIS defense ministers," *UzDaily*, October 12, 2018, <http://www.uzdaily.uz/en/post/46118> (12.03.2019).

⁸⁹⁶ See Mariusz Marszewski, "Thaw in Uzbekistan. Reforms by President Mirziyoyev," *OSW Commentary*, No. 278, July 16, 2018, pp. 7-8. Retrieved from: https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_278.pdf (12.03.2019); and Sulimanov and Beloglazov, "Bilateral Relations between Uzbekistan and the USA in the 21st Century," p. 350. For the full text of this speech about domestic and foreign policy of the new Uzbek government see "The President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev Addressed the Parliament of the Country – the Oliy Majlis," Embassy of Uzbekistan in New Delhi, January 1, 2018, <http://www.uzbekembassy.in/the-president-of-the-republic-of-uzbekistan-shavkat-mirziyoyev-addressed-the-parliament-of-the-country-the-oliy-majlis/> (10.07.2019). In this respect, the Mirziyoyev administration has remarkably softened the official rhetoric with regard to longstanding water sharing issues with Uzbekistan's neighbors and proposed joint development plans for Eurasian hydroelectric sources. Richard Weitz, "Uzbekistan's New Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity under New Leadership" S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell (ed.), *Uzbekistan's New Face*, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2018, pp. 50-51.

⁸⁹⁸ Sanjar Valiyev, "Taking the U.S.-Uzbekistan Relationship to the Next Level: Mirziyoyev's Historic Visit," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, June 11, 2018, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13524-taking-the-us-uzbekistan-relationship-to-the-next-level-mirziyoyevs-historic-visit.html> (10.07.2019).

⁸⁹⁹ Marszewski, "Thaw in Uzbekistan. Reforms by President Mirziyoyev," p. 7.

exercises near Tashkent in October 2017 -for the first time after a twenty-year period.⁹⁰⁰

To conclude, since the late 1990s, Russia has become disturbed from balancing initiatives by Tashkent aiming at increasing its autonomous foreign policy and influence in Central Asia at Moscow's expense. However, geographical realities discouraged Moscow to follow heavy-handed and threatening policies towards Uzbekistan to bring Tashkent under its influence. Uzbekistan shares no border with Russia and it could not possibly join an alliance with a foreign power. The Kremlin rather tried to utilize Uzbekistan's threat perceptions on non-state extremist groups challenging the latter's regime security to build an alliance with this country. On the other side, Moscow has never attempted to manipulate them against Tashkent given the transnational nature of those threats which might uncontrollably spread across Central Asia and even into Russia's borders. In the Caucasus and Black Sea region, however, the existence of ethnic conflicts has provided Russia with useful instruments of pressure and leverage on regional states which seek to balance itself. In this respect, Russia has had a free hand to choose its way to build a fragile peace and stability in those regions furthering its own influence and strategic interests.

B. Georgia: A Caucasian Neighbor with Aspirations for NATO Membership

As noted in the First Chapter of Part One, one of Stephen Walt's hypotheses on bandwagoning behavior suggests that weak states are more likely to bandwagon than strong ones when facing a high-level external threat. He further asserts that *"[s]mall states bordering a great power may be so vulnerable that they choose to bandwagon rather than balance, especially if a powerful neighbor has demonstrated its ability to compel obedience."*⁹⁰¹ In this case, accommodating a threatening great power may be tempting, *"[b]ecause they will be the first victims of expansion, because they lack the capabilities to stand alone, and because a defensive alliance may operate too slowly to do them much good."*⁹⁰² There are two neighbors of Russia expressing their aspirations for NATO membership, i.e. Georgia and Ukraine, which have both

⁹⁰⁰ Nalin K. Mohapatra, "Regional Processes and Geopolitics of India, Afghanistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan (Iatu)," **Jadavpur Journal of International Relations**, Vol. 22, No. 1, 2018, p. 12.

⁹⁰¹ Stephen M. Walt, **The Origins of Alliances**, New York: Cornell University Press, 1987, p. 24.

⁹⁰² **Ibid.**, p. 31.

become victims of the Kremlin's aggressive military policies. In fact, it was Russia's military interventions to ethnic conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and its coercive diplomacy towards Georgia, which forced Tbilisi to sign the Collective Security Treaty thus to bandwagon with Russia in December 1993. Later in 2008, Georgia's attack on South Ossetia led to Russia's occupation of this country. Although the war with Russia did not result in another bandwagoning decision, it rendered Georgia's NATO membership as a much more remote possibility. In this respect, we should examine Russia's military interventions into Georgia, as examples of Moscow's strategy to consolidate its influence in its neighborhood by manipulating ethnic conflicts and other regional threats against local balancers.

Besides its weakness vis-à-vis powerful neighbor, Georgia was born as a state deeply vulnerable to Russia, also because it inherited a large Russian military presence all over its territory.⁹⁰³ Between 1991 and 1993, however, Georgia followed an anti-Russian policy and sought to establish close relations with the US and European states to balance its powerful neighbor. Accordingly, the Georgian leadership did not show any willingness to join the CIS.⁹⁰⁴ On the other side, Georgia's state-building project on the basis of populist nationalism exacerbated ethnic tensions which led to conflicts in the Abkhazian Autonomous Republic and the South Ossetian Autonomous Region.⁹⁰⁵ Despite some early successes, Georgia lost two secessionist wars by the autumn of 1993. During this period, scholars observe that Russian military units backed the separatist forces, through supplying them with heavy weapons and conducting some air force operations.⁹⁰⁶ After the ceasefire agreements brokered by Moscow, Russian peacekeepers were deployed in the Abkhazian and South Ossetian

⁹⁰³ See Dennis Sammut, "Love and Hate in Russian-Georgian Relations," **Helsinki Monitor**, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2003, p. 29-30; and Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the Cis: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 120.

⁹⁰⁴ See Svante Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, New York: RoutledgeCurzon, 2001, p. 334.

⁹⁰⁵ See Spyros Demetriou, "Rising from the Ashes? The Difficult (Re) Birth of the Georgian State," **Development and Change**, Vol. 33, No. 5, 2002, pp. 868-869; and Leila Alieva, "Reshaping Eurasia: Foreign Policy Strategies and Leadership Assets in Post-Soviet South Caucasus", Berkeley Program in Soviet and Post-Soviet Studies Working Paper Series, Winter 1999-2000, p. 17. Retrieved from: <http://www.escholarship.org/uc/item/53q654p5> (04.01.2019).

⁹⁰⁶ For Russian involvement into Georgia's ethnic conflicts, see Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, pp. 157-161; John Mackinlay and Evgenii Sharov, "Russian Peacekeeping Operations in Georgia," John Mackinlay and Peter Cross (ed.), **Regional Peacekeepers: The Paradox of Russian Peacekeeping**, New York: United Nations Publications, 2003; and Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the Cis: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 112-139.

conflict zones. This setting has provided both breakaway regions with de-facto independence.⁹⁰⁷

As Dov Lynch suggests, between October 1992 and 1993, Russia utilized the Abkhazian conflict through a carrot-stick approach which aimed to drive Georgia into the CIS and the CST military alliance. What represented the 'carrot' in this approach was to grant Georgia military aid and to terminate the conflict by deploying Russian peacekeeping forces. Yet those were conditioned on some concessions asked from Tbilisi which would enable Russia to maintain its military presence in Georgia and secure its interests over the region.⁹⁰⁸ At the same time, the Georgian leader Shevardnadze was fighting against a rebellion led by the ousted President Zviad Gamsakhurdia who captured the port of Poti at the Black Sea Coast and imposed a blockade over Tbilisi. Facing the threat of total state collapse, Shevardnadze issued a decree on joining the CIS, on October 23, 1993. In December, he signed the agreements for joining the CIS and the CST.⁹⁰⁹ In addition to that, Georgia signed about 25 additional bilateral agreements on cooperation with Russia whose provisions gave Moscow the right to establish five military bases and to deploy Russian guards along the border with Turkey.⁹¹⁰

However, this intense security cooperation with Russia on the basis of serious concessions failed to bring expected results by Tbilisi, as Russia neither granted satisfying assistance to Georgia build its national army nor it promoted a political resolution for ethnic conflicts with respect to the country's territorial integrity.⁹¹¹ In the second half of the 1990s, the increasing engagement by Western powers towards Caucasian and Caspian regions to further their share of regional oil and gas sources promoted Georgia as a strategic transit country. This set an opportunity for Georgia to diversify its foreign policy.⁹¹² NATO members' increasing concerns on Georgia's security and stability led to an enhancing security cooperation with Georgia through

⁹⁰⁷ Frederik Coene, **The Caucasus: An Introduction**, New York: Routledge, 2010pp. 150-153.

⁹⁰⁸ Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, pp. 134-135.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.* p. 139.

⁹¹⁰ Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the Cis: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 136.

⁹¹¹ Matsaberidze Malkhaz, "Russia and Georgia: Post-Soviet Metamorphoses of Mutual Relations," **Central Asia and the Caucasus**, Vol. 5, No. 53, 2008, p. 148.

⁹¹² See Bruno Coppieters, "Locating Georgian Security," Bruno Coppieters and Robert Legvold (ed.), **Statehood and Security: Georgia after the Rose Revolution**, Cambridge: MIT Press, 2005, p. 375.

the Peace for Partnership Program.⁹¹³ In 1997, Georgia joined the GUAM (Georgia, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Moldova) group to further its political and diplomatic cooperation with other regional states with an interest to integrate into Euro-Atlantic institutions.⁹¹⁴ Two years later it withdrew from the CST which marked the end of the bandwagoning period with Russia. Taking the support of Western powers and its regional allies, Georgia also demanded the withdrawal of Russian military bases and started negotiations with Moscow in this respect.⁹¹⁵

This changing strategy of Tbilisi from bandwagoning with Russia to balance again was also marked with Georgia's approach to Russia's Chechnya problem. Between 1994 and 1996, Georgia fully supported the Kremlin's military campaign to reintegrate Chechnya into Russia –as the only country bordering the conflict zone.⁹¹⁶ However having adopted a pro-Western foreign and security policy, Tbilisi refused to grant any logistical and military support to Russia's intervention in this region during the Second Chechnya War (1999-2009).⁹¹⁷ Furthermore, the Georgian army's failure to control the extremely mountainous border with Chechnya and refugee flow from the conflict zone into Georgia's Pankisi Gorge also created serious problems with Russia. The Putin administration directly accused Tbilisi of providing safe havens to Chechen militants and allowing them to establish some military camps and bases there.⁹¹⁸

In this respect, Russia insisted on a joint Russian-Georgian military operation into the Pankisi Gorge, which was refused by Tbilisi. Russian aircraft also violated Georgia's air space and bombed some targets. In 2002, the Kremlin threatened Tbilisi with a unilateral operation into the region. During the Pankisi crisis, the US took aside with Georgia in opposing such Russian initiatives and criticizing Moscow's violation

⁹¹³ See David Gudiashvili, "Nato Membership as Georgia's Foreign Policy Priority", 2003. Between 1998 and 2001, furthermore, the US has provided \$20 million in military assistance to Georgia for each year. Taras Kuzio, "NATO Reevaluates Strategic Considerations in Caucasus, Central Asia," Eurasianet, December 17, 2001. Retrieved from: http://www.taraskuzio.com/media9_files/12.pdf (30.12.2019).

⁹¹⁴ See Papava, "On the Role of the "Caucasian Tandem" in GUAM,"

⁹¹⁵ See IISS Editorial Board, "Russian Bases in Georgia," **Strategic Comments**, Vol. 7, No. 4, 2001; and Kornely Kakachia, "End of Russian Military Bases in Georgia: Social, Political and Security Implications of Withdrawal," **Central Asia and the Caucasus**, Vol. 2, No. 50, 2008.

⁹¹⁶ See Coppieters, "Locating Georgian Security," p. 375.

⁹¹⁷ See Tracey German, "David and Goliath: Georgia and Russia's Coercive Diplomacy," **Defence Studies**, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2009, p. 230.

⁹¹⁸ Bertil Nygren, **The Rebuilding of Greater Russia: Putin's Foreign Policy Towards the CIS Countries**, New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 125.

of Georgia's sovereignty.⁹¹⁹ In the spring of 2002, Washington also undertook a direct initiative in response to the crisis. The US launched a \$64 million Georgia Train and Equip Program (GTEP), through which 200 American military personnel were deployed in Georgia in order to train and advise the Georgian military in anti-terrorist operations. Besides creating a handicap for Russia's armed operations into Chechnya, the Pankisi issue brought a lasting US military presence in Georgia for the first time.⁹²⁰

The Western vocation in Georgian foreign policy was further strengthened by the Rose Revolution which occurred in November 2003. The new President Mikhail Saakashvili soon promoted joining both NATO and the EU as two main foreign policy goals for Tbilisi.⁹²¹ Saakashvili developed close personal ties with neoconservative figures in the US administration and President George W. Bush himself in order to obtain their support for Georgia's NATO membership. Accordingly, the new government in Tbilisi embraced the US democracy promotion project, while portraying Russia as the primary enemy of 'the freedom movement' throughout the world.⁹²² The Saakashvili administration combined this rhetoric with Georgian populist nationalism which includes anti-Russian and even Russophobic elements.⁹²³ In this respect, Tbilisi denied any cooperation with Moscow over security issues including the terrorist threat by radical groups operating in North Caucasus. Although Tbilisi had common threat perceptions with Russia against international terrorism, the Georgian government viewed such a cooperation as harmful for Georgia's sovereignty.⁹²⁴

⁹¹⁹ See *ibid.*, pp. 127-129; and Mikhail Filippov, "Diversionary Role of the Georgia–Russia Conflict: International Constraints and Domestic Appeal," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 61, No. 10, 2009, pp. 1832-1833.

⁹²⁰ See Jim Nichol, "Georgia [Republic]: Recent Developments and U.S. Interests," CRS Report for Congress, June 21, 2013, p. 30-31. Retrieved from: <https://fas.org/sgp/crs/row/97-727.pdf> (30.12.2018).

⁹²¹ See Tracey German, "Heading West? Georgia's Euro-Atlantic Path," *International affairs*, Vol. 91, No. 3, 2015, p. 604.

⁹²² See Alexander Cooley and Lincoln A Mitchell, "No Way to Treat Our Friends: Recasting Recent US–Georgian Relations," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 32, No. 1, 2009, pp. 28-31; and Kornely Kakachia, Salome Minesashvili, and Levan Kakhishvili, "Change and Continuity in the Foreign Policies of Small States: Elite Perceptions and Georgia's Foreign Policy Towards Russia," *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol. 70, No. 5, 2018, p. 821.

⁹²³ See Vicken Cheterian, "Georgia's Rose Revolution: Change or Repetition? Tension between State-Building and Modernization Projects," *Nationalities Papers*, Vol. 36, No. 4, 2008, p. 696-697; and S. Neil MacFarlane, "Georgia's Security Predicament," Ghia Nodia (ed.), *25 Years of Independent Georgia: Achievements and Unfinished Projects* Tbilisi: Ilia State University Press, 2016, p. 224.

⁹²⁴ Kakachia, Minesashvili, and Kakhishvili, "Change and Continuity in the Foreign Policies of Small States: Elite Perceptions and Georgia's Foreign Policy Towards Russia," p. 826. The Authors explain

In the Georgian perspective, the NATO membership has been viewed as a security guarantee vis-à-vis Moscow and an instrument to temper Russian intervention into Abkhazian and South Ossetian conflicts. In this respect, Tbilisi hoped that once it becomes part of NATO, it will be easier to solve these ethnic conflicts.⁹²⁵ On the other side, NATO members have certainly avoided carrying Georgia's problems separatist conflicts inside the Alliance, considering the breakaway regions' orientations towards Moscow and the presence of Russian peacekeeping forces in both Abkhazia and South Ossetia. In October 2007, the NATO Secretary-General Jaap de Hoop Scheffer explicitly suggested that "*Georgia should try to settle its internal conflicts to become a member of the Atlantic Alliance.*"⁹²⁶ Being aware of this fact, the Putin Administration continued contributing to the de facto state-building process in Abkhazia and South Ossetia through a number of policies. Moscow also granted Russian passports to local people in both regions to prepare some political and even legal ground for future interventions for the sake of protecting its own 'citizens'.⁹²⁷

Under these conditions, Georgia's NATO membership prospects turned into a paradoxical situation: "*NATO won't accept Georgia until it resolves the conflicts in Abkhazia and South Ossetia, but Russia -which adamantly opposes Georgia's accession- won't allow their resolution.*"⁹²⁸ In April 2008, the NATO Bucharest Summit's declaration that Georgia would eventually be a NATO member had a dramatic effect in worsening Georgian-Russian relations. To hasten the process of Georgia's integration into NATO, the Saakashvili government sought to settle the South Ossetian conflict through military means. On August 7, 2008, Georgia attacked

the logic of Saakashvili's political party that it views "*Georgia's independence as doing whatever Russia does not want Georgia to do. Otherwise, if Georgia's actions are complementary to Russian interests, it will not be possible to differentiate whether Georgia's behavior is Tbilisi's free choice or just an imposition by Moscow.*" *Ibid.*, p. 828.

⁹²⁵ Kakha Jibladze, "Russia's Opposition to Georgia's Quest for NATO Membership," **China and Eurasia Forum Quarterly**, Vol. 5, No. 1, 2007, p. 46.

⁹²⁶ Alberto Priego, "NATO Cooperation towards South Caucasus," **Caucasian Review of International Affairs**, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2008, p. 54

⁹²⁷ See Nicu Popescu, "'Outsourcing' de facto Statehood: Russia and the Secessionist Entities in Georgia and Moldova", CEPS Policy Briefs, No: 109, July 2006, pp. 4-8. <https://www.ceps.eu/system/files/book/1361.pdf> (06.01.2019).

⁹²⁸ Jonathan Kulick and Temuri Yakobashvili, "Georgia and the Wider Black Sea," Daniel Hamilton and Gerhard Mangott (ed.), **The Wider Black Sea Region in the 21st Century: Strategic, Economic and Energy Perspectives**, Washington: Center for Transatlantic Relations, 2008, p. 28.

South Ossetia to restore the Tbilisi's authority over the region. This led to a military response by Russia, and subsequently, a five-day war between the two states.⁹²⁹

In fact, during the tensions that lead the war in Ossetia, Russia had demonstrated that it would not be indifferent to the events if Georgia would use military force towards the breakaway regions.⁹³⁰ However, it seems that the Saakashvili government has never expected such a massive armed response by Russia. In addition, Georgian officials thought that the US would intervene to constraint Russian intervention into Georgia and to support their country.⁹³¹ Yet soon it became clear that Western support through diplomatic means fell short to stop Russia's armed intervention which extended even towards Georgia's undisputed territories. After intervening in both South Ossetia and Abkhazia, Russian forces advanced to Georgian cities Poti, Senaki, and Gori which is one-hour-drive away from Tbilisi. Furthermore, the Russian military bombarded key military bases in the country and sank Georgia's naval vessel on the Black Sea Coast.⁹³² In this regard, Georgia's balancing strategy against Russia and its aspirations for NATO membership were answered very harshly by Russia which explicitly proved its power preponderance and military superiority in the region. After the war, Moscow reinforced its military presence in Abkhazia and South Ossetia and recognized both entities as independent states, therefore further consolidated the territorial status quo in Georgia.⁹³³

Besides sending the message to Tbilisi and its Western allies that Russia would not allow NATO's further expansion towards its borders, Moscow's armed aggression against Georgia also contributed some changes in the domestic politics of its neighbor.

⁹²⁹ S. Neil MacFarlane, "Colliding State-Building Projects and Regional Insecurity in Post-Soviet Space: Georgia Versus Russia in South Ossetia," Kristian B. Harpviken (ed.), **Troubled Regions and Failing States: The Clustering and Contagion of Armed Conflicts**, Bingley: Emerald Group, 2010, p. 118.

⁹³⁰ In September 2007, for example, Russia's Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared that "*in the case of aggravation of the situation around South Ossetia Russia will take all the necessary steps determined by its peacekeeping and mediation mission and by its responsibility for the security of Russian citizens.*" German, "David and Goliath: Georgia and Russia's Coercive Diplomacy," p. 234.

⁹³¹ See Karl E Meyer, "After Georgia: Back to the Future," **World Policy Journal**, Vol. 25, No. 3, 2008, p. 119; and Oksana Antonenko, "A War with No Winners," **Survival**, Vol. 50, No. 5, 2008 p. 24.

⁹³² Antonenko, "A War with No Winners," p. 26; M Rahman, "Georgia and Russia: What Caused the August War?," **Identity, Culture and Politics: An Afro-Asian Dialogue**, Vol. 10, No. 1, 2009, p. 136.

⁹³³ Nona Mikhelidze, "After the 2008 Russia-Georgia War: Implications for the Wider Caucasus," **The International Spectator**, Vol. 44, No. 3, 2009, pp. 29-30. However this Russian move was not followed by any of its CSTO allies. As of April 2019, Abkhazia and South Ossetia are recognized as independent states only by Venezuela, Nicaragua, Vanuatu, Nauru and Syria. Giorgi Lomsadze, "Syria formally recognizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia," Eurasianet, May 29, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/syria-formally-recognizes-abkhazia-and-south-ossetia> (13.04.2019).

In 2012 parliamentary elections, the coalition of opposition parties, the Georgian Dream (GD) had a convincing victory over Saakashvili's United National Movement (UNM). The fact that Saakashvili engaged in a war with Russia and lost, which subsequently led to Russian recognition of Georgia's breakaway entities played a key role in the results of these elections.⁹³⁴ The new government led by Bidzina Ivanishvili questioned the rationality of the UNM's policies towards Russia and sought to normalize political and economic relations by departing from the previous openly hostile rhetoric vis-à-vis Moscow. The GD's approach aimed at decreasing the possibility of another armed conflict by accommodating some Russian interests and avoiding any provocation for additional tensions with the powerful neighbor.⁹³⁵ In addition to that, unlike the UNM, the Georgian Dream has been open towards mutual accommodation and policy coordination with Russia on the common border area to promote their common interest in a peaceful and stable North Caucasus.⁹³⁶

At the same time, Georgia did not renounce its aspirations for NATO and EU memberships claiming that rapprochement with Russia does not represent an obstacle to maintaining its Western orientation. Nonetheless, there emerged "*differing opinions [among Georgian elite] about which different tools deserve favor and what the proper time frames are for reaching these goals.*"⁹³⁷ As Neil MacFarlane suggests, it became increasingly clear that Georgia's effort to balance against Russia through integration with NATO has not brought an effective security guarantee and may have negative security implications for the country to the extent that Russia opposes such efforts and has the capability to do so.⁹³⁸ In this regard, the GD has given up the former strategy of heavy reliance to the West to guarantee Georgia's survival and developed a more independent standing, "*which it characterizes as taking the middle ground and*

⁹³⁴ Gela Merabishvili and Annamária Kiss, "The Perception of National Security in Georgia," *Lithuanian Annual Strategic Review*, Vol. 14, No. 1, 2016, p. 160.

⁹³⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 160-163; MacFarlane, "Georgia's Security Predicament," p. 224; and Kakachia, Minesashvili, and Kakhishvili, "Change and Continuity in the Foreign Policies of Small States: Elite Perceptions and Georgia's Foreign Policy Towards Russia," pp. 815, 822. For example, even when Russia started the so-called 'borderization' initiative through marking the borders between breakaway regions and Georgia's proper using barbed wire and other barriers, Prime Minister Ivanishvili showed an understanding on the basis of Russia's security concerns. In September 2013, Ivanishvili linked this initiative to necessary measures for the security of the forthcoming Sochi Winter Olympics in Russia's North Caucasus. *Ibid.*, p. 832.

⁹³⁶ Merabishvili and Kiss, "The Perception of National Security in Georgia," p. 176. See also Kakachia, Minesashvili, and Kakhishvili, "Change and Continuity in the Foreign Policies of Small States: Elite Perceptions and Georgia's Foreign Policy Towards Russia," p. 826.

⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 820.

⁹³⁸ MacFarlane, "Georgia's Security Predicament," pp. 208-209.

maintaining friendly relations with both the West and Russia in the absence of a guaranteed ally.”⁹³⁹ As we argued at the end of the First Chapter of Part One, Russia’s threatening policies against Georgia seem to have created serious impediments for the expansion of NATO and somehow forced its neighbor to change its policy towards a more neutral one.⁹⁴⁰

However, the November 2018 Presidential elections which resulted in the victory of Salome Zurbishvili supported by the Georgian Dream seem to enforce Tbilisi’s orientation towards the West. The new President Zurbishvili, a French-born Georgian who served for the French Foreign Service in her past career, has given an unequivocal support for Georgia’s NATO membership.⁹⁴¹ According to Zurbishvili, Georgia’s accession into NATO remains as ‘a top foreign policy priority’, as “*Russia has failed to divert Georgia even slightly away from its path toward EU and NATO*” despite a series of attempts such as “*the 2018 war [and the installation of] Russian military bases.*”⁹⁴² On the other side, NATO which defines Georgia as ‘one of the Alliance’s closest partners’ and biggest active contributors to NATO-led military operations has welcomed this position and reaffirmed its interest in the country.⁹⁴³ This was also symbolized with a NATO-Georgia exercise which was organized nearby Tbilisi in March 2019 with the participation of 24 NATO members and partner states.⁹⁴⁴ These drills were responded aggressively by Russia-sponsored regimes in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as demonstration of ‘destructiveness of Georgia’s and

⁹³⁹ Kakachia, Minesashvili, and Kakhishvili, "Change and Continuity in the Foreign Policies of Small States: Elite Perceptions and Georgia’s Foreign Policy Towards Russia," pp. 826-827.

⁹⁴⁰ See the discussion on the second main assumption at the end of Part One, Chapter One.

⁹⁴¹ See Giorgi Lomsadze, “A French president for Georgia?” Eurasianet, September 19, 2018, <https://eurasianet.org/a-french-president-for-georgia> (11.07.2019).

⁹⁴² “Salome Zurbishvili: Russia failed to divert Georgia away from its path to EU and NATO,” First Channel, April 1, 2019, <https://1tv.ge/en/news/salome-zurbishvili-russia-failed-to-divert-georgia-away-from-its-path-to-eu-and-nato/> (11.07.2019). See also “NATO’s Stoltenberg Says ‘Georgia Is A Unique Partner’,” Eurasia Review, January 24, 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/24012019-natos-stoltenberg-says-georgia-is-a-unique-partner/> (11.07.2019).

⁹⁴³ See “Relations with Georgia,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, March 26, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_38988.htm (11.07.2019). In January 2019, the NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg also suggested that “*Georgia is ‘a unique partner of the Alliance,’ and that NATO-Georgia partnership is ‘getting even closer.’*” NATO’s Stoltenberg Says ‘Georgia Is A Unique Partner’”

⁹⁴⁴ Levan Izoria, Georgian Minister of Defense portrayed the event was “*an important exercise for Georgia and a significant milestone in strengthening NATO-Georgian military and political cooperation,*” while Irakli Aladashvili, the editor-in-chief of the military-analytical journal Arsenali, described the drills as ““*unique*” for what they signified about the shape of Georgian-NATO relations.” Giorgi Menabde, “NATO Again Demonstrates Strong Support for Georgia,” Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 16, No. 45, April 1, 2019, <https://jamestown.org/program/nato-again-demonstrates-strong-support-for-georgia/> (11.07.2019).

NATO's military ambitions' and 'a continuation of the Alliance's provocative policy'⁹⁴⁵ In this regard, even though Georgia took a more cautious stance towards Moscow after the end of Saakashvili period, one should keep in mind that Russia-Georgia relations always involve the potential for new crises. Georgia's insistence on its Western vocation, anti-Russian elements in Georgian politics and society and the militarization of ethnic conflict zones within the country could potentially serve for such a scenario.

C. Azerbaijan: The Delicate Balancer vis-à-vis Russia

Except for a short period in the early 1990s, Azerbaijan has never followed an open anti-Russian foreign policy seeking to balance its powerful neighbor through relying heavily on alternative centers of power. Unlike its neighbor Georgia, Baku has not considered Western security guarantees as an ultimate solution to its problems of security and survival. Therefore Azerbaijan has remained cautious in its foreign relations especially in the security realm. Nonetheless, this Caucasian state has suffered from Russia's interventions into the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, as Moscow has also used this ethnic conflict to assert control over both Azerbaijan and Armenia. In this respect, Russia managed to establish its protectorate over this regional conflict between these two states and ensured a key role as the mediator of conflict resolution processes, which in turn increased Azerbaijan's and Armenian's dependency on Moscow on security issues.

In fact, Russia's policies towards the Nagorno Karabakh conflict has not remained constant, as Moscow has often made some changes in its approach paying regard to its relations with its neighbors and other regional developments. During the 1990-1991 period, Moscow sided with Azerbaijan as it was governed by pro-Soviet leader Ayaz Muttalibov, while Armenia was both seeking independence and challenging the status quo through unification with the Karabakh region.⁹⁴⁶ However,

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁹⁴⁶ See Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, p. 343. In 1989, the Armenian leadership and the national council of Karabakh Armenians petitioned for unification of the Armenian Soviet Socialist Republic and Nagorno Karabakh Autonomous Oblast. Later in 1992, Karabakh Armenians held a referendum and declared independence, which have not been recognized yet by any UN member states including Armenia. In the same year, Armenia renounced its territorial claims but threatened Azerbaijan with direct armed intervention to defend Karabakh Armenians. See Shannon O'Lear and Robert Whiting, "Which Comes First, the Nation or the State? A Multiple Scale Model Applied to the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict in the Caucasus," **National Identities**, Vol. 10, No. 2, 2008, p. 187; and Lalig Papazian, "A People's Will: Armenian

Russian-Azerbaijani relations sharply deteriorated during the Presidency of Abulfeyz Elchibey (1992-1993), as he tried to move Azerbaijan away from Russian influence by approaching towards Turkey and the West. In this respect, the Elchibey government did not ratify the CIS agreement signed by the previous President. Azerbaijan also refused to join the CST and demanded Russia to withdraw its all military presence from the Azerbaijani territory.⁹⁴⁷ Russia responded by contributing to Armenia's occupation of Karabakh and other regions of Azerbaijan surrounding the conflict zone between 1992 and 1994.⁹⁴⁸

In addition to that Russia supported the armed insurgency led by Colonel Suret Huseyinov, which resulted in the downfall of the Elchibey government in the summer of 1993.⁹⁴⁹ At the end, Russia's geographical advantages and military presence in the conflict zone inherited from the Soviet era enabled it to play the central role in brokering the ceasefire between Armenia and Azerbaijan on May 16, 1994.⁹⁵⁰ However, Russia could not ensure the maintenance of its military presence in Azerbaijan through deploying CIS peacekeepers on the conflict zone, as the Kremlin's offer was rejected by Baku which favored the idea of multinational peacekeeping troops under an international mandate.⁹⁵¹

After coming to power, President Heydar Aliyev has followed a more prudent and balanced foreign policy towards Russia in order to appease the Kremlin and prompt some changes in its attitude towards the Nagorno Karabakh conflict. In this respect, Aliyev provided the ratification of the CIS Agreement in the parliament in

Irredentism over Nagorno Karabagh," Levon Chorbajian (ed.), **The Making of Nagorno-Karabagh**, New York: Palgrave, 2001, p. 81.

⁹⁴⁷ See Murat Gül, "Russia and Azerbaijan: Relations after 1989," **Alternatives: Turkish Journal of International Relations**, Vol. 7, No. 2&3, 2008, p. 57; and Jannatkhan Eyvazov, "Ukrainian Crisis of 2014 and Changing Regional Conditions for National Security of Azerbaijan," Piotr Bajor (ed.), **Contemporary Azerbaijan in Social and Political Dimension**, Kraków: Księgarnia Akademicka, 2016, p. 68.

⁹⁴⁸ See *Ibid.* For Russian military involvement into the Nagorno Karabakh war see Thomas De Waal, **Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War**, New York: New York University Press, 2003, pp. 200-205; and Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, pp. 81, 83.

⁹⁴⁹ See *Ibid.*, p. 346; and Gül, "Russia and Azerbaijan: Relations after 1989," p. 57. For Huseyinov's close relations with Soviet commanders and Moscow see De Waal, **Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War**, p. 198.

⁹⁵⁰ Besides, Russia managed to exclude the chairman of the Minsk Group founded by CSCE for resolution of the Nagorno Karabakh conflict from the negotiations for ceasefire. Cornell, **Small Nations and Great Powers: A Study of Ethnopolitical Conflict in the Caucasus**, p. 99.

⁹⁵¹ This idea has not been fulfilled either. De Waal, **Black Garden: Armenia and Azerbaijan through Peace and War**, p. 254.

September 1993.⁹⁵² On 24 September, Azerbaijan signed the Collective Security Treaty. As Andrei Zagorsky suggests, one of the reasons for Azerbaijan's joining the CST was its aim at frustrating Armenian attempts to use this military alliance with Russia against itself; a fact underlining the significance of the Russian factor in regional alignment formation.⁹⁵³ Later in September 1994, Azerbaijan signed the so-called Contract of the Century with a consortium of multinational oil companies led by British Petroleum, which became the milestone for Baku to diversify its foreign relations. Yet, the Aliyev administration tried to avoid possible hostile reactions by Moscow through granting some share also to the Russian Lukoil Company for the exploitation of Azerbaijani oil sources.⁹⁵⁴

Western powers' investments into Azerbaijan's natural sources have inherently increased their concerns on the country's security and stability. This enabled Azerbaijan to follow some sort of balancing policies towards Russia. In the second half of the 1990s, Baku increased its cooperation with NATO through the PfP Program which provided more training assistance to elevate Azerbaijan's national army to NATO standards.⁹⁵⁵ Diversification of Azerbaijani foreign relations prompted Baku to end the military alliance with Russia. In April 1999, Baku refused to renew its membership to the Collective Security Treaty. However, Azerbaijan has never officially pursued its NATO membership either before or after this strategic move.⁹⁵⁶ The most important reason for this has been the risk of possible hostile reactions by Russia which has the capability to prevent Azerbaijan to reach such an 'unrealistic goal.'⁹⁵⁷ Furthermore, as a Baku-based analyst noted, Azerbaijan does not want to

⁹⁵² See İsmail Safi and Araz Aslanlı, "Russia-Azerbaijan Relations after August 2008," **International Journal of Russian Studies**, Vol. 6, No. 1, 2017, pp. 4-5; and Gül, "Russia and Azerbaijan: Relations after 1989," p. 57.

⁹⁵³ Zagorski, "CIS Regional Security Policy Structures," p. 287.

⁹⁵⁴ See Bolukbasi, "The Controversy over the Caspian Sea Mineral Resources: Conflicting Perceptions, Clashing Interests," pp. 398-400; and Safi and Aslanlı, "Russia-Azerbaijan Relations after August 2008," p. 5.

⁹⁵⁵ See Martin Malek, "NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks," **Connections**, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2008, pp. 38-39. In addition to that, the US has developed bilateral cooperation with Azerbaijan providing military and training assistance which aimed at enhancing the naval capability of Azerbaijan to secure its maritime borders. "U.S.-Azerbaijan Program Launched," *Monitor*, Vol. 8, No. 68, April 8, 2002, <https://jamestown.org/program/u-s-azerbaijan-program-launched-2/> (29.01.2019).

⁹⁵⁶ See Eyvazov, "Ukrainian Crisis of 2014 and Changing Regional Conditions for National Security of Azerbaijan," p. 72; and Jason E Strakes, "Situating the 'Balanced Foreign Policy': The Role of System Structure in Azerbaijan's Multi-Vector Diplomacy," **Journal of Balkan and Near Eastern Studies**, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2013, p. 40.

⁹⁵⁷ In February 2007, Azerbaijani President İlham Aliyev suggested that "*it is well known both in Brussels as well as in Baku that Azerbaijan is not yet ready for NATO membership, and that he would*

follow similar policies with Tbilisi, given that serious troubles between Georgia and Russia began after the former's announcement of its intention to join NATO.⁹⁵⁸

Besides Russia's disturbance from Azerbaijan's increasing cooperation with Western actors, Baku's attitude towards the Second Chechnya War emerged as another problem in Russian-Azerbaijani relations at the turn of the 21st Century. The Putin administration also accused Azerbaijan of providing safe havens for Chechen militias and helping them recruit in Azerbaijani's hospitals. Therefore the Kremlin took some aggressive measures against Baku such bombing the Kımır Village in northern Azerbaijan and conducting military maneuvers with Armenian forces on the Armenian-Azerbaijani border. Such threatening moves induced Azerbaijan to revise its relations with the separatist leadership in Chechnya.⁹⁵⁹ Azerbaijan prosecuted some suspected Chechen rebels and extradited others to Russia. In February 2001, furthermore, Moscow and Baku signed agreements on struggling against terrorism and organized crime across their shared border. Thanks to Baku's cautious attitude toward Moscow, Azerbaijan managed to calm down tensions with Russia much more successfully compared to Georgia.⁹⁶⁰

Nothing much changed in Baku's foreign policy course after İlham Aliyev reached power in October 2003. The emerging threat of color revolutions in the CIS has been another factor inducing the new president to balance Baku's relations between Russia and Western Powers since the latter have been critical towards authoritarian tendencies by the Azerbaijani regime.⁹⁶¹ The rising oil investments and

not want to 'set any unrealistic goals.'” Quoted in Malek, "NATO and the South Caucasus: Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia on Different Tracks," p. 33.

⁹⁵⁸ This argument was made even before the Russia-Georgia war in 2006. Jasur Mamedov, "Azerbaijan Tiptoes Towards NATO," Institute for War & Peace Reporting, November 27, 2006, <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/azerbaijan-tiptoes-towards-nato> (29.01.2019).

⁹⁵⁹ See Fatma A. Kelkitli, "Russian Foreign Policy in South Caucasus under Putin," **Perceptions: A Journal of International Affairs**, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2008, pp. 82-83.

⁹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83. As a result of changing policies by Azerbaijani authorities which created unfavorable conditions for refugees, Aslan Maskhadov, the leader of the Chechen resistance, advised Chechens to leave this country. Anar Valiyev, "Azerbaijan: Islam in a Post-Soviet Republic," **Middle East Review of International Affairs**, Vol. 9, No. 4, 2005, p. 10.

⁹⁶¹ In fact, the dynastic succession of power from Heydar Aliyev to his son led to criticism and objections by some Western institutions including the OSCE. As a result, İlham Aliyev moved to close down or harass Western funders and institutions supporting democracy promotion in the CIS, which had also been active in Azerbaijan. See Pavel K. Baev, "The Uncertain Trajectory of Russia-Azerbaijan Relations in the Multiple-Pipeline Era," Adrian Dellecker and Thomas Gomart (ed.), **Russian Energy Security and Foreign Policy**, New York: Routledge, 2011, pp. 135-136; and Thomas de Waal, "Azerbaijan Doesn't Want To Be Western," *Foreign Affairs*, September 26, 2014,

revenues they brought into Azerbaijan's economy increased Baku's capabilities to follow more independent policies, while it continued to avoid taking an active part in the geopolitical competition in Eurasia through security alignments.⁹⁶² On the other side, Azerbaijan has dramatically increased military expenditures, thanks to the unprecedented growth in its economy in the second half of the 2000s.⁹⁶³ As a result, the Azerbaijani government began to threaten Armenia more confidently with a military option to settle the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, if diplomatic efforts continued to be ineffective.⁹⁶⁴

The Kremlin has become worried about the discourse of war adopted by Azerbaijani officials because such a scenario directly challenges Russia's regional interests. The resolution of Karabakh conflict through a military *fait accompli* by Azerbaijan would both deprive Russia of a significant instrument of influence over those two Caucasian states and damage its military alliance relationship with Armenia.⁹⁶⁵ On the other side, Russia's active involvement in war in defense of Armenian forces would create serious problems and crises not only in its relations with Azerbaijan but also other regional actors and Western powers as well.⁹⁶⁶ For those reasons, Russia has increased its engagement in the conflict resolution process and adopted a more constructive approach over the Karabakh dispute especially after the Russia-Georgia war which threatened security and stability in the South Caucasus. In November 2008, Russia began to organize trilateral meetings with the presidents of

<https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/russia-fsu/2014-09-26/azerbaijan-doesnt-want-be-western> (29.01.2019).

⁹⁶² See Laurence Broers, "The South Caucasus: Fracture without End?," Anna Ohanyan (ed.), **Russia Abroad: Driving Regional Fracture in Post-Communist Eurasia and Beyond**, Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2018, p. 92.

⁹⁶³ Between 2003 and 2010, Azerbaijan has boosted its military expenditure with an average annual increase approximating 50 percent. In 2010 the number reached four times bigger than Armenia's annual military spending. See "Armenia and Azerbaijan: Preventing War," International Crisis Group Europe Briefing, No: 60, 2011, pp. 5-6. Retrieved from: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/b60-armenia-and-azerbaijan-preventing-war.pdf>; and SIPRI, Military expenditure database, <https://www.sipri.org/databases/milex> (29.01.2019).

⁹⁶⁴ See "Aliyev: Karabağ'da askeri güç kullanabiliriz," Hürriyet, November 21, 2009, <http://www.hurriyet.com.tr/dunya/aliyev-karabagda-askeri-guc-kullanabiliriz-13007162>; "Azerbaijan Never Ruled out Military Settlement of Karabakh Conflict—President," News.az, May 28, 2013, <http://news.az/articles/official/80066> (31.01.2019).

⁹⁶⁵ See Anahit Shirinyan, "Assessing Russia's Role in Efforts to Resolve the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict: From Perception to Reality," Caucasus Edition: Journal of Conflict Transformation, February 1, 2013, <http://caucasusedition.net/assessing-russias-role-in-efforts-to-resolve-the-nagorno-karabakh-conflict-from-perception-to-reality/> (31.01.2019).

⁹⁶⁶ In this respect, Shirinyan notes that "[t]he last thing Moscow would like is to be forced to take sides in a possible military escalation of the conflict, undermining its credibility as an honest broker and security guarantor." **Ibid.**

Azerbaijan and Armenia which demonstrated Moscow increasing willingness to play a more active role as a broker in this process.⁹⁶⁷

In April 2016, the Nagorno Karabakh conflict came to the fore of interest again, as Azerbaijan and Armenia fell into the worst violent armed clashes since 1994. According to international observers, the ceasefire was broken by Azerbaijan, which led to a four-day conflict with Armenian forces in the Karabakh region from April 2 to 5.⁹⁶⁸ Given that Azerbaijan has always remained very cautious and prudent against the Russian factor in the region since 1994, how could we explain Baku's rationale in its unilateral use of force against Armenians in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict? At this point, analysts suggest that the military initiative by Azerbaijan remained short of a full-scale offensive that would retake the control of the Karabakh region and liberate other territories under Armenian occupation.⁹⁶⁹ During the fighting, Azerbaijan managed to recover two strategic hills with strategic significance and some small territory. The ceasefire was announced unilaterally by Azerbaijan and again brokered by Russia.⁹⁷⁰ Therefore, as Zaur Shiryev suggests, Azerbaijan did not cross the Kremlin's red line: Baku did not escalate the conflict into a full-fledged war over the Karabakh region and refrained itself from pushing Armenians to question their military-strategic alliance with Russia.⁹⁷¹ On the other side, Baku reached its limited objectives through this short-winded conflict by testing its growing military

⁹⁶⁷ Gulshan Pashayeva and Nigar Göksel, "The Interplay of the Approaches of Turkey, Russia and the United States to the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh," SAM Review Center for Strategic Studies, Baku 2011, p. 20. For more information about those trilateral meetings and Russia's involvement into the conflict resolution process in the recent years, see Vadim Romashov and Helena Rytövuori-Apunen, "Russia's Karabakh Policy: New Momentum in Regional Perspective," *Caucasus Survey*, Vol. 5, No. 2, 2017.

⁹⁶⁸ For example see Zaur Shiryev, "The 'Four-Day War': Changing Paradigms in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," *Turkish Policy Quarterly*, Vol. 15, No. 4, 2017, p. 54; Svante E. Cornell, "Reversing Escalation: The Local and International Politics of the Conflict," Svante E. Cornell (ed.), *The International Politics of the Armenian-Azerbaijani Conflict: The Original "Frozen Conflict" and European Security*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2017, p. 196; and Aleksandra Jarosiewicz and Maciej Falkowski, "The Four-Day War in Nagorno-Karabakh," Center for Eastern Studies, April 6, 2016, <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/analyses/2016-04-06/four-day-war-nagorno-karabakh> (01.02.2019).

⁹⁶⁹ Thomas de Waal, "Prisoners of the Caucasus: Resolving the Karabakh Security Dilemma," Carnegie Europe, June 16, 2016, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/06/16/prisoners-of-caucasus-resolving-karabakh-security-dilemma/j1yq> (01.02.2019); Shiryev, "The 'Four-Day War': Changing Paradigms in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," p. 56.

⁹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 56, Anahit Shirinyan, "Four-Day Battle Over Nagorny Karabakh May Be a Prelude to a New War," Chatham House, April 22, 2016, <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/four-day-battle-over-nagorny-karabakh-may-be-prelude-new-war> (01.02.2019).

⁹⁷¹ Zaur Shiryev, "Azerbaijan's War of Attrition: A New Strategy to Resolve the Karabakh Conflict?," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 13, No. 67, April 6, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/azerbaijans-war-of-attrition-a-new-strategy-to-resolve-the-karabakh-conflict/> (01.02.2019).

capabilities against Armenia and promoting a small shift in the line of contact for the first time. In this respect, Azerbaijan increased its leverage and political pressure in peace talks over both Armenia and Russia, as the latter has also a strong interest in preventing another war.⁹⁷²

All these facts prove the argument that Azerbaijan recognizes the central role of Russia in regional conflict and peace processes, viewing it as the only state which can force Armenia to any agreement and ensure its compliance.⁹⁷³ In fact, Russia does not only act as the key mediator of this regional conflict but also guarantees the mutual deterrence between Azerbaijan and Armenia as the main arms supplier to both sides.⁹⁷⁴ The tactical missile systems supplied to Armenia by Russia are located at the heart of Yerevan's military deterrence strategy, which have the capability of retaliatory strikes against Azerbaijan's key energy and industrial facilities.⁹⁷⁵ Russia also supplies heavy weapons and other military equipment to Azerbaijan which were partly used in the April 2016 conflict, despite Armenian complaints on his matter.⁹⁷⁶ The Kremlin's main objective in this sense is to prevent Baku to seek new allies as arms-trade partners. After the four-day war, Russian Prime Minister Medvedev affirmed that their arms trade with both Armenia and Azerbaijan would continue, noting that those *"weapons should only be used for deterrence, while supplies from other countries would result in a disbalance."*⁹⁷⁷

⁹⁷² See Licinia Simão, "The Nagorno-Karabakh Redux," European Union Institute for Security Studies (EUISS), Issue Alert, No. 28, June 2016, p. 2. Retrieved From: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/Alert_28_Nagorno_Karabakh.pdf (01.02.2019); Shirinyan, "Four-Day Battle Over Nagorny Karabakh May Be a Prelude to a New War"; and Armen Grigoryan, "Current Security Situation in the South Caucasus: Wider Regional Context," **Europolity**, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2018 p. 8.

⁹⁷³ See Shiriyev, "The 'Four-Day War': Changing Paradigms in the Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict," p. 61; and Zaur Shiriyev, "Azerbaijan's Relations with Russia: Closer by Default?," Chatham House, March 14, 2019, p. 12. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/azerbaijan-s-relations-russia-closer-default> (14.07.2019).

⁹⁷⁴ That is why Richard Giragosian, the director of the Regional Security Centre in Yerevan, portrays Russia as *"the main determinant of either deterrence or disaster."* Quoted in Grigoryan, "Current Security Situation in the South Caucasus: Wider Regional Context," p. 6.

⁹⁷⁵ Sergey Minasyan, "Quest for Stability in the Karabakh Conflict," Russia in Global Affairs, March 26, 2012, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Quest-for-Stability-in-the-Karabakh-Conflict-15508> (01.02.2019).

⁹⁷⁶ Grigoryan, "Current Security Situation in the South Caucasus: Wider Regional Context," p. 6. De Waal further suggests that an estimated 85 percent of Azerbaijan's weaponry is supplied by Russia. Thomas de Waal, "Why We Need to Contain the Caucasus Crisis," Carnegie Europe, May 4, 2016, <http://carnegieeurope.eu/2016/05/04/why-we-need-to-contain-caucasus/iy14> (01.02.2019).

⁹⁷⁷ Quoted in Grigoryan, "Current Security Situation in the South Caucasus: Wider Regional Context," pp. 6-7.

Our analysis of Moscow's policies towards the Caucasian conflicts reveals the fact that Russia plays a central role in regional conflict and peace processes. This ensures dependency of all conflicting sides -either independent states or secessionist entities- to Russia. As noted in Part One, Chapter One, scholars associate this situation to a regional structure with the unipolar distribution of power in its extreme form.⁹⁷⁸ In addition, the fact that Azerbaijan has sought to appease Moscow by balancing its foreign policy towards Russia and the West since 1993 makes relevance to our second main assumption. Moscow's manipulation of regional threats and conflicts against Azerbaijan pushed Baku to follow a more cautious approach towards Russia. While Azerbaijan gave priority to the West in energy cooperation and relied on Western political support in order to diminish Russia's power projections towards the region, it stopped short of joining any military alliance or economic integration project such as NATO and the EU.⁹⁷⁹

Since 2008, the relative disengagement of the US from the Caucasus and the increasing Western criticism on Azerbaijan's democracy were other significant factors discouraging Baku to rely on the West for its security. In addition to that, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 prompted Azerbaijan to follow a policy of pacifying Russia.⁹⁸⁰ In this respect, Russia managed to dissuade Azerbaijan from seeking military allies with Western powers at a smaller cost compared to some other regional states, as Baku followed a more balanced foreign policy based on an understanding of the realities of regional politics.

IV. Russia's Policies towards the Bystanders: Moldova and Ukraine

Beyond the Caucasus, there are two other post-Soviet countries in Russia's western neighborhood, which remain outside of CSTO. In the early 1990s, both Moldova and Ukraine have proclaimed a neutral position, therefore they have never joined the Collective Security Treaty.⁹⁸¹ However, the declaration of neutrality by these states has not been recognized by an international treaty or an institution such as

⁹⁷⁸ See Barry Buzan and Ole Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003, p. 47.

⁹⁷⁹ Shiriyevev, "Azerbaijan's Relations with Russia: Closer by Default?," p. 2.

⁹⁸⁰ This was accompanied with an increasing sympathy towards the idea of joining the Eurasian Economic Union in exchange for Russia's support to Azerbaijan's position in the resolution of Nagorno-Karabakh conflict with Armenia. See *ibid.*, pp. 2, 15-17.

⁹⁸¹ Krill Golub and Yuri Golub, "Collective Security Treaty Organization: Origins of the Multidimensional Mandate and Modern Means for Its Implementation," p. 194.

the United Nations which would guarantee maintenance of their neutral position. In the last two decades, furthermore, Moldova and Ukraine have followed a fluctuating course in their foreign policy and sometimes oriented towards security cooperation with Western powers and institutions like NATO.⁹⁸² Below we examine how Russia followed threatening policies against these actors in response to their Western security orientation and discuss the consequences of these policies in the regional context.

A. The Question of Moldova's Neutrality and Russia's Policies towards the Transnistria Conflict

Moldova is a regional state with a small economy and no remarkable military forces, which lies at the crossroads of a geopolitical competition involving great powers.⁹⁸³ In the early 1990s, the country declared a permanent neutrality policy on the assumption that it would best secure Moldova's national interests and contribute to the consolidation of peace and stability on its territory in the most realistic way. The principle of neutrality was even anchored in Article 11 of the 1994 constitution which also affirmed that the country would not allow the deployment of foreign military troops on its territory.⁹⁸⁴ Russia has welcomed Moldova's self-claimed neutrality and insisted on the maintenance of this position as it represents a guarantee that Chisinau will not join any military alliance such as NATO.⁹⁸⁵ In the mid-2000s, however, the enlargement of NATO and EU towards Eastern Europe brought Moldova to the border of both institutions and therefore prompted a reorientation in Chisinau's foreign policy towards the West. This created serious problems in Moldova-Russia relations and influenced the latter's approach towards the Transnistria conflict in the Moldovan

⁹⁸² For a discussion on Moldova's and Ukraine's neutrality in a comparative perspective, see Corneliu Ciurea, "The Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova in the Light of Ukraine's Security Policy," APE- Foreign Policy Association, Policy Analysis, March 30, 2015. Retrieved from: http://old.ape.md/public/publications/2214152_en_cc_ukraine_neu.pdf (15.03.2019).

⁹⁸³ See Veaceslav Ungureanu, "A Geopolitical Approach to the National Security of the Republic of Moldova in the Context of the Interferences of the Geostrategic Relations of the Great Powers," **Cross-Border Journal for International Studies**, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2017, pp. 129-130; Theodor Tudoroiu, "The European Union, Russia, and the Future of the Transnistrian Frozen Conflict," **East European Politics and Societies**, Vol. 26, No. 1, 2012, p. 138; and Matthew Crandall, "Hierarchy in Moldova-Russia Relations: The Transnistrian Effect," **Studies of Transition States and Societies**, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2012, p. 516.

⁹⁸⁴ Adrian Hyde-Price, "Geopolitics and the Concept of Neutrality in Contemporary Europe," Heinz Gärtner (ed.), **Engaged Neutrality: An Evolved Approach to the Cold War**, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2017, p. 131; Svetlana Cebotari, "The Republic of Moldova between Neutrality and NATO Membership Status," **Postmodern Openings**, Vol. 1, No. 3, 2010, p. 84;

⁹⁸⁵ Natalia Albu, "The Republic of Moldova in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis: Vulnerabilities and Threats," Niculae Iancu, et al. (ed.), **Countering Hybrid Threats: Lessons Learned from Ukraine**, Washington Ios Press, 2016, p. 156.

territory. In this respect, the Transnistria conflict has been also utilized by Russia to manage its strategic interest in the region.⁹⁸⁶

Transnistria is located between the Dniester River and Moldova's eastern border with Ukraine. The region was the industrial powerhouse of Moldova during the Soviet era which attracted an influx of Russian immigrants. This is the main reason for the differences in ethnicities between the Transnistria region and the rest of Moldova.⁹⁸⁷ Before and during the Soviet dissolution process, the nationalist forces in Moldova campaigned for the country's unification with Romania with which it has historical, cultural and linguistic ties.⁹⁸⁸ This led to tensions between Moldovans and the highly Russified population in Transnistria. Following Transnistria's declaration of independence two sides fell into a bloody civil conflict during the spring of 1992. In this conflict, the military units from the 14th Soviet Army located in Moldova supported the breakaway region. Since the ceasefire signed in July 1992, the conflict has remained 'frozen' but unresolved, while Transnistria has enjoyed a de facto independence. The Soviet military base was transformed into the center of the peacekeeping forces which still provides Russia with a military presence on Moldovan territory. Albeit limited, these forces also enable Moscow to maintain an indirect influence in the Balkans and ensure some means of leverage on Ukraine's western flank.⁹⁸⁹

In point of fact, Moldova also aimed at delegitimizing Russia's military presence through proclaiming neutrality hoping that Moscow would feel obliged to remove its troops from the conflict zone.⁹⁹⁰ However, Moldova's neutrality was ignored by Moscow which further linked the resolution of the Transnistria conflict with any plan for withdrawal.⁹⁹¹ In the early 2000s, there was a period of positive

⁹⁸⁶ Ryan Kennedy, "The Limits of Soft Balancing: The Frozen Conflict in Transnistria and the Challenge to EU and NATO Strategy," **Small Wars & Insurgencies**, Vol. 27, No. 3, 2016, p. 516.

⁹⁸⁷ See *ibid.* According to a 2004 census the total population of Transnistria is around 555,000 which is divided as 32% Moldovan, 30% Russian, and 29% percent Ukrainian. Crandall, "Hierarchy in Moldova-Russia Relations: The Transnistrian Effect," p. 5.

⁹⁸⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 5; and Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, p. 111.

⁹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 109-114; Crandall, "Hierarchy in Moldova-Russia Relations: The Transnistrian Effect," p. 5; Kennedy, "The Limits of Soft Balancing: The Frozen Conflict in Transnistria and the Challenge to EU and NATO Strategy," p. 516.

⁹⁹⁰ See Albu, "The Republic of Moldova in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis: Vulnerabilities and Threats," p. 156.

⁹⁹¹ Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, p. 110.

relations between Russia and Moldova which raised hopes for the eventual resolution of the conflict. It was because the 2001 parliamentary elections resulted in the decisive victory of the pro-Russian Communist Party of Moldova that campaigned for enhancing political and economic relations with Russia and starting direct negotiations with Russia over the settlement of the Transnistria conflict.⁹⁹² Chisinau also signed an agreement with Moscow designating Russia as ‘the guarantor of Moldova’s territorial integrity’ and of ‘resolving the Transnistria conflict’⁹⁹³ In 2003, the negotiations finally promoted the so-called ‘Kozak plan’ which was sponsored by Russia and called for the reunification of Transnistria with Moldova in the framework of an asymmetrical federal state. This setting offered a high level of autonomy to Transnistria and the right to secede from Moldova if Chisinau were to cede part of its sovereignty e.g. through joining the EU or re-unifying with Romania. In addition, the Kozak plan foresaw maintenance of Russian military presence for the transition period during 20 to 30 years.⁹⁹⁴

The plan was accepted and even initialed by the Moldovan President Vladimir Voronin. However, it was rejected by Chisinau at the last moment. Furthermore, Putin’s planned visit Moldova for the signature ceremony on December 25, 2003 had to be canceled on the previous day. Scholars indicate the main factors for the refusal of the ‘Kozak plan’, as the diplomatic pressure by the US, EU, Romania and Ukraine, the domestic opposition in the country, and accordingly the protests in Chisinau.⁹⁹⁵ The adoption of this plan would have been the first real example of an eventual

⁹⁹² Cristian Cantir and Ryan Kennedy, "Balancing on the Shoulders of Giants: Moldova's Foreign Policy toward Russia and the European Union," **Foreign Policy Analysis**, Vol. 11, No. 4, 2015, pp. 402-403.

⁹⁹³ *Ibid.*; Crandall, "Hierarchy in Moldova-Russia Relations: The Transnistrian Effect," p. 7. In fact, Moldova has long accepted such a guarantor role of Russia over this conflict implicitly, though it has periodically contested its military presence. Since the Soviet collapse, Russian military base in the region has included huge stocks of military equipment and Russian troops have prevented these arms from falling into the hands of the separatists in a region out of Chisinau’s control, which would have fired up the conflict in Moldova’s disadvantage. Lynch, **Russian Peacekeeping Strategies in the CIS: The Case of Moldova, Georgia and Tajikistan**, p. 110.

⁹⁹⁴ Kennedy, "The Limits of Soft Balancing: The Frozen Conflict in Transnistria and the Challenge to EU and NATO Strategy," p. 516.

⁹⁹⁵ Paul D Quinlan, "A Foot in Both Camps: Moldova and the Transnistrian Conundrum from the Kozak Memorandum," **East European Quarterly**, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2008, p. 131; Cantir and Kennedy, "Balancing on the Shoulders of Giants: Moldova's Foreign Policy toward Russia and the European Union," p. 403. On the other side, a Moldova-based analyst, suggests that one primary reason for the rejection of agreement was the fact that the document did not include some amendments promised to him earlier, especially on the articles regulating the issues of Russian military presence and Transnistria’s right to secede from Moldova. Zurab Todua, "Russia Must Regain the Initiative in Moldova," *Russia in Global Affairs*, February 11, 2007, https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/n_7987 (19.03.2019).

political settlement of a regional conflict with Moscow's assistance. Therefore Moldova's rejection of the plan damaged Russia's image as a stabilizer and peace-maker in the region and its prestige as a great power as well. The Russian-Moldovan relations rapidly deteriorated, which was accompanied by some economic sanctions posed on Chisinau by Russia.⁹⁹⁶

As a response, the Moldovan government enhanced Western orientation in its foreign policy in cooperation with NATO. This was marked by Voronin's call to Moscow for withdrawing its troops from Transnistria during his speech at the 2004 NATO summit. A year later, the President made another statement that Moldova wanted to enter the "*European and Euro-Atlantic security space, never to be part of a post-Soviet security space*"⁹⁹⁷ In 2006, Moldova signed its Individual Partnership Action Plan with NATO. However, Moldova has preserved the neutrality clause in its constitution since then, while the Prime Minister Vlad Filat reiterated that the country was not interested in a full NATO membership in both 2009 and 2011.⁹⁹⁸

Nevertheless, Chisinau's maneuvering towards NATO since the mid-2000s has been enough to disturb Russia which has continued to utilize the Transnistria conflict to prevent Moldova from moving away from its orbit.⁹⁹⁹ On the other side, the increasing engagement of NATO and the EU towards the region in recent years has also brought the question of Moldova's neutrality into the discussion. In the domestic realm, advocates of neutrality contend that it remains the optimal choice for Moldova in the face of geopolitical uncertainties in the region given the expansion of NATO, EU, and Russian influence. A neutral Moldova can cooperate with external powers without solid political preferences while avoiding any categorical steps and swings from one extreme to the other. This would prevent the country from becoming a convergent point of political pressure. On the other side, there are others arguing that

⁹⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁹⁷ Quoted in Cantir and Kennedy, "Balancing on the Shoulders of Giants: Moldova's Foreign Policy toward Russia and the European Union," p. 403.

⁹⁹⁸ See Crandall, "Hierarchy in Moldova-Russia Relations: The Transnistrian Effect," p. 8.

⁹⁹⁹ According to Vladimir Socor, Russian Foreign Ministry acknowledged this link through a statement that the unresolved conflict was not the only one factor preventing Moscow from evacuating the arsenals from the breakaway region. There were some other reasons such as 'Moldova's changing relations with NATO' and 'its role in GUAM'. Vladimir Socor, "Russia Acknowledges Punishing Moldova's Western Orientation," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 2, No: 211, November 11, 2005, <https://jamestown.org/program/russia-acknowledges-punishing-moldovas-western-orientation/> (19.03.2019).

Moldova cannot sustain its neutrality without serious and powerful guarantors over this status. Therefore Moldova should strengthen its national security through a possible partnership with the political-military block having the capability to ensure its independence and territorial integrity, which is seen as NATO by pro-Westerners.¹⁰⁰⁰

The political turmoil in Ukraine since late 2013 and Russia's annexation of Crimea further complicated the discussion on Moldova's position. An international observer argues that the annexation of Crimea was another "*warning for ex-Soviet countries, such as Moldova, who do not have security guarantees and yet are trying to pivot to the West – and perhaps for some allies too.*"¹⁰⁰¹ It is a fact that the Ukrainian crisis deepened the existing frictions in Moldova. This trend was observed not only in the breakaway region of Transnistria but also in the autonomous region of Gagauzia involving a small Turkic population with pro-Russian orientation. During the Ukrainian political crisis, the authorities of both regions expressed support for the Viktor Yanukovich regime and approved his actions against revolutionary protests. As the crisis escalated into ethnic clashes in eastern and southern parts of Ukraine, they also warned that Chisinau's orientation toward the West and EU was leading to the territorial dismemberment of Moldova.¹⁰⁰²

In fact, those regional developments since the Crimean annexation have led to the emergence of diversified views on foreign policy issues also at Moldova's general public level. Public opinion polls put forward that only a small percentage of Moldovan citizens (18%) supports the idea of NATO membership, probably because most political party leaders in the country think that it would irreparably harm their relations with Russia. On the other side, there is a remarkable decrease in the support given to the EU membership, which dropped to 44% in November 2014, while 47%

¹⁰⁰⁰ Ruslana Grosu, "The Concept of Permanent Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova from the Point of View of Discrepancies between Judicial Norms and Geopolitical Uncertainties," **Cross-Border Journal for International Studies**, Vol. 2, No. 2, 2017, pp. 45-46. For a detailed review of the discussion of Moldova's neutrality involving Moldovan scholars see the whole article.

¹⁰⁰¹ Francisco de Borja Lasheras, "European insecurity after Crimea," European Council of Foreign Relations, April 11, 2014, https://www.ecfr.eu/article/commentary_european_insecurity_after_crimea246 (19.03.2013).

¹⁰⁰² Svetlana Suveica, "Crisis in Ukraine: A Quest for Moldovan Territorial Integrity," **Südosteuropa**, Vol. 62, No. 2, 2014, pp. 209-216.

of Moldovans supported joining the Russian-led Customs Union.¹⁰⁰³ Although people's attitudes are generally informed by ethnic identities, it seems that their views exceed such barriers given the small percentage of Russian and other minorities in Moldova.¹⁰⁰⁴ Therefore there is no clear orientation by Moldovan public towards the West, while 53% of the population supports the status of neutrality given the geopolitical crises and uncertainties in the region with their destructive consequences.¹⁰⁰⁵ Such a division in public views also reflected in the February 2019 parliamentary elections, in which the pro-Russian Socialist Party received 35 seats and the pro-European Democratic Party obtained 30 seats out of 101 and both remained well short of a majority.¹⁰⁰⁶

After the Ukraine crisis, Chisinau's Western orientation has been encouraged by the EU and the US, while the Moldovan government took some important steps in this respect.¹⁰⁰⁷ However, it is suggested that the recent elections promoting a divided parliament might keep Moldova in the 'grey zone' between Russia and the West.¹⁰⁰⁸ If not, Chisinau's rapprochement towards the West to build a closer alignment would underline frictions in the country as Moscow would possibly support pro-Russian forces in Moldova. Russia will likely continue to utilize the Transnistria conflict to block Moldova's integration with Euro-Atlantic political and security structures. Nonetheless, the recent political developments in Moldova show us that Russia has managed this objective vis-à-vis this country more successfully and at a lower cost compared to its policies towards other regional states -especially Ukraine.

¹⁰⁰³ For those pools and related discussions see Kennedy, "The Limits of Soft Balancing: The Frozen Conflict in Transnistria and the Challenge to EU and NATO Strategy," pp. 524-527.

¹⁰⁰⁴ According to the 2014 census held in Moldova 75,1% of total population is Moldovan. Other ethnic groups include Romanian (7%), Ukrainian (6,6%), Gagauz (4,6%), Russian (4,1%), and Bulgarian (1,9%). Cristi Vlas, "Moldova 2014 identity census," Moldova.org, March 31, 2017, <https://www.moldova.org/en/moldova-2014-identity-census-751-declared-moldovans-7-romanians-66-ukrainians-46-gagauz/> (19.03.2019).

¹⁰⁰⁵ Kennedy, "The Limits of Soft Balancing: The Frozen Conflict in Transnistria and the Challenge to EU and NATO Strategy," p. 526.

¹⁰⁰⁶ Wilder Alejandro Sanchez, "Moldova's February Elections and Regional Geopolitics," Geopolitical Monitor, March 1, 2019, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/moldovas-february-elections-and-regional-geopolitics/> (19.03.2019).

¹⁰⁰⁷ On 27 June 2014, Moldova joined Ukraine and Georgia to sign an Association Agreement with the EU. In response to Western diplomatic support for Moldova carrying the message that Chisinau could stand up to 'Russia's political, economic and military pressure', the Moldovan authorities declared that they will make an official request for the EU membership in the near future. See Suveica, "Crisis in Ukraine: A Quest for Moldovan Territorial Integrity," pp. 216-219.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Matthias Williams, "Election may keep Moldova in 'grey zone' between West and Russia," Reuters, February 13, 2019, <https://af.reuters.com/article/worldNews/idAFKCN1Q21SE> (19.03.2019).

B. Russia-Ukraine Relations: Kiev's Balancing Policies vis-à-vis Moscow and the Annexation of Crimea

Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has attached paramount importance to its relations with Ukraine among the other post-Soviet States. Ukraine is the second-largest Former Soviet Republic after Russia, with an approximately 45 million population, which is located in a very strategic position vis-à-vis Europe. Furthermore, the country occupies a special place in Russian identity and culture as Ukrainian and Russian history are intertwined with each other.¹⁰⁰⁹ Therefore, Ukraine has been the pivotal state for Moscow's efforts to preserve some control over security policy orientations of the former Soviet states.¹⁰¹⁰ On the other side, Western powers have viewed Ukraine as the most important regional state with regard to its economic, industrial and military power, which can shift the strategic balance in Eastern Europe vis-à-vis Russia.¹⁰¹¹ For Western analysts who view Russian revival as a profound threat to European security, an independent Ukraine in collaboration with Euro-Atlantic political and security institutions appears as an insurance policy against 'Russian neo-imperial ambitions.'¹⁰¹² In this regard, Western powers' portrayal of Ukraine as a 'regional power' and 'stability factor' in Eastern Europe have encouraged Kiev to maneuver from its self-declared neutral position towards building a strategic alignment with the West especially since the mid-2000.¹⁰¹³

However, Ukraine has also deep handicaps as a regional power based on its genesis, identity, and historical development. The country emerged from its historical

¹⁰⁰⁹ See Paul Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," **Political Science Quarterly**, Vol. 114, No. 4, 1999, pp. 556-557. For population data see "DataBank World Development Indicators," The World Bank, <https://databank.worldbank.org/data/reports.aspx?source=2&series=SP.POP.TOTL&country> (10.03.2019).

¹⁰¹⁰ Roy Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," **International Affairs**, Vol. 90, No. 6, 2014, p. 1269.

¹⁰¹¹ Mitchell, **The Color Revolutions**, p. 95; F. Stephen Larrabee, "Russia, Ukraine, and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics," **Journal of international affairs**, Vol. 63, No. 2, 2010, p. 38.

¹⁰¹² See **ibid.**; Sergei M. Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," J. L. Black and Michael Johns (ed.), **The Return of the Cold War: Ukraine, the West and Russia**, New York: Routledge, 2016, p. 14. Most notably Zbigniew Brzezinski puts it that "[w]ithout Ukraine, Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire. ... However, if Moscow regains control over Ukraine, with its ... major resources as well as its access to the Black Sea, Russia automatically again regains the wherewithal to become a powerful imperial state, spanning Europe and Asia." Zbigniew Brzezinski, **The Grand Chessboard: American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives**, New York: Basic Books, 1997, p. 46.

¹⁰¹³ Ciurea, "The Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova in the Light of Ukraine's Security Policy," pp. 2-3.

roots as an 'incomplete state' whose borders were drawn by Soviet officials with regard to Soviet development plans. Around one-quarter of the Ukrainian population consider themselves as ethnic Russians who mainly live in the eastern and southern parts of the country.¹⁰¹⁴ In addition, many people with Ukrainian origin have connections with Russia by family and cultural ties. The number of Ukrainians considering Russian as their mother language is around 40 percent, while 60 percent of people would not support the country's integration into NATO even after the annexation of Crimea in 2014.¹⁰¹⁵ Therefore, Ukraine's one-vectorized Western policy advocating that the country must be moved away as far as possible from Russian influence becomes flawed, as it disregards all organic connections and political-economic dependency ties between two states. In fact, such a policy based on Ukrainian nationalism has feed frictions in the country and weaken it as an independent state.¹⁰¹⁶ Besides, it has also provided the conditions making it easier for Russia to retaliate against Kiev's balancing policies vis-à-vis Moscow. Below we examine Russia's aggressive policies towards Kiev and how Moscow has manipulated domestic splits in the country, which all aimed at discouraging and preventing Ukraine's integration into Western political and security institutions.

Ukraine's balancing policies vis-à-vis Russia has started in the early 1990s. The first President Leonid Kravchuk (1991-1994) sought to enforce the country's independence by severing ties with Moscow, therefore, refused to join both the CIS security structures and the CST alliance.¹⁰¹⁷ As a response, the Kremlin increased its

¹⁰¹⁴ Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 4. In Eastern and Southern Ukraine, the share of Ukrainian speakers remains less than one-third. Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, p. 99.

¹⁰¹⁵ Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," pp. 7-8. The Author refers to a pool conducted by the Kiev-based International Institute whose results were declared roughly one year later following the Crimean annexation on March 26, 2015.

¹⁰¹⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 14-15; Margarita M Balmaceda, "Ukraine, Russia, and European Security: Thinking Beyond Nato Expansion," **Problems of post-Communism**, Vol. 45, No. 1, 1998, p. 22. For a similar view on Ukraine's domestic composition by a well-known American political scientist and diplomat see Henry A. Kissinger, "How the Ukraine Crisis Ends," The Washington Post, March, 6, 2014, <https://www.henryakissinger.com/articles/how-the-ukraine-crisis-ends/> (02.05.2019). In this respect, Kissinger argues that if Ukraine wants to survive it should neither join the West or East as 'an outpost against the other' but should function as a 'bridge' between them.

¹⁰¹⁷ Despite Russian pressure, Ukraine accepted to join the CIS only as an 'associate member' which solely involved into economic cooperation structures on a voluntary basis. Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, p. 101; Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," p. 559. In the absence of intra-state ethnic conflicts in its territory, Kiev could also resist Moscow's pressure to join the CST, while Ukraine maintained its emphasis on the position of neutrality during the early 1990s. See F. Stephen Larrabee, "Ukraine's Balancing Act," **Survival**, Vol. 38, No. 2, 1996, p. 145-146.

pressure on Kiev on a number of problems between Russia and Ukraine. Those issues included the status of Crimea, the division of the Soviet Black Sea Fleet between the two states, and the basing rights of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in Sevastopol in the Crimean peninsula.¹⁰¹⁸ In fact 'the Crimean Oblast' had been transferred into Ukrainian Soviet Socialist Republic through a decree by the Presidium of Supreme Soviet of the USSR in February 1954. This action was viewed as 'illegal' by many Russians, on the assumption that the transfer of Crimea had been realized without organizing any referendum or signing any agreement.¹⁰¹⁹ After Ukrainian independence, the Kremlin has long resisted signing a treaty with Kiev which would renounce Russian claims on Ukraine's territory and recognize its borders. Furthermore, Yeltsin stated that Russia could recognize Ukraine's borders within the CIS framework in January 1993, and, therefore, conditioned such a recognition to the maintenance of the latter's membership to this organization.¹⁰²⁰ In addition to that, Russia asserted control both over the Black Sea Fleet and Sevastopol naval base despite the fact that Ukraine claimed the ownership of the entire Black Sea Fleet except the units equipped with nuclear strategic weapons.¹⁰²¹ As the Kremlin refused to hand over these naval forces and facilities, the Russian military maintained its presence on the strategic Crimean peninsula where the majority of the population consisted of ethnic Russians.¹⁰²²

Notwithstanding Russian assertiveness and threatening policies towards Ukraine, Kiev has continued its balancing strategy vis-à-vis Moscow during the 1990s. In February 1994, Ukraine became the first CIS member to initiate a formal cooperation with NATO through signing the Peace for Partnership Agreement. Kiev soon turned to be an intensive participant in joint events and military exercises.¹⁰²³

¹⁰¹⁸ Anton Bebie, "Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," **Romanian Journal of European Affairs**, Vol. 15, No. 1, 2015, p. 39. Another problem, the transfer of the Soviet nuclear weapons to Russia, was dropped from the agenda, as Ukraine signed the Non Proliferation Treaty in 1994 and completed the transfer of those arms by 1996. Sakwa and Webber, "The Commonwealth of Independent States, 1991-1998: Stagnation and Survival," p. 382.

¹⁰¹⁹ Bebie, "Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," p. 38

¹⁰²⁰ Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," p. 558.

¹⁰²¹ Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, p. 105.

¹⁰²² Approximately 60 percent of Crimea's total population (2.3 million) speak Russian and identify themselves as ethnic Russians. "Russian Parliament Passes Unanimous Vote for Armed Troops to be Deployed in Crimea," Euronews, March 1, 2014, <https://www.euronews.com/2014/03/01/russian-upper-house-approves-use-of-troops-on-ukrainian-soil-> (02.05.2019).

¹⁰²³ See Miller, **To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States**, pp. 107-108; and Larrabee, "Ukraine's Balancing Act," pp. 147-148.

Leonid Kuchma as the second President of Ukraine (1994-2005) accelerated Kiev's maneuver towards the West. In 1996, Ukraine signed a strategic partnership with the US and established a high-level commission for bilateral relations with Washington. At the same time, Kuchma began to back NATO expansion towards Eastern Europe and upgraded its relations with NATO also to a 'strategic partnership'.¹⁰²⁴ This was followed by the adoption of the 1997 National Security Concept which declared Ukrainian interests to join international security structures and therefore signaled a deviation from its self-declared neutrality position.¹⁰²⁵

Interestingly, Ukraine's balancing strategies during the Kuchma years brought some success vis-à-vis Russia. In March 1995, Ukraine's parliament revoked the constitution of Crimean Oblast, removed President Yuriy Meshkov who was charged with promoting separatism and also abolished the office of Crimean Presidency.¹⁰²⁶ In 1997, Kuchma signed a Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation and three other intergovernmental agreements with Russia, which resolved some long-standing disputes in highly favorable terms for Ukraine. The agreements confirmed Russian recognition of the territorial integrity and 'immutability' of Ukrainian borders, and provided an equal division of Black Sea Fleet between two states. In turn, Russia was given leasing rights for Crimean naval facilities rather than the territory for a 20-year-long period.¹⁰²⁷ However, it seems that this deal was conditioned on the maintenance of Ukraine's neutral status, as the Treaty of Friendship confirmed that "*Ukraine could not enter into any agreements with third parties aimed against Russia; and that Ukraine could not allow the stationing of NATO troops and nuclear weapons on its territory.*"¹⁰²⁸

At the turn of the century, the Kuchma government's balancing acts faced some crucial challenges, due to the President's drift towards authoritarianism in domestic politics and some international scandals which seriously deteriorated Ukraine's

¹⁰²⁴ See Steven Pifer, "Ukraine's Perilous Balancing Act," *Current History*, Vol. 111, No. 743, 2012, p. 107; and Kubicek, "Russian Foreign Policy and the West," p. 561. By 1997, this foreign policy change promoted as Ukraine as the third biggest recipient of the US foreign aid following Israel and Egypt. *Ibid.* 559.

¹⁰²⁵ Balmaceda, "Ukraine, Russia, and European Security: Thinking Beyond Nato Expansion," p. 22.

¹⁰²⁶ Bebiev, "Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," p. 39.

¹⁰²⁷ See James Sherr, "Russia-Ukraine Rapprochement?: The Black Sea Fleet Accords," *Survival*, Vol. 39, No. 3, 1997, p. 33; and Miller, *To Balance or Not to Balance: Alignment Theory and the Commonwealth of Independent States*, p. 107.

¹⁰²⁸ *Ibid.*

relations with the West. This led to the beginning of a new rapprochement process with Russia.¹⁰²⁹ In December 2004, however, ‘the Orange Revolution’ brought Viktor Yushchenko to the Presidency who had his power base in the western parts of Ukraine. The political coalition led by Yushchenko advocated a pro-Western foreign policy for Ukraine under the banner of ‘European way’ which aimed at the country’s full integration into both EU and NATO.¹⁰³⁰ In 2005, Ukraine signed an ‘Intensified Dialogue’ with NATO and sought the US and European states’ support for the remaining precursory steps towards joining the Alliance.¹⁰³¹ Accordingly, the Ukrainian government sought ways to end Russian influence and military presence in Crimea. In October 2006, Putin expressed Moscow’s desire to extend the Black Sea Fleet agreements to ensure the maintenance of Russia’s facility rights after 2017. However, this idea was firmly opposed by Yushchenko and other Ukrainian top officials.¹⁰³²

In this regard, the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit’s declaration that Ukraine will be eventually an Alliance member became an alarm call for Russia. In response to Ukrainian NATO aspirations, Moscow employed a rhetorical weapon that joining this Alliance will inevitably disintegrate the country. Just a few days before the Bucharest Summit, Russia’s special envoy to the Alliance declared that if Ukraine *“does join NATO, then it will do so only with the territory on which the referendum on joining the [A]lliance was conducted.”*¹⁰³³ In this respect, Russia underlined Kiev’s disability to assert itself over Crimea and eastern parts of Ukraine where the majority of the population had a pro-Russian orientation.¹⁰³⁴ In fact, Yushchenko’s pro-Western

¹⁰²⁹ Pifer, "Ukraine's Perilous Balancing Act," p. 107. Accordingly, Kuchma issued a presidential decree in 2004, *“to remove all entries related to Ukraine’s adherence to NATO from the laws.”* Ciurea, “The Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova in the Light of Ukraine’s Security Policy,” p. 2.

¹⁰³⁰ See Mitchell, **The Color Revolutions**, p. 50; Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 9; and Pifer, "Ukraine's Perilous Balancing Act," p. 108.

¹⁰³¹ According to Pifer, this move put Yushchenko far out in front of both elite and public opinion, as polls showed that there was only 20 to 30 percent support among Ukrainian people for the country’s NATO membership. Pifer, "Ukraine's Perilous Balancing Act," p. 108.

¹⁰³² Larrabee, "Russia, Ukraine, and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics," p. 41.

¹⁰³³ Quoted in Andrey Makarychev, "Russia, NATO, and the "Color Revolutions" Discursive Traps," **Russian Politics & Law**, Vol. 47, No. 5, 2009, pp. 46-47.

¹⁰³⁴ According to a witness account; Putin told the US President George W. Bush during the Bucharest summit *“that Ukraine was “not a real nation,” that much of its territory had been “given away” by Russia, and that Ukraine would “cease to exist as a state” if it joined NATO.”* Such suggestions by Putin hinted that *“Russia would encourage secession of the Crimea and eastern regions of Ukraine”* in case of Ukraine’s NATO membership. Quoted in Vladimir Socor, “Moscow Makes Furious but Empty Threats to Georgia and Ukraine,” *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 5, No. 70, April 14, 2008, <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-makes-furious-but-empty-threats-to-georgia-and-ukraine/> (02.05.2019).

foreign policy and the renewal of Ukrainian nationalism campaign in the country has exacerbated the East-West divide in Ukraine. In addition to that, the government's mismanagement of domestic politics and economy led to a dramatic decrease in public support towards Yushchenko. All these developments established the ground for the victory of the Party of Regions in the 2010 presidential elections. This Party was led by businessmen and bureaucratic elites from the south-eastern industrial regions of Ukraine who promised domestic reforms and restoring an East-West balance in Ukrainian foreign policy.¹⁰³⁵

Viktor Yanukovich's reach to the Presidency as a more Russia-oriented leader led to a rapprochement with Moscow. The new president soon adopted a law that declared 'non-bloc' status as the fundamental principle for Ukrainian foreign policy and removed all entries referring to NATO adherence from the official documents.¹⁰³⁶ In April 2010, the Yanukovich government signed the Kharkov Agreement with Moscow which extended Russia's leasing rights of the Sevastopol facilities for the Black Sea Fleet for another 25 years, plus an automatic extension of five years. All these allowed Moscow to consider Ukraine as a neutral buffer state between Russia and NATO and even aroused hopes that Kiev might orient towards security cooperation with the CSTO.¹⁰³⁷

However, Yanukovich's turn to the East and his pro-Russian cultural and language policy faced a domestic national backlash especially from the Western parts of Ukraine.¹⁰³⁸ In 2013, Yanukovich maintained negotiations on the signing of an 'Association Agreement' with the EU. During this period he tried to maneuver between Brussel and Moscow in order to get the highest offer in financial aid and loans.¹⁰³⁹ On November 21, Yanukovich suspended the process for the signing of the EU Association Agreement and turned to Russia which offered a multi-billion package

¹⁰³⁵ Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 9.

¹⁰³⁶ Ciurea, "The Neutrality of the Republic of Moldova in the Light of Ukraine's Security Policy," p. 2.

¹⁰³⁷ Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," p. 1271.

¹⁰³⁸ See Thomas Ambrosio, "The Fall of Yanukovich: Structural and Political Constraints to Implementing Authoritarian Learning," *East European Politics*, Vol. 33, No. 2, 2017, p. 204; and Volha Charnysh, "Analysis of Current Events: Identity Mobilization in Hybrid Regimes: Language in Ukrainian Politics," *Nationalities papers*, Vol. 41, No. 1, 2013.

¹⁰³⁹ See Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, *Ukraine between the EU and Russia: The Integration Challenge*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015, pp. 84-88.

of loans and natural gas discounts by one third. Yanukovych's decision soon prompted mass protests in Kiev, which were responded with violent crackdown attempts by the government. All these developments led to the Ukrainian Euromaidan revolution in February 2014.¹⁰⁴⁰

On February 21, the group of EU foreign ministers including French, German, and Polish representatives brokered an agreement between the Ukrainian government and opposition leaders which called for some constitutional reforms and organization of early elections until the end of 2014.¹⁰⁴¹ However, this deal was rejected by the protesters in Kiev's Maidan square which included radical nationalist groups and militias who demanded the president's immediate resignation. They achieved ousting the president within twenty-four hours, as Yanukovych fled from Kiev due to fears for his safety.¹⁰⁴² The United States welcomed this unconstitutional regime change -if not backed the revolution itself.¹⁰⁴³ On the other side, the Kremlin interpreted it as another foreign manipulated regime change which placed a hostile government on Russia's borders and opened the way for renewed efforts to enforce a security alignment

¹⁰⁴⁰ See *ibid.*, pp.94-98; and Nadia Diuk, "Euromaidan: Ukraine's Self-Organizing Revolution," **World Affairs**, Vol. 176, No. 6, 2014.

¹⁰⁴¹ See Roland Oliphant, "Ukraine: Peace hopes in the air as president loses his powers," *The Telegraph*, February 21, 2014, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/europe/ukraine/10655129/Ukraine-peace-hopes-in-the-air-as-president-loses-his-powers.html> (02.05.2013); and Ekaterina Klimenko, "Protracted Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space and Their Impact on Black Sea Security," SIPRI Insights on Peace and Security, No 2018/8, December 2018, p. 16. Retrieved from: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-12/sipriinsight1808_0.pdf (02.05.2019).

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid.*; Dmitri Trenin, "Ukraine and the New Divide," Carnegie Moscow Center, July 30, 2014, p. 3. Retrieved from: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/Article_Ukraine_Trenin_Eng_Jul2014.pdf (02.05.2019). For radical groups and far-right militants involving the protests see Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," pp. 17-19; and Andreas M Bock, Ingo Henneberg, and Friedrich Plank, "'If You Compress the Spring, It Will Snap Back Hard': The Ukrainian Crisis and the Balance of Threat Theory," **International Journal**, Vol. 70, No. 1, 2015, p. 102.

¹⁰⁴³ In fact, Victoria Nuland, the U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian affairs, and Republican Senator John McCain personally participated in the Maidan demonstrations. After the ousting of Yanukovych, Geoffrey Pyatt, the US ambassador to Ukraine, suggested that it was 'a day for the history books.' Furthermore, a leaked phone call between Victoria Nuland and Geoffrey Pyatt put forward that before the revolution Nuland had talked about a regime change in Ukraine which might place Arseniy Yatsenyuk in a top position, who then became the prime minister of the Ukrainian interim government. John J. Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," **Foreign Affairs**, Vol. 93, 2014, pp. 80-81. For the transcript of telephone conversation see "Ukraine Crisis: Transcript of Leaked Nuland-Pyatt Call," BBC news, February 7, 2014, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-26079957> (02.05.2019). Washington also granted well-publicized political support to the Maidan-backed government following the regime change, which was marked by the visits to Kiev "by Vice President Joe Biden, Secretary of State John Kerry, Central Intelligence Agency Director John Brennan, and a number of other U.S. officials." Trenin, "Ukraine and the New Divide," p. 4.

between Ukraine and the US-NATO bloc.¹⁰⁴⁴ Scholars confirm that the newly established government was clearly pro-Western and anti-Russian, which included some members with far-right affiliations especially in the areas of law enforcement and national security.¹⁰⁴⁵ The interim government soon signed the political provisions of the EU Association Agreement on March 21, while the remaining parts were left to be signed after the presidential elections in May.¹⁰⁴⁶ Kiev also looked for a fresh start with NATO, which was marked by the promotion of a draft legislation by the parliament reinstating the goal of joining NATO as a centerpiece of the Ukrainian national strategy. This was welcomed by the Alliance, while NATO's Secretary-General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has already confirmed that the 2008 Bucharest Summit's decision and NATO's open-door policy to Ukrainian membership would remain as valid.¹⁰⁴⁷

In this respect, this second revolutionary regime change in Ukraine within a ten-year period provoked outrage among the Kremlin's officials. Russia was seriously disturbed to see its neighbor turning into a country governed by a coalition of pro-Western elites and anti-Russian western Ukrainian nationalists.¹⁰⁴⁸ As Ukraine renewed its aspirations for NATO membership, the Kremlin considered that Kiev might cancel the Kharkov Agreement and order the Black Sea Fleet out of Crimea by 2017. This would mean losing a crucial base for Russia's power projections in the Mediterranean Sea, while the withdrawal of the Fleet might also facilitate Ukraine's joining into NATO. The latter appeared as the worst nightmare scenario for Russia, as

¹⁰⁴⁴ Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," Allison 1257.

¹⁰⁴⁵ Samuel Charap and Keith Darden, "Russia and Ukraine," *Survival*, Vol. 56, No. 2, 2014, p. 11; Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," p. 80.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Roman Petrov, Guillaume Van der Loo, and Peter Van Elsuwege, "The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement: A New Legal Instrument of Integration without Membership?," *Kyiv-Mohyla Law and Politics Journal*, Vol. 1, No. 1, 2015, p. 7. The agreement signed between Ukraine and the EU was a comprehensive legal text including technical regulations about political, economic, trade, social relations, etc. In the realm of security, in particular, it included provisions on cooperation and convergence in the field of Common Foreign and Security Policy of the European Union (CFSP). *Ibid.*, p. 3.

¹⁰⁴⁷ Rasmussen affirmed this in his address to European Union Summit in December 2013 when the Maidan demonstrations in Kiev were in the early stages. See Vladimir Socor, "NATO and Ukraine's Security Vacuum," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 11, No. 46, March 11, 2014, <https://jamestown.org/program/nato-and-ukraines-security-vacuum/> (02.05.2019).

¹⁰⁴⁸ Trenin, "Ukraine and the New Divide," p. 3.

it would bring the Alliance's military deployments a few hundred miles away from Moscow and might transform Sevastopol into a NATO naval base.¹⁰⁴⁹

Russia's Annexation of Crimea

Such fears and concerns played significant roles in Russia's decision to annex Crimea, which emerged as the harshest response by the Kremlin in reaction to a revolutionary regime change in the post-Soviet space.¹⁰⁵⁰ Shortly after the Yanukovych's fall on February 22, the Kremlin ordered Russian forces to take the control of Crimea who were already stationing at the Sevastopol naval base.¹⁰⁵¹ Moscow also encouraged local authorities to hold a referendum on Crimea's status. On March 16, Crimean people overwhelmingly voted for 'reunification' with Russia. Two days later, the Kremlin announced that Crimea and the Sevastopol City were incorporated into Russia through a treaty signed in Moscow, which was responded with huge enthusiasm in the country and pushed Putin's domestic approval to the highest levels ever.¹⁰⁵² Russia's annexation of Crimea which emerged as an expansionist and revisionist move in its own right has been interpreted among Western countries as a 'neo-imperialist' and 'neo-Soviet action' by the Putin government. According to the conventional wisdom in the West, the annexation of Crimea proves that Putin has adopted an aggressive and territorially expansionist foreign policy to re-

¹⁰⁴⁹ See Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," pp. 20-21, Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," p. 77; Mark Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's 'New Way of War'?", **Small Wars & Insurgencies**, Vol. 27, No. 2, 2016, p. 283; and Kissinger, "How the Ukraine Crisis Ends". For expression of such fears by the President Putin himself see "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014, The Kremlin, Moscow, <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/20603> (02.05.2019).

¹⁰⁵⁰ Although our theoretical framework leads us to focus the Euromaidan Revolution's implications on Ukraine's 'security alignments' and relations with NATO, we should acknowledge that the competition between alternative 'economic integration' processes also played a principal role in the development of Ukrainian crisis and international responses. While the EU was negotiating an association agreement with Kiev, Moscow pushed Kiev to join instead the Russia-led Custom Union and Eurasian Economic Community. For that aspect of the Ukraine crisis see Kristi Raik, "The Ukraine Crisis as a Conflict over Europe's Political, Economic and Security Order," **Geopolitics**, Vol. 24, No. 1, 2019, pp. 10-12; and Rilka Dragneva and Kataryna Wolczuk, "The EU-Ukraine Association Agreement and the Challenges of Inter-Regionalism," **Review of Central and East European Law**, Vol. 39, No. 1, 2014.

¹⁰⁵¹ See Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," p. 81. For the military operation which was achieved very easily and almost bloodless, see Bebie, "Crimea and the Russian-Ukrainian Conflict," pp. 41-42; and Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's 'New Way of War'?", p. 285.

¹⁰⁵² See Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 21; and Trenin, "Ukraine and the New Divide," pp. 3-4.

establish 'imperial control' over the near abroad which may eventually expand towards the rest of Ukraine and even other countries in Eastern Europe.¹⁰⁵³

On the other side, Vladimir Putin expressed his interpretation of the Ukraine crises in his address about Crimea's 'reunification' with Russia on March 18, 2014. He suggested that by supporting Ukraine's integration into the West and the Euromaidan revolution, Western powers;

*"have crossed the line, playing the bear and acting irresponsibly and unprofessionally. After all, they were fully aware that there are millions of Russians living in Ukraine and in Crimea. They must have really lacked political instinct and common sense not to foresee all the consequences of their actions ... If you compress the spring all the way to its limit, it will snap back hard."*¹⁰⁵⁴

There are noted Western political analysts and Russia experts who support the argument that Moscow behaved as 'reactive' and 'defensive' in its policies towards the Ukraine crises. According to them, Russia's moves including the annexation of Crimea appeared as a response to the Western challenge to Russia's political and security interests in its neighborhood, rather than reflections of its 'neo-imperial' and 'expansionist' ambitions.¹⁰⁵⁵ In fact, such a view relates to the neorealist perspective which focuses on external threats and geopolitical competition among great

¹⁰⁵³ See Bock, Henneberg, and Plank, "'If You Compress the Spring, It Will Snap Back Hard': The Ukrainian Crisis and the Balance of Threat Theory," p. 102; Charap and Darden, "Russia and Ukraine," p. 11; and Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," p. 77.

¹⁰⁵⁴ "Address by President of the Russian Federation," March 18, 2014.

¹⁰⁵⁵ George Friedman, the founder of Stratfor, argues that the Ukraine crisis has emerged as a result of the US containment strategy towards Russia which wanted Ukraine to maintain a neutral position. According to him, "Russia did not want to completely control Ukraine or occupy it; it was enough that Ukraine not join NATO and the EU." "Stratfor Chief's 'Most Blatant Coup in History' Interview Translated in Full," Russia Insider, January 20, 2015, <https://russia-insider.com/en/politics/stratfor-chiefs-most-blatant-coup-history-interview-translated-full/ri2561> (05.05.2019). Richard Sakwa, Professor of Russian and European politics from the University of Kent, focuses on the West's ignorance of Russia's security interests to explain the reasons for the Ukraine crisis. According to him "[t]he persistent delegitimation of Russia's security concerns, the anti-Russianism of the new NATO members, the failure to overcome the asymmetries in the Cold War settlement, the consolidation of a monological Wider European agenda of EU enlargement and its effective merger with the Atlantic security system, and the dismissal of Russian and other ideas for Greater European unity, have all conspired to create the conditions for the confrontation of 2014." Richard Sakwa, **Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands**, London: I.B. Tauris, 2015, p. 48. Accordingly Stephen Cohen, a distinguishing American scholar on Russia and the Soviet studies, argues that the Kremlin "had no reason to provoke a major international crisis with the West on Russia's borders, and still less in 'fraternal' Ukraine." Underlining the processes of NATO and the EU enlargement towards the country and their repercussions in Ukrainian domestic political space, Cohen concludes that Moscow's actions "have been mostly reactive, not 'aggressive,' including in Crimea and eastern Ukraine." Stephen F. Cohen, "Four Years of Ukraine and the Myths of Maidan," The Nation, January 3, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/four-years-of-ukraine-and-the-myths-of-maidan/> (06.05.2019).

powers.¹⁰⁵⁶ As the originator of balance of threat theory Stephen Walt suggests that the Ukraine crisis did not start “*with a bold Russian move or even a series of illegitimate Russian demands;*” but attempts by the US and EU “*to move Ukraine out of Russia’s orbit and into the West’s sphere of influence.*”¹⁰⁵⁷ He maintains that, in fact;

*“Moscow made it abundantly clear it would fight this process tooth and nail. U.S. leaders blithely ignored these warnings — which clearly stemmed from Russian insecurity rather than territorial greed — and not surprisingly they have been blindsided by Moscow’s reaction. The failure of U.S. diplomats to anticipate Putin’s heavy-handed response was an act of remarkable diplomatic incompetence.”*¹⁰⁵⁸

John Mearsheimer, as another prominent contemporary realist, claims that the taproot of all the trouble about Ukraine was the NATO expansion, while the EU enlargement and the Western backing for regime change in the country also played crucial roles. In recent years, the Kremlin has made it clear that it would not stand by, while Ukraine as its strategically significant neighbor turned into a Western outpost. In this respect, Mearsheimer suggests, “*the illegal overthrow of Ukraine’s democratically elected and pro-Russian president -which he rightly labeled a “coup” was the final straw.*”¹⁰⁵⁹ Russia responded by taking Crimea and worked for the destabilization of Ukraine until it gave up its efforts to join the West. However, Mearsheimer argues, if the Kremlin were committed to building a greater Russia, it would have hinted or taken some actions before the Yanukovich’s fall on February 22. Since there was no evidence of Russia’s revisionist plan before that date, even Western leaders supporting NATO expansion caught by surprise with Putin’s actions in Crimea which “*appear to have been a spontaneous reaction to Yanukovich’s ouster.*”¹⁰⁶⁰

¹⁰⁵⁶ See Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," pp. 1267-1269.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Stephen M. Walt, "Why Arming Kiev is a Really, Really Bad Idea," Foreign Policy, February 9, 2015, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2015/02/09/how-not-to-save-ukraine-arming-kiev-is-a-bad-idea/> (02.05.2019).

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁹ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," p. 77.

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85. Similarly, Richard Sakwa argues that Russia actions are designed to maintain the 'status quo' in the region, as “[t]here is little evidence that the annexation of Crimea followed by unrest in the east and south was part of a long-established plan to separate ... [these regions] from Ukraine.” Sakwa, **Frontline Ukraine: Crisis in the Borderlands**, 2015 pp. 206. See also p. 117.

In this respect, by taking Crimea Russia denied this strategic territory permanently to NATO –even to common PfP exercises with Ukraine; and started a long term international dispute about the country's territorial integrity. With the emergence of the Crimean dispute and the civil war in Eastern Ukraine, Russia could expect that Kiev's aspirations for NATO membership would be blocked by some European states in the Alliance which would avoid Moscow's negative reactions let alone the likelihood of armed confrontation with Russia.¹⁰⁶¹ In fact, it seems as another application of the Russian traditional strategy towards the post-Soviet ethnic conflicts such as Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Transnistria which were all examined above.¹⁰⁶² While Russia seemed to be provoked by similar concerns, it took a step further ahead of these 'old tactics' by incorporating Crimea into its territory and raised the stakes significantly. This could be explained with a sort of factors falling beyond the systemic framework of neorealist theory.¹⁰⁶³

Yet, the annexation of Crimea could not divert Ukraine from its objective of integrating with NATO and the EU. The presidential elections held in May 2014 resulted in Petro Poroshenko's victory, a billionaire politician from the nationalist camp who had played a major role in the regime change in Kiev by supporting and financing Euromaidan protests.¹⁰⁶⁴ The Western powers embraced Poroshenko's government, while the EU speeded up its efforts to finish the process for the Association Agreement with Ukraine. The new President signed the remaining economic parts and thus concluded the EU Association Agreement on June 27, 2014.¹⁰⁶⁵ Poroshenko also promoted NATO integration as a foreign policy priority for

¹⁰⁶¹ See Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," p. 1273; and Emmanuel Dreyfus and Jean-Baptiste Jeangène Vilmer, "A People-Oriented Peace Formula for the Donbass," *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol. 42, No. 2, 2019, p. 119.

¹⁰⁶² See Jeffrey Mankoff, "Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine," *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 3, 2014, p. 60.

¹⁰⁶³ Such factors may follow as the demographic composition of Crimea, its place in Russia's history and identity, President Putin's personnel willingness to hike up his confrontation with the West which he views as increasingly antagonistic to Russian interests, and his attempt to use the crises as an advantage to consolidate public support towards the government. See *ibid.* p. 60; John Biersack and Shannon O'leary, "The Geopolitics of Russia's Annexation of Crimea: Narratives, Identity, Silences, and Energy," *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, Vol. 55, No. 3, 2014, pp. 252-256; and Elias Götz, "Russia, the West, and the Ukraine Crisis: Three Contending Perspectives," *Contemporary politics*, Vol. 22, No. 3, 2016, p. 255-256.

¹⁰⁶⁴ Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 22.

¹⁰⁶⁵ Hiski Haukkala, "'Crowdfunded Diplomacy'? The EU's Role in the Triangular Diplomacy over the Ukraine Crisis," Vicki L. Birchfield and Alasdair R. Young (ed.), *Triangular Diplomacy among the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation: Responses to the Crisis in Ukraine*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 85.

Ukraine. In July 2017, he reiterated Ukrainian NATO aspirations and announced that his government would seek the start of negotiations on a Membership Action Plan (MAP) with NATO, which would contribute Ukraine in preparations to fulfill its membership to the Alliance.¹⁰⁶⁶

Besides Ukraine's foreign relations, Poroshenko's handling of the Eastern Ukrainian conflict has become another major source of contention with Russia. After his election to the presidency, Kiev's offensive in Eastern Ukraine was renewed with greater force and resolve to crush the rebels among the Russian-speaking population. The human toll boosted with huge damage to residential housing and infrastructure, while hundreds of thousands of civilians took refuge, most of them in Russia.¹⁰⁶⁷ The civil war in Ukraine was intervened by the Russian army, therefore, two states fell into a de facto military conflict with each other.

Russia's Involvement into the Ukrainian Civil War

The Ukraine crisis resulted not only in Russia's annexation of Crimea but also sparked a civil war in Eastern Ukraine which led to the further disintegration of the country. The success of the 'Western uprising' against the Yanukovych leadership provoked an 'Eastern uprising' in the Donbass region against the new government in Kiev. Pro-Russian activists in Eastern Ukraine began forming their own militia groups, arming themselves, seizing government buildings, and taking over towns.¹⁰⁶⁸ In April 2014, local leaders proclaimed two republics in Donetsk and Luhansk and proceed to organize referendums in order to secede from Ukraine. In the early stages of the conflict, Russia did not actively intervene in Eastern Ukraine and therefore the events unfolded mostly out of its control.¹⁰⁶⁹ In addition to that, Russia's policies towards the ethnic conflict in Eastern Ukraine notably diverged from its approach towards Crimea. Before the referendums were held on May 11, Vladimir Putin urged the self-declared

¹⁰⁶⁶ See "Poroshenko: Ukraine Seeking NATO Membership Action Plan," RFE/FL, March 10, 2018, <https://www.rferl.org/a/nato-ukraine-poroshenko-membership-action-plan/29090212.html> (15.07.2019); and "Membership Action Plan (MAP)," February 18, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natolive/topics_37356.htm (15.07.2019).

¹⁰⁶⁷ Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 22.

¹⁰⁶⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 20; Kimitaka Matsuzato, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock," *Demokratizatsiya: The Journal of Post-Soviet Democratization*, Vol. 25, No. 2, 2017, pp. 188-190, ; Trenin, "Ukraine and the New Divide," p. 4.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Paul Robinson, "Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security," *European Politics and Society*, Vol. 17, No. 4, 2016, p. 511.

republics to put off the voting for secession and wait until the presidential elections which would establish a legitimate authority in Kiev to negotiate with for a political solution in Eastern Ukraine. Accordingly, the Kremlin did not recognize the results of the referendums in favor of independence and continued to emphasize that the people of Donbass are Ukrainian citizens.¹⁰⁷⁰ Such policies by Moscow revealed the fact that Russia has been interested in maintaining the ethnic Russian population in Donbass within a restored Ukraine rather than incorporating this region into its territory.¹⁰⁷¹

At the same time, however, Moscow warned that Russia would not remain idly if Kiev's military operations into Donbass would result in a significant loss of life.¹⁰⁷² On April 13, 2014, the Ukrainians army launched its so-called 'anti-terrorist' operation against the separatist insurgency.¹⁰⁷³ The fighting intensified in July and August when Kiev advanced closer to Donetsk and Luhansk. This led to a substantial deterioration of the humanitarian situation in Eastern Ukraine.¹⁰⁷⁴ Russia responded by increasing its support to the rebels through supplying weapons, transferring 'volunteer fighters,' training and supervising militias, etc. In August 2014, finally, military units of the Russian army, as well as Russian T-72 tanks, appeared in Eastern Ukraine. This transformed the Donbass conflict drastically from the previous 'art of limited war' to a more typical military intervention by Russia.¹⁰⁷⁵ While preventing an outright Ukrainian victory over the separatist regions, Putin and other Russian officials continued to advocate a political solution through the 'federalization' of the country which would to grant political and cultural autonomy to the Donbass region. In this

¹⁰⁷⁰ Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," pp. 21-22; Robinson, "Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security," pp. 509-510. As a result, the second round of referendums about joining the Russian Federation which had been scheduled for May 18 was cancelled by the authorities of self-declared republics. Nikolaus von Twickel, "Russia and the 'People's Republics' in Eastern Ukraine," Russian Analytical Digest, No. 214, February 28, 2018, p. 2. Retrieved from: <https://www.research-collection.ethz.ch/handle/20.500.11850/321601> (05.05.2019).

¹⁰⁷¹ See Matsuzato, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock," p. 199; and Andrew S. Bowen, "Coercive Diplomacy and the Donbas: Explaining Russian Strategy in Eastern Ukraine," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 42, No. 3-4, 2019, p. 334.

¹⁰⁷² Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 22.

¹⁰⁷³ As Wilson suggests, the new government in Kiev employed a too broad definition for 'terrorist' and used the term as synonym of 'separatist' covering anyone who might have waved a flag or thrown a stone. Andrew Wilson, *Ukraine Crisis: What It Means for the West*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2014, p. 136.

¹⁰⁷⁴ Robinson, "Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security," p. 513.

¹⁰⁷⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 511-514; Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's 'New Way of War'?", pp. 285-286; and Matsuzato, "The Donbass War: Outbreak and Deadlock," p. 176. For a detailed report about Russian military involvement and troop deployments in Eastern Ukraine, see Igor Sutyagin, "Russian Forces in Ukraine," Briefing Paper, Royal United Services Institute, March 2015. Retrieved from: <https://rusi.org/publication/briefing-papers/russian-forces-ukraine> (05.05.2019).

respect, Russia mainly aimed at coercing Kiev to start direct negotiations with local authorities in Donbass which was seen as the only way by Moscow to promote such a 'deep settlement'.¹⁰⁷⁶ Finally, Russia supported the multilateral Minsk peace process assisted by OSCE which promoted two ceasefire agreements in September 2014 and February 2015.¹⁰⁷⁷

There are some Western analysts arguing that Moscow's actions in Ukraine reveal Russia's massive revisionist agenda which may extend towards other Eastern European countries if the Donbass war could not be contained. According to this view, Russia seeks 'territorial expansion', 'reorganization of European security along new lines', and even 'revising the existing international system' by 'rewriting the rules' of international relations.¹⁰⁷⁸ However, Russia's policies towards the Donbass conflict since April 2014 demonstrate that the Kremlin has followed much more limited objectives with regard to Ukraine's future. After the defeat of the Ukrainian army in late-August, there was nothing to prevent the insurgents from continuing their advance. Instead of encouraging separatists to keep going, Russia forced their leaders to sign Minsk agreements. In this respect, Paul Robinson concludes that:¹⁰⁷⁹

"If Russia's intent had been to ... seize additional Ukrainian territory or reshape the international order in some fundamental way, its behavior at this point makes no sense ... The only explanation for the Russians' actions is that their objectives were very different – to bring the war to an end, by ensuring that the Ukrainian government agreed to speak to the rebels and provided Donbass with some degree of autonomy."

Since the ceasefire in 2015, Kiev has not accepted to negotiate with separatist leaders for a political solution on the basis of the 'federalization' of Ukraine. On the other side, Russia has not backed down from its position but continued to provide

¹⁰⁷⁶ See Robinson, "Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security," pp. 509-510, 517; Bowen, "Coercive Diplomacy and the Donbas: Explaining Russian Strategy in Eastern Ukraine," pp. 330, 334; and Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 22.

¹⁰⁷⁷ The first ceasefire agreement was reached on September 5, 2014, at the Minsk meeting of the trilateral contact group consisting of the representatives of Russia, Ukraine and the OSCE. The Minsk II ceasefire agreement was promoted on February 12, 2015, by the leaders of the so-called Normandy Four i.e. France, Germany, Russia and Ukraine. Although these agreements ensured a relative stability in the conflict area, they could not prevent serious escalations which led to thousands of civilian and battle-related deaths. See Klimenko, "Protracted Armed Conflicts in the Post-Soviet Space and Their Impact on Black Sea Security," pp. 16-18.

¹⁰⁷⁸ For a review of such arguments see Robinson, "Russia's Role in the War in Donbass, and the Threat to European Security," pp. 506-507.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 514.

military support to the breakaway entities in Eastern Ukraine. If this deadlock continues, Donbass could evolve into another example of ‘frozen conflict’ in the post-Soviet space -characterized by the emergence of a de facto independent state whose survival largely depends on Russian military presence and economic support.¹⁰⁸⁰ The 2019 Ukrainian presidential elections, in fact, aroused some hopes for the restoration of political relations between Russia and Ukraine which could facilitate the resolution of the Donbass conflict. In the second round of elections on April 21, Volodymyr Zelensky, a young newcomer politician, won a large victory (73.2 percent) over Petro Poroshenko. As his political rhetoric towards Russia was more moderate than that of his predecessor, Zelensky was widely supported by Russian-speaking voters in central and eastern Ukraine. Before the elections, furthermore, he campaigned for direct talks with Russia which he saw necessary to proceed in conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine.¹⁰⁸¹ After coming to power, Zelensky also offered internationally mediated meetings with the Russian President and made an official phone call to Putin on July 12, 2019.¹⁰⁸² The new President still unambiguously denounces the Kremlin’s foreign policy and rejects any direct dialogue with the separatists in Donbas. In addition, the current political atmosphere in Ukraine and the setting of the Ukrainian parliament

¹⁰⁸⁰ Scholars even discuss whether Russia’s objective towards the Eastern Ukraine crisis fall short of creating an unsettled ‘frozen conflict’ such as the Abkhazia and Transnistria conflicts. According to Andrew Bowen, a ‘frozen conflict’ would be detrimental to Russian interests “*by saddling it with an economically depressed region – on top of Crimea – along with failing to achieve its original goal of institutionalizing a mechanism of influence inside Ukraine.*” Bowen, “Coercive Diplomacy and the Donbas: Explaining Russian Strategy in Eastern Ukraine,” p. 334. Considering that Russian speaking population in Donbass played a central role in Yanukovich’s electoral victory in 2010, isolating those people from Ukrainian domestic politics might have self-defeating results for Russia. See Dreyfus and Vilmer, “A People-Oriented Peace Formula for the Donbass,” p. 123. Twickel, on the other side, asserts that maintaining a de facto state in Donbass would not only increase the standoff between Russia and the West but also put a serious economic burden on the Russian Federation. Both breakaway ‘republics’ in Donbass are significantly more populous than other de facto states in the post-Soviet region, “*the biggest of whom, Transnistria, has a population of less than half a million. Luhansk and Donetsk are believed to have between 2.5 and 3 million inhabitants.*” Twickel, “Russia and the “People’s Republics” in Eastern Ukraine,” p. 4.

¹⁰⁸¹ See Dreyfus and Vilmer, “A People-Oriented Peace Formula for the Donbass,” p. 115; and Vladimir Ryzhkov, “Russia and the European Union: Crisis and Prospects,” *Survival*, Vol. 61, No. 3, 2019, p. 143.

¹⁰⁸² See “Ukraine's President Says Ready to Meet Russia's Putin in Minsk,” Reuters, July 8, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-ukraine-russia/ukraines-president-says-ready-to-meet-russias-putin-in-minsk-idUSKCN1U310I> (16.07.2019); and Charles Maynes, “Russian, Ukrainian Leaders Talk at Last,” Voice of America, July 12, 2019, <https://www.voanews.com/europe/russian-ukrainian-leaders-talk-last-0> (16.07.2019).

would possibly to play constraining factors for Zelensky in future meeting and initiatives in the conflict resolution process.¹⁰⁸³

Through its involvement in the Donbass war, Russia has so far demonstrated its capability to maintain a 'controlled' and 'weaponized' chaos in eastern Ukraine.¹⁰⁸⁴ Accordingly, Moscow sent a message to Kiev that Russia could not let its neighbor join Euro-Atlantic political and security organizations even it would cost to 'wreck' Ukraine as a functioning state and economy.¹⁰⁸⁵ During the five-year-long period, the Donbass war took around 13.000 lives including more than 3.000 civilians, made nearly 1.5 million people displaced, led to the contraction of the Ukrainian economy by one-fifth and a severe deterioration of socio-economic conditions especially in the eastern regions of the country.¹⁰⁸⁶ Therefore, the costs of Russia's coercive strategy towards Ukraine pushing it to abandon its efforts to join NATO and the West have been tremendously higher compared to the other cases examined above. This has led to some paradoxical results underlining the handicaps of Russia's threatening and aggressive policies towards local balancers. With the annexation of Crimea and its intervention into the civil war, Russia has boosted nationalism and anti-Russianism in much of Ukraine in a fundamental way and pushed Kiev further towards the West. Scholars describe the situation as follows: 'Russia won Crimea but lost Ukraine.'¹⁰⁸⁷

When we look at the level of the geopolitical competition between the West and Russia, Moscow's approach towards the Ukraine crisis makes sense. The Kremlin seemed to achieve its main security objective – 'the strategic denial of Ukraine to

¹⁰⁸³ See "Ukraine not to Hold Dialogue with Separatists – Zelensky," Ukrinform, July 15, 2019, <https://www.ukrinform.net/rubric-politics/2723107-ukraine-not-to-hold-dialogue-with-separatists-zelensky.html> (16.07.2019); and Dreyfus and Vilmer, "A People-Oriented Peace Formula for the Donbass," p. 123.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Galeotti, "Hybrid, Ambiguous, and Non-Linear? How New is Russia's 'New Way of War'?", p. 285

¹⁰⁸⁵ Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West's Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," p. 82. See also Mearsheimer remarks on 'the causes and consequences of Ukraine crisis' at the lecture he delivered at MGIMO. "Visit of Professor John Mearsheimer to MGIMO," Lecture III, October 21, 2016, Moscow State Institute of International Relations, <https://mgimo.ru/about/news/main/mearsheimer-lectures/> (05.05.2019).

¹⁰⁸⁶ See "Death Toll Up To 13,000 In Ukraine Conflict, Says UN Rights Office," RFE/RL, February 26, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/death-toll-up-to-13-000-in-ukraine-conflict-says-un-rights-office/29791647.html> (05.05.2019); and Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 3.

¹⁰⁸⁷ See Mankoff, "Russia's Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine,"; Charap and Darden, "Russia and Ukraine," p. 12; Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," p. 1272.

NATO.’¹⁰⁸⁸ Considering Russia’s relations with Ukraine, however, Moscow’s handling of the Ukrainian crisis in the last five years served for Russia’s political, diplomatic economic and isolation from its neighbor.¹⁰⁸⁹ As noted in the previous chapter, Russia’s threat perceptions associates such a situation with adverse effects of NATO enlargement -but it seems that Russia itself has done much more to deteriorate bilateral relations with its neighbor than the Western powers and the Alliance. In addition, the Kremlin’s aggressive actions against Ukraine’s sovereignty and territorial integrity caused some fears among other local states including Russia’s regional allies. Such concerns might force them to question their alignment with Moscow and balance their relations with the West to decrease their dependence and vulnerability to Russia.¹⁰⁹⁰

In fact, the Ukraine crisis and Russia’s subsequent actions have had significant implications not only on regional politics in the CIS but also on international politics and the future of Russia’s great power status. First of all, in April 2014, NATO suspended all practical cooperation with Russia (including those taking place in the NATO-Russia Council) and boosted its military installations in Eastern Europe and Baltic states. Russia responded by increasing the quantity and readiness of its own forces around the areas involving the risk of conflict with NATO. Both sides began to organize threatening military exercises mobilizing their air and naval forces.¹⁰⁹¹ The rising tensions in Russian-Western relations led to the suspension of Russia’s membership to the G8 group. In addition, the process for Russia’s accession into the

¹⁰⁸⁸ **Ibid.**

¹⁰⁸⁹ For example, Russia-Ukraine trade volume has decreased more than two third following the 2014 crisis, although there has been a significant recovery in the recent years. See Nolan Peterson, “Long at War with each other, Ukraine and Russia Trade on” *Newsweek*, January 28, 2018, <https://www.newsweek.com/long-war-each-other-ukraine-and-russia-trade-793142> (06.05.2019); and “Russia Becomes Ukraine’s Biggest Trading Partner in 2017,” *The Moscow Times*, February 20, 2018, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2018/02/20/russia-becomes-ukraines-biggest-trading-partner-2017-a60573> (06.05.2019); In January 2019, Kiev announced that Ukraine has so far annulled 49 international agreements with Russia and it aimed to cancel other 50 treaties which had served as the basis of bilateral relations between two neighbors before 2014. In addition, Ukraine declared its wiliness to break diplomatic relations with Russia provided that a third country would bring its embassy into service to represent Ukrainian interest in Moscow. Paul Goble, “Ukraine Moving toward Breaking Diplomatic Relations With Russia – OpEd,” *Eurasiareview*, January 20, 2019, <https://www.eurasiareview.com/22012019-ukraine-moving-toward-breaking-diplomatic-relations-with-russia-oped/> (06.05.2019).

¹⁰⁹⁰ See Mankoff, “Russia’s Latest Land Grab: How Putin Won Crimea and Lost Ukraine,” p. 61; and Allison, “Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO,” pp. 330-331.

¹⁰⁹¹ See “NATO-Russia Council,” North Atlantic Treaty Organization, January 25, 2019, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_50091.htm (05.05.2019); and Plekhanov, “Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis,” p. 3.

Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) was put off.¹⁰⁹² Such developments posed challenges to Russia's efforts to build a 'multipolar' world in its own perspective and the Kremlin's aspirations for an 'equal' and 'indispensable' great power status. Last but not least, the US led its allies in imposing economic sanctions against Russian officials and companies -with potential impact on all sectors of the industry- which aimed at crippling the Russian economy thus forcing a foreign policy change.¹⁰⁹³ The Kremlin viewed those economic measurements as instruments to destabilize Russia as an important major power and undermine the public support to the government. Therefore, Western sanctions have also aggravated the Kremlin's concerns on regime security.¹⁰⁹⁴

Our examination of regional alignment formation in the CIS in this chapter shows that Russia plays a dominant role in regional military and security affairs. For the time being, Russia seems capable to block Western military encroachment further towards its borders relying on its own sources. However, this is only a part of the story. Resisting Western geopolitical expansionism and NATO enlargement is not enough to guarantee the maintenance of Russia's great power status and especially the transformation towards a 'multipolar' world order as defined in Moscow's terms. Russia needs the cooperation of other major powers to reach both goals –a fact underlined by global level consequences of the Ukraine crisis noted above. Enhancing a security cooperation with major powers like China and India could at least diminish possible threats from the East and therefore enable Moscow to confront the Western challenges in a more concentrated and effective way. Furthermore, promoting a security cooperation and dialog on Asian security would be an important step to transform international order towards a more multilateral one i.e. to Russia's liking. In this respect, the next chapter examines Russian alignment strategies beyond the post-Soviet area focusing primarily on Russia's security cooperation with the members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

¹⁰⁹² Trenin, "Ukraine and the New Divide," p. 4.

¹⁰⁹³ Both Trenin and Plekhanov put it explicitly that those sanctions aim at undermining the Putin regime in Russia. *Ibid.*, p. 4-5; Plekhanov, "Assisted Suicide: Internal and External Causes of the Ukrainian Crisis," p. 3.

¹⁰⁹⁴ For an analysis on the sanctions' effects on the Russian economy and Putin's handling of domestic situation see Christopher Patane and Cooper Drury, "Russia Plays the (Triangular) Sanctions Game," Vicki L. Birchfield and Alasdair R. Young (ed.), **Triangular Diplomacy among the United States, the European Union, and the Russian Federation: Responses to the Crisis in Ukraine**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

CHAPTER TWO – SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION AND RUSSIA’S RELATIONS WITH OTHER ASIAN STATES: THE SOFT BALANCING DIMENSION

China and Russia are not creating any military blocs... We have no bloc mentality stereotypes. We have been doing our utmost, and, as far as I understand, with success, to think globally, to share responsibility and to achieve mutually acceptable solutions and compromises... We have always looked for solutions to be achieved through a negotiating process.

Vladimir Putin, President of the Russian Federation¹⁰⁹⁵

I. Main Functions of the SCO and its Contributions to Multilateralism in International Security

This section examines international and regional security cooperation within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with reference to our theoretical framework. It starts by examining the historical development of the organization and its structure. After linking the security cooperation in the SCO to our alignment typology and soft balancing theory, we put forward how the organization contributes to Russia’s main strategic objectives, namely preserving its special great power interests in its near abroad and the transformation of international order towards a more multilateral one. The chapter goes on elaborating Russia’s security cooperation with the SCO members from the outside of the post-Soviet region and Iran as an observer state with strong aspirations to join the organization.

A. From the Shanghai Five to the SCO: Development of the Organization

Russian leaders’ initiatives to diminish the possibility of conflicts in the country’s southern and eastern neighborhoods can be traced back to the last years of the Cold War period. As examined in the historical background, mutual threat

¹⁰⁹⁵ “Russia, China do not Create Military Blocs — Putin,” TASS, June 19, 2015, <https://tass.com/russia/802428> (10.10.2019).

perceptions and border conflicts between major powers in Asia (i.e. Russia, China, and India) have been a destabilizing factor in the region. The regional frictions have also fed the instability in Afghanistan, as the rival axes supported different groups in the civil war following the Soviet intervention in 1979. Under these conditions, Gorbachev openly advocated in his 1986 Vladivostok speech that Moscow, Beijing and New Delhi should come together in closer cooperation against the US efforts to ‘militarize’ Asia as an offshore power which strategically utilized the regional rivalry between these actors.¹⁰⁹⁶ In the early aftermath of the Cold War, China adopted a ‘good neighbor’ policy which “*aimed at ensuring friendly relations with, and stability within the states on its borders.*”¹⁰⁹⁷ This enabled Moscow and Beijing to make a fresh start in their bilateral relations and opened the way for security cooperation on the border areas which finally evolved into a multilateral institution called the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, the border problems between China and its neighbors became much more complicated, as there emerged three newly independent states on China’s northwestern borders i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.¹⁰⁹⁸ China recognized that Russia can facilitate the resolution of border disputes as it was still an influential actor in Central Asia, therefore supported Moscow’s participation in the process.¹⁰⁹⁹ In the early 1990s, the Shanghai mechanism was created including all these five states in order to resolve border disputes. By 1995, most of the border issues were settled through negotiations. In April 1996, these states signed ‘the Shanghai Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Area’ which aimed at avoiding conflict among themselves. This formally

¹⁰⁹⁶ Garver, "The Indian Factor in Recent Sino-Soviet Relations," p. 84-85.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Stephen Aris, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," Mapping Multilateralism in Transition, No. 2, International Peace Institute, December, 2013, p. 1. Retrieved from: https://www.ipinst.org/wp-content/uploads/publications/ipi_e_pub_shanghai_cooperation.pdf (17.06.2019). See also Weiqing Song, "Interests, Power and China’s Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," **Journal of Contemporary China**, Vol. 23, No. 85, 2014, pp. 87-88.

¹⁰⁹⁸ In fact, Sino-Soviet negotiations on border demarcation started in 1987 following China’s welcoming of Gorbachev’s Vladivostok Speech quoted above. The two sides reached an agreement in May 1991 before the dissolution of the USSR. Jing-dong Yuan, "Sino-Russian Confidence-Building Measures: A Preliminary Analysis," **Asian Perspective**, Vol., 1998, p. 77; and James Clay Moltz, "Regional Tensions in the Russo-Chinese Rapprochement," **Asian Survey**, Vol. 35, No. 6, 1995, p. 516.

¹⁰⁹⁹ Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 17, May 2007, p. 31. Retrieved from: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRI17.pdf> (17.06.2019); Stephen Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011, p. 3.

marked the establishment of the Shanghai Five.¹¹⁰⁰ After managing to ease state-to-state tensions through the creation of new channels, these five states were able to focus on positive cooperation against common threats and challenges to regional security and stability. Therefore the Shanghai Five broadened its agenda to foster cooperation in combatting against the so-called ‘three evils’ -terrorism, separatism, and extremism- which spread throughout the region after the dissolution of the Soviet Union.¹¹⁰¹

The June 2001 Shanghai Summit formally declared both the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Tashkent’s joining in this structure as a new member. Therefore, the SCO included six founding members i.e. Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.¹¹⁰² The Declaration on the Establishment of the SCO identified the main goals of the organization including “*strengthening mutual trust, friendship and good neighborliness between the member states; encouraging effective cooperation between them in the political, trade, economic, scientific ... and other fields.*”¹¹⁰³ It also referenced to the 2001 Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism signed by the members and called them to implement this agreement “*through the establishment of a regional anti-terrorist structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization with headquarters located in Bishkek.*”¹¹⁰⁴ Accordingly, the SCO urged its members to develop multilateral documents to fight against arms and drug trafficking, illegal migration and other types of criminal activity with transitional nature.¹¹⁰⁵

While the organization mainly focused on security cooperation against non-traditional threats in its region, the SCO Charter adopted in June 2002 also underlined some basic principles of with regard to interstate relations on the basis of international

¹¹⁰⁰ See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 90; Ishtiaq Ahmad, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization: China, Russia, and Regionalism in Central Asia," Howard Loewen and Anja Zorob (ed.), **Initiatives of Regional Integration in Asia in Comparative Perspective: Concepts, Concerns and Prospects**, Dordrecht: Springer, 2018, pp. 119-121; Alyson J. K. Bailes and Pál Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," The Shanghai Cooperation Organization, SIPRI Policy Paper No. 17, May 2007, p. 4. Retrieved from: <https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIPP17.pdf> (17.06.2019).

¹¹⁰¹ See *ibid*, p. 21; and Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’," p. 208.

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*; Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p. 119.

¹¹⁰³ Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 15, 2001, <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/193054/> (17.06.2019).

¹¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.* See the Shanghai Convention on Combating Terrorism, Separatism and Extremism, June 15, 2001, <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/202907/> (17.06.2019).

¹¹⁰⁵ Declaration on the Establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

law such as ‘the sovereign equality of states’ and ‘the rejection of hegemony and coercion in international affairs’¹¹⁰⁶ Accordingly, the SCO declares that the members will adhere the norms and principles of respecting “*each other's independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity, non-interference in each other's internal affairs ... settlement of all questions through consultations*” and carrying “*out all forms of dialogues, exchanges and cooperation with other countries and relevant international or regional organizations.*”¹¹⁰⁷ The 2006 Shanghai Summit also declared that the SCO members will have ‘immediate consultation’ in case of an emergency threatening regional peace, stability, and security in order to effectively respond “*to the emergency to fully protect the interests of the SCO and the member states.*”¹¹⁰⁸ As noted in the First Chapter of Part One, this commitment enables us to classify the SCO as a consultation pact (i.e., entente) which involves some sort of interstate security cooperation but falls short of a formal alliance.

In the early stages of the organization’s development, the members have not actively interested in the SCO’s enlargement towards new states. In the 2010 Tashkent Summit, however, the SCO approved formal documents which codified procedures for accepting new members to the organization.¹¹⁰⁹ According to these regulations, the SCO membership is open for other countries that accept the purposes and principles of its Charter provided that they ‘belong to the Euro-Asian region’ and ‘have the status of the SCO observer or dialogue partner.’ In addition to that aspirant states’ “*international commitments of in the field of security should not be contrary to the relevant international treaties and other instruments adopted within the SCO.*”¹¹¹⁰ In 2017, the Astana summit announced ‘the historical nature’ of the first SCO enlargement towards India and Pakistan and transformed the observer status of both states into full membership.¹¹¹¹ On the other side, the SCO invented another mechanism called as ‘dialog partners’ to accommodate request by outsider states with

¹¹⁰⁶ Bailes and Dunay, “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution,” p. 6.

¹¹⁰⁷ “Shanghai Cooperation Organization Secretariat Founded in Beijing,” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People’s Republic of China, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/sco_665908/t57970.shtml (19.06.2019).

¹¹⁰⁸ See “Full Text of the Declaration on 5th Anniversary of the SCO”.

¹¹⁰⁹ Song, “Interests, Power and China’s Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO),” p. 100.

¹¹¹⁰ For all the criteria and conditions see Regulation on Admission of New Members to Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 11, 2010, <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/199125/> (20.06.2019).

¹¹¹¹ The Astana Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, June 9, 2017, <http://eng.sectesco.org/load/297146/> (17.06.2019).

an interest in future membership to the SCO or cooperation in specific policy areas.¹¹¹² Currently, the SCO involves four observer states including Iran and Afghanistan as well as six other states as dialog partners.¹¹¹³ The SCO's expanding focus and area of membership in the last two decades were accompanied by a developing legal and institutional framework and an intensified security cooperation among the member countries. Below we outline the evolution of the SCO with regard to both aspects.

The Organizational Framework

The SCO represents an intergovernmental institution where the members do not cede sovereignty to any structure within the organization. Article 17 of its Charter suggests that “[t]he decisions taken by the SCO bodies shall be implemented by the Member States in accordance with the procedures set out in their national legislation.”¹¹¹⁴ The SCO mainly works through the organization of regular meetings among high-level representatives of member states, which constitutes an integral part of discussions, decision and policy making within the organization.¹¹¹⁵ The supreme body of the SCO is the ‘Council of Heads of States’ which organizes regular meetings among the presidents once a year in order to identify priorities and major areas of activities of the organization. The Council also evaluates the most significant international issues and makes decisions on the SCO's interaction with third parties including other states and international organizations.¹¹¹⁶ There are other intergovernmental platforms holding regular meetings in the SCO such as ‘the Council of Heads of Government’ (i.e. prime ministers) and ‘the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs.’ The former deals with major issues especially related to economic interactions as the responsible body for the approval of the organization's budget. On the other side, the latter considers issues related to routine activities of the organization

¹¹¹² See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 100.

¹¹¹³ The SCO's observer members are listed as Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia. The organization has also six dialogue partners, namely Azerbaijan, Armenia, Cambodia, Nepal, Turkey, and Sri Lanka. "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," The SCO Website, January 9, 2017, http://eng.sectsc.org/about_sco/ (20.06.2019).

¹¹¹⁴ Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 7, 2002, <http://eng.sectsc.org/load/203013/> (17.06.2019). This even covers decisions on whether to participate in joint military exercises that are represented as the most highly acclaimed achievement of the SCO. Participation in military exercises are based on the principle of voluntariness. Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 95.

¹¹¹⁵ Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, pp. 20-21.

¹¹¹⁶ See "Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," The SCO Website, June 9, 2017, <http://eng.sectsc.org/structure/> (18.06.2019); and Aris, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, pp. 2-4

and makes preparation for meetings of the Council of Heads of States (i.e., the SCO summits). The Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs also holds consultations on international issues concerning the members and the organization.¹¹¹⁷

Besides these intergovernmental platforms, the SCO established two permanently functioning bodies within its organizational structure in 2004. Those are the SCO Secretariat in Beijing and the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS) based in Tashkent. As a result, the SCO was transformed into a fully developed regional institution which is able “*to handle everyday affairs and respond to emergency issues.*”¹¹¹⁸ While the Secretariat deals with “*preparing draft documents, making suggestions, implementing resolutions, and exercising budgetary supervision for the organization*”, RATS is responsible for collecting and sharing information and intelligence about terrorist groups operating in the member states of the SCO.¹¹¹⁹ In addition, it monitors the anti-terrorist struggle of individual members, studies different forms of terrorism and makes researches for new methods and approaches to fight against international terrorism.¹¹²⁰

The decision making processes in all these bodies are implemented through informal discussions with the aim of reaching consensus.¹¹²¹ The SCO Charter suggests that “*[t]he SCO bodies shall take decisions by agreement without vote and their decisions shall be considered adopted if no member State has raised objections during its consideration (consensus).*”¹¹²² So all the members including major powers and even the smallest member state have the same formal right of veto which can be used against the adoption of a specific decision or program within the SCO. This is suggested as the best for the SCO which allows it to function without threatening national sovereignty, as the members are generally reluctant to cede any control over

¹¹¹⁷ See Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, pp. 20-23; and “Structure of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation”. For the two remaining intergovernmental platforms i.e. ‘The Council of National Coordinators’ and ‘Meetings of Heads of Ministries and/or Agencies’ see *ibid.*

¹¹¹⁸ See Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, p. 21.

¹¹¹⁹ Chien Peng Chung, “China and the Institutionalization of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” **Problems of Post-Communism**, Vol. 53, No. 5, 2006, pp. 5-7.

¹¹²⁰ Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p. 123.

¹¹²¹ Aris, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, p. 2.

¹¹²² There is an exception “*for the decisions on suspension of membership or expulsion from the Organization that shall be taken by "consensus minus one vote of the member State concerned."*” Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

their domestic affairs.¹¹²³ Although this brings about a slow and problematic decision-making process, the SCO members have so far achieved expanding their cooperation based on common interests in different areas beyond security such as economy, energy, culture, and education.¹¹²⁴ Regarding the parameters of this study and our definition of alignment, below we focus on security cooperation within the organization and its theoretical implications.

Regional Security Cooperation within the SCO

The SCO as the successor of the Shanghai Five was established as a regional institution for cooperation in non-traditional security issues.¹¹²⁵ Within a decade, the SCO has achieved to establish an institutionalized cooperation and cohesion among its members in their struggle against non-state threats entitled as ‘three evils’; terrorism, separatism, and extremism.¹¹²⁶ Common threat perceptions from these three challenges feeding each other have been the primary catalysts for the security cooperation among the members. China has long been concerned about Uyghur extremism and separatism in Xinjiang, while Russia has faced a similar challenge in Chechnya and the wider North Caucasus. In Central Asia, as examined earlier, Uzbekistan has been challenged by the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Tajik government has fought Muslim militant groups in the 1990s. All these states are troubled by Islamist extremism spilling over from Afghanistan – a principle

¹¹²³ See Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, pp. 26, 48; and Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," p. 195.

¹¹²⁴ Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 93. For the SCO activities and cooperation on economy, trade, education, science, and culture see S.G. Luzyanin et al., "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," Russian International Affairs Council, Working Paper, 21/2015, pp. 14-30. Although economic cooperation falls beyond the focus of this study, it is important to reiterate here that Robert Pape suggests that 'economic strengthening' through selective cooperation with a group of states might lead long-term changes in economic and consequently military balance throughout the system. Thus it is suggested as a component of soft balancing tactics. Pape, "Soft Balancing against the United States," p. 37. For Russia under sanctions by the West, the economic cooperation with the SCO members is especially valuable as it generates significant exchange, finance, trade, investment and other sources which are all crucial for Russia's economic survival and well-being. See Luzyanin et al., "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 6.

¹¹²⁵ See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 93; and Jianwei Wang, "China and SCO: Towards a New Type of Interstate Relations," Guoguang Wu and Helen Lunsdowne (ed.), **China Turns to Multilateralism: Foreign Policy and Regional Security**, New York: Routledge, 2008, p. 110.

¹¹²⁶ See Ahmad, **op.cit.**, p. 120.

common security concern as an important base of terrorist movements in the region.¹¹²⁷

The primary engine of the SCO's joint action against international terrorism has been the Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure (RATS). Although it has been designed to carry out 'analytical work' on terrorism, the activities of RATS have extended into operational areas such as planning a shared databank on terrorist organizations including *"their structures, leaders, members, operational channels and financial resources; contributing to command and tactical-operational training and helping to draft international legal documents concerning the fight against terrorism."*¹¹²⁸ At the RATS Council meeting in April 2006, the SCO members agreed on a list of prohibited terrorist, separatist and extremist organizations operating in its area of membership.¹¹²⁹ According to the former Secretary-General of SCO, during the 2011-2015 period, the RATS coordination mechanisms helped to prevent 20 terrorist attacks in the planning process, averted 650 crimes with terrorist and extremist nature and neutralized 440 terrorist training camps along with 1700 members of transnational terrorist groups.¹¹³⁰

At the 2017 Astana Summit, the SCO member states signed an updated Convention on Countering Extremism which also included measures against the spread of extremist ideology and crimes through the internet. Therefore, they enforced their cooperation on information security.¹¹³¹ The accession of India and Pakistan into the SCO in the same year is expected to contribute to the organization's counterterrorism agenda and efforts, given the experience of both countries on

¹¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 123; Stephen Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, 13; Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 91.

¹¹²⁸ Bailes and Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," p. 24.

¹¹²⁹ See Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," pp. 38-39.

¹¹³⁰ Rashid Alimov, "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security," UN Chronicle, Vol. 54, No: 3, 2017, p. 35. Retrieved from: https://www.un-ilibrary.org/the-role-of-the-shanghai-cooperation-organization-in-counteracting-threats-to-peace-and-security_27ed566d-en.pdf?itemId=%2Fcontent%2Fpaper%2F27ed566d-en&mimeType=pdf (19.06.2019). The Author served as the Secretary General of SCO between 2016 and December 31, 2018.

¹¹³¹ See "SCO Secretary-General: The Convention on Countering Extremism is the SCO's Common Response to this Growing Threat," The SCO Website, June 13, 2017 <http://eng.sectsco.org/news/20170613/295928.html> (19.06.2019). For the links between cooperation on the information space and the members' concerns on their regime security see Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 319-320.

combatting terrorism and extremism as well as their interests on regional stability.¹¹³² However, it is still early to draw definitive conclusions about how they will contribute to the SCO's various agendas including the cooperation on counterterrorism.¹¹³³ India's and Pakistan's positions in the SCO and their possible contributions to the future development of the organization are discussed mainly in the third section of this chapter which examines Russia's security cooperation with both actors.

In the last two decades, the SCO's cooperation against non-traditional security threats has not only covered the three evils but also expanded to include all kinds of transnational threats such as organized crime, illicit arms, human and drug trafficking.¹¹³⁴ The SCO carries out special anti-drug operations in its region which have so far managed to seize tons of heroin and precursory material used for the production of narcotics.¹¹³⁵ The chief source of all those kinds of transnational threats and regional instability has been Afghanistan since the start of the civil war between the Northern Coalition and the Taliban. Therefore, the SCO has consistently supported a rapid settlement to the Afghanistan problem and consolidation of this country as a sovereign, secure, peaceful and neutral state.¹¹³⁶ In 2005, the SCO established the SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group as the main channel for dialogue and cooperation in order to deal with the problems of terrorism, organized crime, and drug trafficking. Later in 2012, Afghanistan was accepted as an observer member of the SCO.¹¹³⁷

¹¹³² See Luzyanin et al., "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 6; and Zahid S. Ahmed, Sarfraz Ahmed, and Stuti Bhatnagar, "Conflict or Cooperation? India and Pakistan in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation," *Pacific Focus*, Vol. 34, No. 1, 2019, pp. 16, 21.

¹¹³³ See *ibid.* p. 8.

¹¹³⁴ See Kuralai I. Baizakova, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Role in Countering Threats and Challenges to Central Asian Regional Security," *Russian Politics & Law*, Vol. 51, No. 1, 2013, p. 70; and Alimov, "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security," p. 35; and "SCO focuses on international terrorism and extremism. Prosecutors General meet in Dushanbe," The SCO Website, September 21, 2018, <http://eng.sectsco.org/news/20180921/469152.html> (19.06.2019).

¹¹³⁵ According to Rashid Alimov, between 2012 and 2017, those operations seized 69 tons of 'deadly heroin' from traffickers, which accounted roughly for 14 percent of confiscated drugs worldwide. In addition SCO members' collaboration among their law enforcement bodies helped to the seizure of 75 tons of precursors, which proved the effectiveness of joint efforts in this area. See Alimov, "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security," p. 36.

¹¹³⁶ Baizakova, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Role in Countering Threats and Challenges to Central Asian Regional Security," pp. 61, 69-70.

¹¹³⁷ For more details see João A. da Silva Reis and Guilherme H. Simionato, "The SCO and Post-War Afghanistan: New Challenges to Regional Cooperation," *UFRGS Model United Nations Journal*, Vol. 2013, No. 1, 2013, p. 149; and Betty Lalrinfel and Anurag Tripathi, "Afghanistan and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Prospects for Membership," *International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews*, Vol. 5, No. 4, 2018, p. 1117.

The SCO members are concerned with the stability in Afghanistan in the aftermath of the withdrawal of international coalition forces. As an international organization lacking an alliance structure and its own armed forces, there is not even a scant possibility that the SCO would directly take part in a military operation into Afghanistan. However, the SCO is expected to assume some burden for many problems that could arise in Afghanistan as a regional organization promoting security dialogue and coordination between the members sharing the same neighborhood. Besides the SCO members continue to sponsor social, infrastructural, and educational projects in Afghanistan which are crucial for the postwar reconstruction of the country.¹¹³⁸

The Role of International Factors and the US Challenge towards the Region

The evolution of security cooperation in the SCO puts forward the primary role of regional threats and security problems in decisions and initiatives taken by the members. However, there are some undeniable international factors that have also served as a catalyst for developing security cooperation. Almost immediately after the SCO's establishment in June 2001, the organization faced its first extra-regional challenge -the US military penetration into Afghanistan and Central Asia. From the beginning, China was worrisome about the US military bases in Central Asia as a rising great power and a would-be contender for superpower status. Beijing viewed the US military penetration towards its 'troubled' Western borders as a part of pre-emptive measures to countervail rising Chinese power and influence.¹¹³⁹ In this context, Beijing took the lead to support the consolidation of the SCO as a regional security institution involving Central Asian states. At the 2001 SCO Almaty Summit, the Chinese Premier Zhu Rongji called for further institutionalization of the new organization. He advocated drafting of an SCO charter and establishment of an anti-

¹¹³⁸ See Baizakova, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization's Role in Countering Threats and Challenges to Central Asian Regional Security," p. 70; and Reis and Simionato, "The SCO and Post-War Afghanistan: New Challenges to Regional Cooperation," p. 146.

¹¹³⁹ See Huasheng Zhao, "Central Asia in China's Diplomacy," Eugene Rumer, et al. (ed.), **Central Asia: Views from Washington, Moscow, and Beijing**, New York: Routledge, 2007, p. 149; Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," pp. 91-92; and Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 670.

terrorist center as soon as possible. As indicated by Weiqing Song, this move can be understood as China's 'strategic response to the impending US threat.'¹¹⁴⁰

Russia was rather comfortable with the US military presence in Central Asia in the early Putin years when the Kremlin was seeking an equal partnership status with the US to deal with international and transitional security threats. In the early years of the SCO, therefore, Russia showed a passive attitude towards security cooperation.¹¹⁴¹ Moscow was also suspicious of the Chinese objective to increase its influence in Russia's near abroad.¹¹⁴² At the same time, Central Asian states were reluctant to engage in active security cooperation in the SCO such as military exercises, as they were concerning on reactions of their Western partners. Towards the mid-2000s, however, 'color revolutions' in the CIS have prompted changes in Russia's and other post-Soviet states' attitudes to the SCO. Disturbed by the US democracy promotion strategy in the CIS and the Bush administration's unilateral policies in the larger international system, Russia became increasingly concerned with the American presence in the region and especially its military bases.¹¹⁴³ As Russia moved towards a common position with China on this issue, the security cooperation in the SCO framework began to gain momentum.¹¹⁴⁴ As Huasheng Zhao suggests, the American challenge might reduce the likelihood of competition between Moscow and China and induce them to unite against the US intrusion into their neighborhood.¹¹⁴⁵

There are significant indicators that the SCO was used as some sort of 'balancing' instrument against the US since the mid-2000s. In July 2005, Washington attempted to send its officials to attend the SCO Astana Summit and thus requested an observer status in the organization. Russia and China opposed this idea on the pretext that the US does not take place in the Eurasian region despite the lack of any

¹¹⁴⁰ **Ibid.**

¹¹⁴¹ Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 95.

¹¹⁴² This was also signaled by the CSTO's institutionalization shortly after the creation of the SCO. Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 672.

¹¹⁴³ See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 95; and Stephen Blank, "The Central Asian Dimension of Russo-Chinese Exercises," **Central Asian-Caucasus Analyst**, Vol. 21, No. 9, 2005, p. 6.

¹¹⁴⁴ See **ibid.**, p. 5-6 and Huasheng Zhao, "Central Asia in China's Diplomacy," p. 185.

¹¹⁴⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 185.

geographical criteria for membership in the SCO Charter at that time.¹¹⁴⁶ A year later, Iran ‘a primary critic of US policies’ was granted an observer status.¹¹⁴⁷ In addition to that, the main achievement of the 2005 Astana summit was the common declaration of the members calling the US-led coalition countries to “*set the final dates for their temporary use of those infrastructure installations and stationing of their troops on SCO member countries’ territories.*”¹¹⁴⁸

The Astana Resolution stimulated a quick response from the American side. Sean McCormack, the US State Department spokesperson, publicly declared that “*it was up to individual states, not the SCO, to determine their relationships with foreign troops.*”¹¹⁴⁹ Accordingly, the US Defense Secretary, Donald Rumsfeld, paid visits to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in July 2005 to seek support for the American position by convincing these states that it was in their best interest to continue to their cooperation with the United States.¹¹⁵⁰ As seen in its approach towards the CSTO, Washington disregarded the SCO’s role in regional security and sought to enhance bilateral security cooperation with regional states excluding other great power actors from this setting.¹¹⁵¹

At the same time, Russia-China cooperation within the framework of the SCO was further extended to the level of common military exercises –the most visible aspect of the organization’s security dimension. In fact, the first SCO exercise was organized between China and Kazakhstan in the autumn of 2003, which involved only moderate Russian participation with one company of troops.¹¹⁵² In August 2005, Russia and China co-organized their first military exercise called ‘Peace Mission’

¹¹⁴⁶ Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’," p. 210; and Song, "Interests, Power and China’s Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 100.

¹¹⁴⁷ Syed F. Hasnat and Zamurad Awan, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Platform for Regional Understanding: Its Economic, Political and Security Potential," *Perceptions*, Vol. 21, No. 1, 2016, p. 95.

¹¹⁴⁸ Vladimir Socor, "SCO Asks Washington to Set Date for Withdrawal of Forces," *Eurasia Daily Monitor*, Vol. 2, No. 130, July 6, 2015, <https://jamestown.org/program/sco-asks-washington-to-set-date-for-withdrawal-of-forces/> (20.06.2019); and Frost, "The Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and Russia's Strategic Goals in Central Asia," p. 97.

¹¹⁴⁹ Quoted in Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 673.

¹¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁵¹ Therefore, the SCO felt obliged to make a similar declaration four years later at the 2009 Yekaterinburg summit calling for the removal of external forces from the region. Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’," p. 211-212.

¹¹⁵² Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 31.

under the auspices of the SCO which was open only to observers of the members of the organization. It was supposedly labeled as an ‘anti-terrorist’ exercise aiming at settling a ‘terrorist conflict.’¹¹⁵³ However, the scale and scope of the exercise went beyond an anti-terrorist mission and reached the level of a large-scale conventional operation. The participating land, sea and air forces conducted long-range air-strikes using nuclear-capable ‘TU-22M’ bombers, neutralized anti-aircraft defenses and enforced naval blockades. Those were all more reminiscent of conventional Warsaw Pact exercises.¹¹⁵⁴ Given the fact that the exercise was held soon after the Astana Summit calling the US withdrawal from Central Asia, “*the signals it conveyed about Chinese–Russian capacity and resolve were not aimed exclusively at potential non-state adversaries.*”¹¹⁵⁵

In the following years, the SCO member states have continued to hold large-scaled ‘Peace Mission’ exercises on a regular basis together with annual anti-drug trafficking exercises. The latter have contributed to Central Asian states’ capabilities to struggle against transnational threats.¹¹⁵⁶ The SCO has so far completed twenty-five anti-terrorism exercises including the ‘Peace Mission 2018’ which was organized in Russia and joined by all SCO members including India and Pakistan.¹¹⁵⁷ In the literature, scholars discuss the real motivations in enhancing security cooperation in the SCO marked with such military exercises. While some underline that the primary motivation for these military events is to combat terrorism, extremism, and separatism; others contend that the SCO has taken a geopolitical role against the US military expansionism towards the region. As suggested by Chaka Ferguson, however, these “*two missions need not be mutually exclusive.*”¹¹⁵⁸ Besides contributing counter-

¹¹⁵³ See Blank, "The Central Asian Dimension of Russo-Chinese Exercises," p. 5; and Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," pp. 672-673.

¹¹⁵⁴ Blank, "The Central Asian Dimension of Russo-Chinese Exercises," p. 5; Bailes and Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," p. 23.

¹¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

¹¹⁵⁶ See Ahmad, *op.cit.*, p. 123; and Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’," p. 212. For an update and detailed information about the SCO military exercises see Le Tian and Jia Jieqiong, "Infographic: A quick guide to SCO and its military cooperation," China Global Television Network, June 5, 2018, https://news.cgtn.com/news/3d3d414d7967444f77457a6333566d54/share_p.html (20.06.2019).

¹¹⁵⁷ See *ibid.*; and Huang Panyue, "SCO 'Peace Mission 2018' Anti-Terrorism Exercise Kicks off in Russia," Ministry of National Defense of the People's Republic of China, August 27, 2018, http://eng.mod.gov.cn/news/2018-08/27/content_4823426.htm (20.06.2019).

¹¹⁵⁸ Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese–Russian ‘Strategic Partnership’," p. 205.

terrorist practices in the region, the SCO military exercises have signaled to the world and especially the United States that Russia, China and other members of the organization have the determination and capability to combat regional terrorism and to achieve regional security altogether.¹¹⁵⁹ In this regard, the regional security cooperation within the SCO has also functioned to remove the causes on which the US legitimizes its military engagement to the region especially since the mid-2000s.

However, the SCO members stopped short to create a formal military alliance against an external actor seeking military power projections towards the region. The SCO has never identified itself as a traditional military alliance nor acted in practice as such an organization comparable to NATO or even the CSTO. The SCO declares that their cooperation does not target any other country, while the military exercises of the organization avoid making reference to the US or other external actors.¹¹⁶⁰ These facts enable us to classify the SCO security cooperation and ad hoc military exercises as ‘soft balancing’ initiatives which emerged under the co-leadership of Russia and China.

The developments examined above also show that the SCO members have followed some certain soft balancing strategies defined by Pape and examined in Part One, Chapter One. Through organizing large-scaled military exercises regularly, Russia and China have increased their trust in each other’s willingness to oppose the US unilateralism and ‘signaled of resolve to balance’ against the superpower’s future military ambitions. The security cooperation within the SCO has been conducted also at the diplomatic realm. The SCO member's concerns on regime security became influential in reaching the consensus for the Astana resolution calling for the withdrawal of the US forces from the region. However, it was the strong endorsement by Russia and China which made Central Asian states courageous enough to declare their position opposing the United States.¹¹⁶¹ In soft balancing terminology, the ‘entangling diplomacy’ conducted within the SCO framework vis-à-vis the US

¹¹⁵⁹ Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 672.

¹¹⁶⁰ See *ibid*; Bailes and Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," pp. 21-22; and Rashid Alimov, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its Role and Place in the Development of Eurasia," *Journal of Eurasian studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, 2018, p. 115.

¹¹⁶¹ Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 673.

supported the strategy of ‘territorial denial’ against American military forces in Central Asia.

In this respect, security cooperation in the SCO under Russian and Chinese leadership aimed at frustrating and undermining American unilateral policies in their neighborhood.¹¹⁶² However, Russia and China did not enter into open confrontation with Washington or seek to restore the global balance of power. As noted in Part One, Chapter One, this represents the core difference between soft balancing and hard balancing behavior by major powers.¹¹⁶³ Having underlined the links between the SCO’s security dimension and our theoretical framework, we can go further to investigate how the organization supports two main objectives of Russia’s alignment strategies; - namely ensuring Russia’s great power status together with its privileged interests in the near abroad and contributing transformation of the international system towards a ‘multipolar’ one as defined in Russian perspective.

B. The SCO and Russia’s Near Abroad: The Implications on Regional Security in Central Asia

One of the main arguments of this study is that Russia seeks to ensure an unrivaled great power role in the regional security of the post-Soviet area. Accordingly, Russia claims the main responsibility to stabilize the region –yet with regard to its own special and privileged interests. In this respect, we should investigate how Russia’s security cooperation with extra-regional actors through the SCO mechanism supports Russian strategic objectives. To what extent the involvement of China and other SCO members to the region through this setting could undermine Russia’s dominant role in the post-Soviet security affairs? The following pages consider the SCO’s impact on the security of Russia’s near abroad paying regard to cooperation and competition between the SCO and the CSTO –i.e. the Russian-led military alliance.

¹¹⁶² To quote Pape again, soft balancing refers to “*actions that do not directly challenge U.S. military preponderance but that use nonmilitary tools to delay, frustrate, and undermine aggressive unilateral U.S. military policies.*” Pape, “Soft Balancing against the United States,” p. 10. As we outlined in Part One, Chapter One, the Author defines four strategies of soft balancing followed vis-à-vis the unipole: (i) territorial denial, (ii) economic strengthening, (iii) entangling diplomacy, and (iv) signaling of resolve to balance. *Ibid.*, pp. 36-37

¹¹⁶³ See Walt, “Alliances in a Unipolar World,” p. 104.

First of all, since its early years, the SCO has played a positive and complementary role with the CSTO by supporting Russia's regional security objectives. In fact, the Kremlin sees the SCO regional agenda as highly relevant to what Russia considers as its regional security priorities. Therefore, Russia encourages security cooperation against 'three evils' within the organization.¹¹⁶⁴ Besides fighting against non-state threats to regional stability, ensuring the regime security of member states against various threats and challenges is one of the primary concerns of the SCO. All basic SCO documents, including its charter, emphasize the principle of 'non-interference' into internal affairs of the member states.¹¹⁶⁵ In the wake of 'color revolutions' between 2003 and 2005, the promotion of this principle by the SCO was viewed by Central Asian governments as a valuable tool to amplify their own voices at the global level.¹¹⁶⁶ The SCO also campaigns other relevant norms which are shared by Russia, such as 'sovereignty' and 'diversity' of cultures, civilizations, political and economic models.¹¹⁶⁷ In this respect, the SCO seems to adopt the alternative Russian doctrine of 'sovereign democracy' against the normative agenda the West based on democracy, liberalism and human rights.¹¹⁶⁸

Therefore, the SCO plays a complementary role with the CSTO in ensuring the regime security of the member states. As we argued for the CSTO, the SCO also promotes collective political solidarity among the member states by endorsing and legitimizing their domestic political practices and sustaining a sovereignty-focused normative framework at the international system level.¹¹⁶⁹ The most noteworthy examples of such a solidarity appeared at a time when the Uzbek government was under great pressure by the West in the wake of Andijan events in May 2005. The SCO officially identified those events as "*fighting against a terrorist plot*."¹¹⁷⁰ While Uzbekistan reoriented its foreign policy, Tashkent improved its relations not only with Russia but also with China which shares common threat perceptions on Islamist

¹¹⁶⁴ Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, p. 60.

¹¹⁶⁵ Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 37.

¹¹⁶⁶ Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, p. 31.

¹¹⁶⁷ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 311. See also Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," pp. 186-187.

¹¹⁶⁸ Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," p. 213.

¹¹⁶⁹ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 309.

¹¹⁷⁰ Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 95 (see also footnote 32).

opposition movements and the US military presence in the region.¹¹⁷¹ Another example of political solidarity on regime security has been the SCO's legitimization of electoral processes in the member states. Color revolutions in the CIS region have been followed by elections during which OSCE and Western NGOs have reported massive electoral fraud. As a response to Western criticism on that issue, the SCO created its own Election Observer Mission. Since 2004, the SCO Observers have published a series of reports endorsing that elections have been organized as 'free' and 'fair' in accordance with regulations of concerned states.¹¹⁷²

At this point, one could suggest that China's improving relations with Central Asian states through the SCO and its special support to regime security in the region may pose a challenge to Russia's regional influence. From the beginning, the SCO project has been developed largely as a Chinese initiative in which Beijing has played a leading role. Accordingly, it is argued that the benefits from this regional cooperation in Russia's traditional sphere of influence can be distributed unevenly with China increasing its involvement in Central Asia.¹¹⁷³ In fact, China's entry into the region through the SCO framework is also welcomed by Central Asian states, as Beijing plays a role to balance the Russian influence. As Marcel de Haas suggests, the co-existence of two major powers in the SCO has played a mitigating effect on Russia's and China's actions towards regional states in Central Asia. Both great powers can block each other's initiatives when one of them takes an action which is not approved by the other. According to Marcel de Haas, this ensures that neither Moscow nor Beijing would take an assertive and hegemonic stance against regional states.¹¹⁷⁴

¹¹⁷¹ See *Ibid.*; and Fumagalli, "Alignments and Realignments in Central Asia: The Rationale and Implications of Uzbekistan's Rapprochement with Russia," pp. 264-265.

¹¹⁷² See Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," pp. 213-215; and Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 312. Since 2004, the SCO has concluded 43 monitoring missions for presidential and general elections as well as referendums. Among those, six observer missions have taken place in the Russian Federation. Moscow also received the SCO's approval for its recent presidential elections organized on March 18, 2018. See "Statement by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Observer Mission on Monitoring the Preparations for and Holding of the 18 March 2018 Election of the President of the Russian Federation," The SCO Website, March 20, 2018, <http://eng.sectsco.org/news/20180320/400034.html> (20.07.2019).

¹¹⁷³ See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," pp. 86-87; and Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 668.

¹¹⁷⁴ De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 12.

In this respect, the SCO enables Central Asian states to diversify their relations and thus increase their autonomy in their foreign policy vis-à-vis Moscow. Yet, there is another fact that Russia does not assert hegemony over domestic and foreign policies of those regional states. Therefore Moscow cannot prevent China -a rising and proximate great power- from increasing its involvement into regional political, economic and security affairs. At this point, the SCO represents a useful multilateral framework to manage China's entry into Central Asia. On the one side, Russia uses the SCO to try to get multilateral support for its regional security objectives and its foreign policy in general, when the Kremlin could obtain Chinese support. On the other side, Russia takes any opportunity to thwart Chinese proposals in the SCO, which would increase the latter's regional reach to the extent that is not approved by Moscow.¹¹⁷⁵ The consensus-based decision making in the SCO provides Russia with a valuable veto power over Chinese regional initiatives.¹¹⁷⁶ Under these conditions, the SCO acts as a vehicle to incorporate Russian and Chinese interests in developing joint policies and actions to 'selected' security challenges in the region in particular ways confirmed by all the member states.¹¹⁷⁷

The formal military alliance ties between Russia and the CSTO members plays another factor to balance Chinese influence in regional security affairs. The CSTO was created in May 2002, shortly after the SCO's establishment.¹¹⁷⁸ The coexistence of these two organizations promoted a dichotomic security system in Central Asia where regional states consider the CSTO as their 'first option for security cooperation' and the SCO as more of a 'complementary mechanism'.¹¹⁷⁹ Since the early 2000s, Moscow has considered these two organizations as distinct tracks for developing its security relations with Central Asian states and China. While the CSTO has been designed as a traditional defense arrangement between Russia and small regional states, the SCO has renounced any prospective to promote military cooperation except intelligence sharing and limited joint exercises.¹¹⁸⁰ Therefore, the security cooperation in the SCO

¹¹⁷⁵ Joshua Kucera, "Russia "Increasingly Distrustful" Of SCO," Eurasianet, March 5, 2013, <https://eurasianet.org/russia-increasingly-distrustful-of-sco> (20.07.2019).

¹¹⁷⁶ See Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 12.

¹¹⁷⁷ See Allison, "Regionalism, Regional Structures and Security Management in Central Asia," p. 478.

¹¹⁷⁸ Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 672.

¹¹⁷⁹ See Luzyanin et al., "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 9; Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 94.

¹¹⁸⁰ Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 34.

against threats to regime security and regional stability generally takes place in the form of a political and diplomatic alignment. Holding its membership in both the core military alliance in Central Asia (the CSTO) and a multilateral regional security cooperation platform (the SCO), “*Russia benefits from the current situation in which Moscow can veto SCO actions whereas Beijing lacks the equivalent power to affect CSTO decisions.*”¹¹⁸¹

As examined in the previous chapter, since the early 2000s, Russia has increasingly invested into the military dimension of the CSTO by creating special armed forces (such as Collective Rapid Reaction Forces and peacekeeping troops), establishing military bases in the territory of member countries and providing significant amount arms to those regional states. The SCO, on the other side, has neither its own armed forces nor any military bases.¹¹⁸² Russian officials and experts have also emphasized that the SCO has no plan to create any multilateral military groups -or even police units- in the future.¹¹⁸³ Therefore the SCO has no potential for intervention into regional or domestic-level crises in Central Asia. This issue has been much blurred in the CSTO by different dynamics such as Russia’s dominance in this asymmetrical alliance, its operational control over the existing rapid deployment and peacekeeping forces and historical experiences of Russian intervention into the region.¹¹⁸⁴ The possible use of Chinese troops or armed units of another major power in intra-state crises within Central Asia, however, remains geopolitically and culturally too sensitive for any regional state and Russia to contemplate. Therefore, the SCO’s possible response to regional crises is bonded through ‘consultations.’¹¹⁸⁵

In addition to that, the SCO and the CSTO formally recognize each other with respect to their role and responsibilities in regional security affairs. Russia has long pressured China to establish formal cooperation mechanisms between these two organizations.¹¹⁸⁶ In October 2007, two institutions finally signed a Memorandum of

¹¹⁸¹ Weitz, "The CIS is Dead: Long Live the CSTO," p. 12.

¹¹⁸² Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," p. 191.

¹¹⁸³ Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 37.

¹¹⁸⁴ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 326.

¹¹⁸⁵ See *ibid.*, Allison, **Russia, the West, and Military Intervention**, pp. 142-143.

¹¹⁸⁶ See Marcin Kaczmarek, "Russia Attempts to Limit Chinese Influence by Promoting CSTO-SCO Cooperation," The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst, October 17, 2007, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/11497-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2007-10-17-art-11497.html> (20.07.2019). In 2003, Nikolai Bordyuzha, the CSTO Secretary-

Understanding (MoU) calling for cooperation in the areas of regional and international security, such as the struggle against terrorism, illegal drugs, and arms trafficking. The CSTO and the SCO also agreed to conduct consultations, to share information with each other and to develop some joint programs and activities. Most significantly, the language of this document underlined that such a cooperation between two organizations should take place “*within the limits of their [respective] competence.*”¹¹⁸⁷ Therefore, Moscow managed to obtain the SCO’s recognition of the CSTO as the regional military alliance where Russia asserts a dominant leadership position. This makes relevance to Russia’s intention to settle itself as the main coordinator of all multilateral activities in Central Asia.¹¹⁸⁸ Given that the US-NATO bloc has never accepted such an arrangement, the signing of MoU between the SCO and the CSTO put forward China’s more prudent approach towards Central Asia with respect to Russia’s great power role in the region.

As examined earlier, Russian attempts to promote multilateral mechanisms in international security together with Western powers since the 1990s have been failed. First, the US and its European allies rejected to grant CSCE/OSCE a central role for the future of European security –an institution where Russia holds its full membership.¹¹⁸⁹ Instead, Western powers brought NATO into the forefront and provided the establishment of the NATO-Russia council for security dialogue but deprived Russia of veto power on decision-making processes in the Alliance including the issue of eastward expansion.¹¹⁹⁰ Besides NATO’s expansion towards Russia’s western borders, the US has also politically and militarily penetrated into Central Asia in the 2000s ignoring Russia’s reservations and the existence of the CSTO as the regional military alliance. Having all those historical developments in mind, one can

General paid an official visit to China to meet Zhang Deguang, the SCO Secretary-General, in order to discuss opportunities for cooperation between the two organizations. Later, in August 2004, the SCO observers participated the ‘Rubezh-2004’ military exercise of the CSTO, which was organized to give impetus to the alliance’s project of Collective Rapid Deployment Forces. Mikhail Troitskiy, “A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” p. 34.

¹¹⁸⁷ Kaczmariski, “Russia Attempts to Limit Chinese Influence by Promoting CSTO-SCO Cooperation.” For more information about the SCO’s external relations with the CSTO and other international organizations. See “General information (External Communication),” The SCO Website, January 10, 2017, <http://eng.sectesco.org/cooperation/> (20.07.2019).

¹¹⁸⁸ See Kaczmariski, “Russia Attempts to Limit Chinese Influence by Promoting CSTO-SCO Cooperation.”

¹¹⁸⁹ Kubicek, “Russian Foreign Policy and the West,” p. 554-555.

¹¹⁹⁰ Allen C. Lynch, “The Realism of Russia’s Foreign Policy,” pp. 18-19; Andrei Tsygankov, Russia’s Foreign Policy: Change and Continuity in National Identity, p. 108.

differentiate between the Western and Chinese approach towards Russia's neighborhood. In this respect, the multilateral tendency in Beijing's foreign policy somehow mitigates the Chinese geopolitical threat from the East as a rising great power neighboring Central Asia.¹¹⁹¹

For all those reasons examined above, the SCO functions as a complementary regional security institution in Central Asia which by and large supports Russia's regional security objectives. The SCO represents an important regional platform, where security relations between Central Asian states and China have been developed through a multilateral setting also involved by Russia. In short, the SCO seems to enforce Chinese engagement into Central Asian security space but in a positive way monitored and confirmed by Russia. The inclusion of India and Pakistan into the SCO is expected to generate similar results given the structure of this multilateral security cooperation platform. Furthermore, as examined later in this chapter, one of Russia's motivations to encourage the SCO enlargement towards India was to balance Chinese clout in the organization and to enhance multilateralism within the organization itself.¹¹⁹² One should not ignore, however, Russia's expectations about New Delhi's contributions to regional security given its considerable experience in combating terrorism and religious extremism.¹¹⁹³

C. The SCO and Multilateralism Principle in International Security: The Links to Russia's Ideal Multipolar World Order

Last but not least, the SCO also contributes to the transformation towards a more multilateral world system with regard to interstate relations, especially between major powers. The SCO advocates a model of cooperation between countries based on the 'Shanghai spirit' which refers to 'partnership' rather than 'alliance.' As the SCO has emerged mainly as Beijing's initiative, Chinese politicians and academics have paid more attention to this concept which has played a central role in the organization's development.¹¹⁹⁴ According to the former Chinese President Jiang Zemin, the

¹¹⁹¹ This point is further elaborated in the second section examining the dynamics of Russia-China alignment.

¹¹⁹² See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 100; Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 300; and Luzyanin et al., "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 13.

¹¹⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

¹¹⁹⁴ See Pan Guang, "A Chinese perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," SIPRI Policy Paper No. 17, May 2007, p. 48. Retrieved from:

Shanghai spirit calls for “*mutual trust and co-operation in seeking security, settling disputes by means of consultation, respecting different civilizations, [and] treating countries equally regardless of size.*”¹¹⁹⁵ On other side, a Chinese academic suggests that the Shanghai spirit represents a powerful force in world politics which confronts ‘hegemonism’ and ‘power politics,’ respects the right of states to develop politically and economically in their own way, underlines the solidarity of SCO member states in their struggle to create a new ‘multipolar’ world order.¹¹⁹⁶

As Roy Allison suggests, ‘multipolarity’ has been a central norm defended by the SCO at the global level. Although this concept appears to be prescriptive about a desirable change in international power distribution, it has been used by the major SCO states to identify the character of global relations, especially since the late 2000s.¹¹⁹⁷ In this respect, the use of ‘multipolarity’ by the SCO shows some similarities with the Russian official discourse examined earlier in this study. The founding documents and declarations of the SCO repeatedly denounces the US unilateralism and hegemonic stance in world politics and instead advocates the establishment of a ‘multipolar’ world order.¹¹⁹⁸ The 2017 Astana Summit declaration, for example, announces that ‘amid profound transformations in international politics,’ the members of the SCO affirm “*the importance of creating a more equitable polycentric world order ... based on international law and the principles of mutual respect and consideration of each other's interests ... and equal and indivisible security.*”¹¹⁹⁹ The prescription of such a world order informs about the SCO’s two-pronged approach towards its geopolitical relationship with the West. While the SCO seeks to deny or limit the space available to the West within the area under its responsibility, it also seeks to open some for cooperation with the West on common security interests and issues beyond Eurasia. In the current international system which is increasingly becoming regionalized and

<https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/files/PP/SIPRIIPP17.pdf> (17.06.2019); and Chien Peng Chung, "The Shanghai Co-Operation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia," **The China Quarterly**, Vol. 180, 2004, p. 991.

¹¹⁹⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*.

¹¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 991-992.

¹¹⁹⁷ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 321.

¹¹⁹⁸ Selbi Hanova, "Perspectives on the SCO: Images and Discourses," **China & Eurasia Forum Quarterly**, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2009, p. 64.

¹¹⁹⁹ The Astana Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, June 9, 2017.

interdependent, the UN should play a central role as an over-encompassing global institution.¹²⁰⁰

The parallelism between the SCO's and Russia's description of 'multipolarity' should come to no surprise, given that Moscow has taken a leading role to profile the organization at the global level as the advocator of an alternative world order vis-à-vis the supremacy of US power and ideas.¹²⁰¹ At the same time, Russia wants to use the SCO as an important symbol of Russia's available allies in the East and thus a bargaining chip in its negotiations with the US in order to consolidate Russia's global position.¹²⁰² Accordingly, Russia has utilized the organization as a forum to bolster diplomatic criticism of Western security policies on the issues beyond the SCO's area of membership like the Syrian civil war and the build-up of NATO missile defense systems.¹²⁰³ In this regard, Russia's cooperation with the SCO members can be regarded as compatible with what was called as 'the Primakov doctrine of multipolarity' that emerged in the late 1990s. As examined in Part One, Yevgeny Primakov, as Russian Foreign Minister, sought political and diplomatic cooperation with China and India through the establishment of strategic partnerships with these powers and called for closer relations with states disturbed by the US policies such as

¹²⁰⁰ Aris, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 10. Accordingly, the SCO members declare their support to "*strengthening the key role of the UN Security Council as the primary body which, in accordance with the UN Charter, has the primary responsibility for maintaining international peace and security.*" The Astana Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, June 9, 2017.

¹²⁰¹ Bailes and Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," p. 28.

¹²⁰² Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 44.

¹²⁰³ "China's Central Asia Problem," International Crisis Group, Asia Report, No. 244, February 27, 2013, p. 24. Retrieved from: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/central-asia/china-s-central-asia-problem> (20.07.2019). Since the early years of the Syrian crisis, the SCO members put forward their position in favor of a political solution that would be achieved by Syrian people themselves, "*without external interference, inter alia, by force, not sanctioned by the UN Security Council.*" See Bishkek Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, September 13, 2013, <http://eng.sectsc.org/load/199687/> (28.07.2019). Later at the Bishkek 2019 Summit, the SCO praised Russian-led Astana peace talks including also Turkey and Iran claiming that it promotes "*an inclusive process of political settlement by Syrians themselves and under their leadership in order to search for solutions meeting the interests of the people of the SAR [Syrian Arab Republic] and of the international community.*" Bishkek Declaration of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation's Heads of State Council, June 14, 2019, <http://eng.sectsc.org/load/550977/> (28.07.2019). On the issue of missile defense, the member states reaffirmed "*that the unilateral and unrestricted build-up of missile defence systems by one state or a group of states, without taking into account the interests of other countries, is detrimental to international and regional security and stability. They find it unacceptable to ensure one's own security at the expense of others.*" The Astana Declaration of the Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, June 9, 2017.

Iran.¹²⁰⁴ However, Primakov did not seek a Cold-War style bloc to compete seriously with the United States but wanted to create a situation in which Washington would have to respect Moscow's interests by ensuring the support of its allies to Russia's position on international security issues.¹²⁰⁵

In this regard, the SCO emphasizes political and diplomatic cooperation between its members with regard to common positions on security issues, yet, at the same time, denounces open confrontation with Western powers in the realm of international security. At this point, Mikhail Troitskiy from Moscow State Institute of International Relations suggests that:¹²⁰⁶

“Russian mainstream analysts do not treat the SCO as an attempt at a traditional collective security arrangement. Nor do they write it off—as outside observers often tend to do—as a loose grouping of states that have nothing more in common than reservations about Western policies and positions. A middle position between these two extremes seems to be most popular in the Russian foreign policy making community. The SCO is regarded as a means to add weight to member states’ common positions on key security issues, both internal and external to the SCO territory; and its comparative advantage for doing so is that it places these countries’ interactions on a firm institutional footing.”

As examined in our theoretical framework, soft balancing theory posits itself in between two rigid propositions of traditional balance of power theory; states either balance by accumulating their capabilities together to restore the equilibrium or they do not.¹²⁰⁷ Considering the case of SCO, soft balancing theory can explain security behavior of the members more satisfactorily, as they pursue more tacit and indirect means of balancing other than open arms buildup and forming alliances. This argument does not run contrary to the fact that the SCO members promote an active collaboration and ad hoc military training against non-traditional challenges (e.g. terrorism, extremism, and separatism), as they are posed by non-state actors.¹²⁰⁸

¹²⁰⁴ See Ariel Cohen, “The “Primakov Doctrine”: Russia's Zero Sum Game with the United States”; and Katz, “Primakov Redux? Putin's Pursuit of” Multipolarism” in Asia,” p. 145.

¹²⁰⁵ See *ibid.*, pp. 145-146

¹²⁰⁶ Mikhail Troitskiy, “A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” p. 30.

¹²⁰⁷ Paul, “Introduction: The Enduring Axioms of Balance of Power Theory and Their Contemporary Relevance,” p. 13.

¹²⁰⁸ The SCO maintains that it is not a military alliance directed against other states and international institutions. However its “front-line struggle against terrorist threats requires the members to “further demands develop and enhance mechanisms aimed at complete eradication of terrorist activities ... [including] its scheduled anti-terrorist training manoeuvres.” Alimov, “The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security,” p. 36.

Furthermore, this kind of a security cooperation between major powers against non-traditional threats represents a central dimension of Russia's ideal 'multipolar' world order based on multilateralism. As underlined in Part One, Chapter Two, such an order does not call for power politics but seeks a great power concert to promote cooperation against common threats and challenges towards international security and stability. In the 21st Century, international terrorism represents the foremost challenge to which every state is vulnerable. Given the transnational nature of this threat, Russian official discourse portrays 'existing military and political alliances' as incapable of struggling against current non-traditional threats which in fact require a *"flexible approach to participating in multilateral mechanisms for the sake of finding effective solutions to common issues."*¹²⁰⁹ Similarly, Rashid Alimov, while serving the SCO Secretary-General, asserted that *"[a]n upsurge in terrorist activities in various parts of the world requires the development and improvement of existing methods and techniques applied to our common fight against this evil."*¹²¹⁰ In this respect, he praised the success of SCO's multilateral efforts in struggling against terrorism and underlined the SCO's *"call the international community to unite within a broadly-based international anti-terrorist coalition to combat this severe global threat."*¹²¹¹ Most recently, at the 2019 Bishkek summit, the SCO Heads of States urged the international community to enhance global cooperation against the global terrorist threat under the UN's central role and *"also to press for consensus regarding the adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism."*¹²¹²

From the Russian perspective, continuing international instability and unpredictability put forward the need to establish structural cooperation among great powers. This could be only possible when major powers would come to a consensus that it is better to work together than to play geopolitical games by forming opposing groups or manipulating smaller countries against each other to ensure their security

¹²⁰⁹ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016.

¹²¹⁰ Alimov, "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security," p. 35.

¹²¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²¹² "Press Release on the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation Heads of State Council Meeting," The SCO Website, June 14, 2019, <http://eng.sectsco.org/news/20190614/550955.html> (28.07.2019). For the initiatives to reach a 'Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism' under the UN framework, see Andrea Gioia, "The UN Conventions on the Prevention and Suppression of International Terrorism," Nesi Giuseppe (ed.), **International Cooperation in Counter-Terrorism: The United Nations and Regional Organizations in the Fight against Terrorism**, Hampshire: Ashgate, 2016.

interests in different regions.¹²¹³ In both the Chinese and Russian perspectives, the SCO represents a new model of “*cooperative security*” which “*is antithetical to traditional power politics.*”¹²¹⁴ As early as 2006, President Putin himself wrote an essay praising the ‘Shanghai Spirit’ and the SCO’s model of cooperation which, according to him, was increasingly in the world’s demand. He listed the precise principles which constitute the SCO’s prominent features as “*mutual trust, discussing any problems openly, resolving problems without exerting any kind of pressure, and consultations*” and noted his hope that these features would “*increase the organization’s appeal in the eyes of the international community.*”¹²¹⁵

The expansion of SCO towards South Asia with the inclusion of two powerful and influential states, India and Pakistan, has strengthened the global weight of the organization. As a result of the 2017 enlargement, the SCO’s vast region currently stretches north to south from the Arctic to the Indian Ocean and east to west from Kaliningrad in the Russian Federation to the South China Sea. The organization now covers nearly 45 percent of the total world population and represents 25 percent of the global GDP.¹²¹⁶ Furthermore, the SCO brings together four nuclear powers (Russia, China, India, and Pakistan) -half of the world’s nuclear states- at the same multilateral platform to hold consultations on regional and international security issues.¹²¹⁷ In accordance with its interpretation of the international system, the SCO has also actively sought to build up cooperative relationships with a wide range of available actors. The organization formed diplomatic ties and partnerships by concluding memorandums of understanding with other multilateral institutions such as the CIS, Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), as well as the United Nations.¹²¹⁸

¹²¹³ Shakleina, "A Russian Perspective on Twenty-First-Century Challenges," p. 60.

¹²¹⁴ Yong Deng, "Remolding Great Power Politics: China's Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India," **Journal of Strategic Studies**, Vol. 30, No. 4-5, 2007, p. 883.

¹²¹⁵ Quoted in Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, p. 45.

¹²¹⁶ See Alimov, "The Role of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in Counteracting Threats to Peace and Security," pp. 34-35; Ahmad, **op.cit.**, p. 121; and Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, p. 9.

¹²¹⁷ Alimov, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its Role and Place in the Development of Eurasia," p. 116.

¹²¹⁸ The list also includes, the CSTO, Economic Cooperation Organization, and Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific. Aris, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 10. The SCO holds an observer status at the United Nations, which has granted in December 2004. For more information about the SCO-UN relations, "General information (External Communication)".

However, there are serious problems undermining the SCO's global weight and the role it could play in the transformation of great power relations at the global level. The biggest handicap of SCO's relations with the world remains as its inability to form a cooperative dialogue with any regional institution outside of its own geographical area or any individual Western power.¹²¹⁹ That is mostly because the SCO is perceived by the West generally as a club of authoritarian states whose main objective is resisting and undermining democratization in its region.¹²²⁰ In Thomas Ambrosio's words, the SCO emerges as a formidable challenge to the West and "*the ideas of universal democracy and human rights through its de facto legitimisation of authoritarianism and by establishing itself, as a counterweight to external democratic norms.*"¹²²¹ Such an image seems to overshadow the Russian perspective of the SCO as a successful multilateral organization to struggle against non-traditional threats and to manage inter-state security problems through an equitable dialogue and formal consultations. The SCO's claims in this respect are underscored in the West, thus reduce the possibilities for establishing cooperation. Secondly, there are continuing complex security problems among certain SCO members themselves, especially China, India, and Pakistan. Those problems were inherited from the Cold-War era and examined shortly in Part One. While analyzing Russia's bilateral security cooperation with these three actors, the rest of this chapter will also discuss those tensions and security problems with regard to their implications on Russia's alignment strategies.

II. Russia-China Alignment: A Great Power Entente in the 21st Century

Russia-China alignment, which has come to be a widely recognized phenomenon in the post-Cold War era, has started through a process during which these two great powers have first decreased their mutual threat perceptions from each other. This process enabled them to recognize their convergent interests in fighting against common threats and challenges and transforming the international system based on a joint perspective on 'multipolarity.' This common perspective has brought

¹²¹⁹ Bailes and Dunay, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization as a Regional Security Institution," p. 29.

¹²²⁰ See Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, p. 7; Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 306-307; and Thomas Ambrosio, "Catching the 'Shanghai Spirit': How the Shanghai Cooperation Organization Promotes Authoritarian Norms in Central Asia," **Europe-Asia Studies**, Vol. 60, No. 8, 2008.

¹²²¹ **Ibid.**, p. 1322.

along a broad-scale security cooperation covering high-level regular consultations, joint military exercises, and an increasing cooperation in the arms sector—even though it falls short of a formal military alliance. Below we examine this process and explore the actual content of security cooperation between Moscow and Beijing. Later in the second subsection, we will also consider the negative dimension of Sino-Russian security interactions and underline the constraining factors in their bilateral alignment relations.

A. Convergent Interests and Common Threat Perceptions: The Content of Security Cooperation

Prior to the end of the Cold War, Beijing has started a domestic and foreign policy reform and adopted a more outward-looking perspective. This led to the promotion of the ‘good neighbor policy’ which sought favorable relations with all the countries in China’s vast periphery in order to focus on the country’s overall strategy of development.¹²²² According to this view, Beijing had to stabilize its frontiers and harmonize its interests with proximate states, since the country’s neighborhood was seen as the primary setting in which China can ensure its security and exert international influence.¹²²³ The most serious impediment in front of this objective was China’s border disputes with Russia and Central Asian states. Chinese new foreign policy perspective was cautious enough to avoid challenging Moscow’s influence and special interests in the region. Beijing did not seek to advance its position at the expense of Russia but rather advocated Moscow’s inclusion into the process for negotiations between China and Central Asian states.¹²²⁴

Therefore, the negotiations on border issues were conducted in the interesting format of two sides but five countries; on the one hand, China, and, on the other hand, the alliance between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan.¹²²⁵ In this regard, the conclusion of the 1996 ‘Shanghai Agreement on Confidence Building in the Military Field in the Border Area’ between two sides both marked the significant progress achieved with regard to border issues and Chinese recognition of Russia’s

¹²²² Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation*, p. 54.

¹²²³ Song, "Interests, Power and China’s Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 87-88.

¹²²⁴ See Aris, *Shanghai Cooperation Organization*, p. 2.

¹²²⁵ See Song, "Interests, Power and China’s Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 90; and “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions,” <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.06.2017).

enduring influence over the security of Central Asian states.¹²²⁶ By 2004, Russia and China settled all their border disputes through the SCO framework and some other bilateral agreements.¹²²⁷ As a result, two states managed to eliminate their biggest source of tension since the Cold-War period – a rare achievement for great powers neighboring each other.¹²²⁸ During this process, Russia and China have come to understand that border conflicts are too costly for both sides and that they should choose to co-exist peacefully; thus, the way they view each other has improved dramatically.¹²²⁹ This removed a very security threat which had historically dominated Russian and Chinese strategic planning on national security, and accordingly, had required heavy military deployments on the border area.¹²³⁰ Maintaining a quiet border with China enabled Russia to concentrate its military forces in the west where Moscow faces various challenges with respect to Chechnya, Georgia and Ukraine and the risk of confrontation with NATO. Similarly, China was allowed to re-concentrate its own forces to the west and south of the country where it faces numerous maritime challenges with regard to the South China Sea, North Korea, Taiwan, and the United States.¹²³¹

Establishment of mutual trust among Russia, China, and Central Asian states through the SCO and other bilateral agreements with commitments on confidence-building measures, non-aggression, and consultations has enabled these states to focus on common threat perceptions by non-state actors more effectively.¹²³² China shares a

¹²²⁶ Aris, Shanghai Cooperation Organization, p. 2. For example, Article 15 of the Treaty recognizes Russian led-alliance framework, as it states “*that any of the two sides (i.e. China and the alliance between Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia, and Tajikistan) or any member country of the alliance has the right to withdraw from the agreement.*” “Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions,” <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.06.2017).

¹²²⁷ For information about those bilateral treaties, see Alexander Korolev, “On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation,” *Asian Security*, 2018, p. 13.

¹²²⁸ See Fu Ying, “How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies,” *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 95, No. 1, 2016, pp. 98-99.

¹²²⁹ Korolev, “On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation,” p. 14.

¹²³⁰ Deng, “Remolding Great Power Politics: China’s Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India,” p. 881; and Paul N. Schwartz, “The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations,” Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (ed.), *Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 100.

¹²³¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 99-100; and Christopher W. Hsiung, “Facing the “New Normal”: The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe,” The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, U.I. Paper No.3, 2019, pp. 9-10. Retrieved from: <https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/2019/ui-paper-no.-3-2019.pdf> (21.08.2019).

¹²³² For information about those agreements including such commitments see, Hsiung, “Facing the “New Normal”: The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe,”

long border with Russia and three Central Asian states in its northwest region. For Beijing, it seemed very difficult to maintain a secure border in this area since the Islamic separatist movement in Xinjiang Autonomous Region was believed to be part of the transnational network of the fundamentalist Islamic movement operating throughout the territories of China's neighbors.¹²³³ These common threat perceptions by China and Russia put forward their convergent interest in a peaceful, stable and prosperous Central Asia.¹²³⁴ Yet, these concerns on non-state challenges have been not the sole driver of Russia-China alignment, given that the US penetration into the region has played an even more decisive role in enforcing security cooperation between these two powers throughout the 2000s and 2010s.

The US Factor in Russia-China Alignment and Common Views on 'Multipolar' World Order

As noted briefly earlier, Beijing has become disturbed with the US military penetration into Central Asia after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Chinese policymakers and analysts have viewed the US bases in Central Asia as a part of the American grand strategy aiming at containing China as a rising great power which could compete with the US for a superpower status in the future. Given the US military engagement in the Far East since the World War II, this strategy had the potential to construct the missing link of encirclement around the country.¹²³⁵ Meanwhile, the US asserts a dominant position in the East Asian military security, which is ensured with a network of bilateral defense pacts encompassing South Korea, Japan, the Philippines, Thailand, and Australia.¹²³⁶ As we argued for Russia, Beijing also considers American initiatives to maintain and strengthen its alliances with Asian countries in its neighborhood, as potentially threatening to China's security and economic interests in the region.¹²³⁷ Especially, the longstanding US commitment to support Taiwan, a primary national

p. 10; and Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," pp. 5, 13.

¹²³³ Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 88.

¹²³⁴ Huasheng Zhao, "Central Asia in China's Diplomacy," pp. 159-160.

¹²³⁵ Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," pp. 669-670.

¹²³⁶ Marcin Kaczmarek, **Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order**, New York: Routledge, 2015, pp. 101-102.

¹²³⁷ Chung, "The Shanghai Co-Operation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia," p. 993.

security issue for China, continues to be a source of tension between Beijing and Washington. In this respect, China proclaims that it faces an increasingly hostile security environment in its periphery which is getting more complicated due to American policy towards Asia-Pacific. Such concerns became greater with ‘the US pivot to Asia’, an initiative started by former President Barrack Obama, which called for greater political, economic and military engagement towards the region as a response to the transfer of the global power gravity from the Atlantic to the Pacific.¹²³⁸

Combined with the issue of NATO’s eastward enlargement and the crises such as Georgia and Ukraine, Russia and China have been pushed towards each other especially since the mid-2000s. In Dmitri Trenin’s words, the US dual containment of Russia and China has produced “*a predictable result: the China-Russian strategic cooperation.*”¹²³⁹ He maintains that although the US has an interest in tearing apart of this strategic axis between these two great powers, weaning Moscow off its alignment with Beijing would not be possible, as long as Washington continues seeking to enforce its engagement both Russia’s and China’s proximate environments. As indicated by Stephen Blank, by coming together within formal multilateral mechanisms such as the SCO, Russia and China seek to increase their leverage against the United States. In this respect, Moscow and Beijing hope that they could “*force Washington to come to terms with them both regionally and globally and act only with their consent or prior consultation.*”¹²⁴⁰ Beijing has its own historical and actual reasons to seek more equal status with the United States and other great powers. Chien-peng Chung suggests that China has a long-standing apprehension against self-interested great powers forcing their will upon weaker powers, which is rooted in the country’s recent history of being humiliated into the signing of ‘unequal’ agreements with the West and Japan. Therefore, China seeks to counter what it regards as

¹²³⁸ See Ethan Meick, “China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation,” U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission, Staff Research Report, March 20, 2017, p. 20. Retrieved from: <https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/Research/China-Russia%20Mil-Mil%20Relations%20Moving%20Toward%20Higher%20Level%20of%20Cooperation.pdf> (21.08.2019); and Hsiung, “Facing the “New Normal”: The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe,” p. 21. For an analysis on the US ‘pivot to Asia’ through a realist perspective see Wei Ling, “Rebalancing or De-Balancing: US Pivot and East Asian Order,” **American Foreign Policy Interests**, Vol. 35, No. 3, 2013.

¹²³⁹ Dmitri Trenin, “US Obsession with Containment Driving China and Russia Closer,” *Global Times*, July 31, 2019, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1159900.shtml> (21.08.2019).

¹²⁴⁰ Blank, “The Central Asian Dimension of Russo-Chinese Exercises,” p. 6.

‘unilateralist’ and ‘meddlesome’ actions by Washington and to enhance its own regional position as a rising major state with huge power potential.¹²⁴¹

Russian and Chinese common perceptions on unilateralist tendencies by the United States, the sole superpower of the world, have also transformed the way they view the international system towards an identical one. Bobo Lo suggests that it has been an axiom that they are of one mind with regard to their global perspective: “*Both are highly critical of American unilateralism and hegemonism; oppose Western moral interventionism and democracy promotion; and call for a new world order in which the emerging powers of the non-West enjoy greater influence and status.*”¹²⁴² As early as 1997, Russia and China issued a ‘Joint Declaration on a Multipolar World and the Establishment of a New International Order’ which denounced ‘hegemony’ and ‘power politics’ and called for ‘bilateral and multilateral coordination and cooperation’ in international security.¹²⁴³ Later in 2005, they issued another ‘Joint Statement on the World Order for the 21st Century’, which elaborated their common global vision more explicitly by suggesting that “*the international community should thoroughly rid itself of confrontational and alliance-making mentalities, should not seek monopoly and domination in international affairs, and should not categorize member states into leadership and subordinate types.*”¹²⁴⁴

This common standpoint acknowledges that as we see in Russia’s official perspective, China also views ‘multipolarity’ as an antidote to what it perceives as American ‘unilateralism’ and ‘discrimination’ disregarding certain major powers. It is evident that both Russia and China seek to undermine Washington’s specific policies and initiatives they disapprove, yet through non-confrontational tactics.¹²⁴⁵ As examined earlier, the weakness of Russia vis-à-vis the US, the only superpower, and China, a rising great power, has been a factor discouraging Moscow to follow costly hard balancing strategies through boosting its military expenditures or alliance

¹²⁴¹ Chung, "The Shanghai Co-Operation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia," p. 993.

¹²⁴² Bobo Lo, "Introduction," Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (ed.), **Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 6.

¹²⁴³ For the full text of this document, see Letter Dated 15 May 1997 from the Permanent Representatives of China and the Russian Federation to the United Nations, <https://www.un.org/documents/ga/docs/52/plenary/a52-153.htm> (10.08.2019).

¹²⁴⁴ Quoted in Deng, "Remolding Great Power Politics: China's Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India," p. 881.

¹²⁴⁵ See **ibid.**

formation with secondary powers because it may lose a significant amount of its autonomy in such a setting. On the other hand, China has its own different reasons to embrace a 'soft balancing' vision vis-à-vis the United States. Chinese leaders view their country as a beneficiary of the current international order, with the UN at its core, and acknowledge that China's rapid ascent has achieved through a successful integration into the global economic system. In this regard, China's primary goal is to maintain both its domestic stability and external peace, although Beijing seems to be determined to protect its own interests and to respond firmly to provocations and foreign encroachments towards its borders.¹²⁴⁶ At the current stage, Chinese political leaders believe that they have to continue their focus on economic development in order to see China as a powerful country in the future with strong military capabilities.¹²⁴⁷ That is why Chinese official rhetoric emphasizes a peaceful and harmonious world where development is a key concern for all states. In this context, China contends that its self-proclaimed 'peaceful rise' should not be perceived as threatening to the international system, because, Beijing argues, "*old power politics is a thing of the past*".¹²⁴⁸

While denouncing power politics at the global level, China has also begun to pay greater attention to the norms of behavior and related expectations they create in the international order. In Jianwei Wang's words, "*China firmly believes that the new reality of world politics requires some norms and principles*", while Beijing "*is determined to have a say in formulating these*".¹²⁴⁹ First of all, China's defense white

¹²⁴⁶ Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," pp. 102-103.

¹²⁴⁷ Chung, "The Shanghai Co-Operation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia," p. 993.

¹²⁴⁸ Jackson, "Trans-Regional Security Organisations and Statist Multilateralism in Eurasia," pp. 186-187.

¹²⁴⁹ Quoted in Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, , p. 55. One may find it a bit puzzling that our research based on a realist framework underlines Russia's and China's approach to norms and principles in order to decompose their approach towards multipolarity and the international system. In fact, realist scholars "*also recognize that states sometimes operate through institutions*" which can be defined as "*a set of rules that stipulate the ways in which states should cooperate and compete with each other*." John J. Mearsheimer, "The False Promise of International Institutions," **International security**, Vol. 19, No. 3, 1994, p. 13. At the same time, realists believe that all those institutions, norms and rules reflect state calculations of their self-interests and they are used to fulfill their strategic interests. Norms, principles and institutions are generally created by the most powerful states to ensure maintaining or even strengthening their position in the system. See *ibid.* p. 13. In this respect, Russian and Chinese support to certain norms and principles examined above as well as their political alignment about those norms at the system level can be referred as a part of their strategy to oppose the US unilateral policies with certain geopolitical implications. Both states try to boost a multilateral cooperation among like-minded states. By doing so, they strive to ensure their predominant position in their respective neighborhoods and the global system in general. In the same vein, Weiqing Song indicates that "[a]lthough norms and values were originally formulated for organizational

paper adopted in 1998 made a strong emphasis on mutual respect of sovereignty, non-interference, equality and peaceful co-existence.¹²⁵⁰ In 2002, Beijing officially promoted its ‘New Outlook on Security’ concept outlining the Chinese perspective of international security with related significant norms, which was later adopted by the SCO. The concept suggests that all states in the system have equal rights to ensure their national security and that no state shall achieve its security at the cost of another state by implementing unilateralism. It maintains that “[s]ources of threat to security do not come from power and capability gaps, but from those policies formulated and implemented by hegemony, power politics and expansionism.”¹²⁵¹ Given the overlapping norms advocated by Chinese and Russian official discourses, it is not surprising that these two states have established a political solidarity on such principles and accordingly their interpretations of the global system.¹²⁵² In practice, this turned to be a political and diplomatic alignment in various international platforms and especially the UN Security Council where two great powers jointly used their veto power to block draft resolutions initiated by the US or EU, especially on Syria.¹²⁵³ Below we examine the actual content and practice of security cooperation between Russia and China in political, diplomatic and military realms.

The Content of Russia-China Alignment: Agreements, Declarations and Actual Practice of Security Cooperation

Formal security interactions between Russia and China in the 1990s have started with the signing of several bilateral and multilateral agreements. For example, Russia and China signed an important agreement in 1994 calling for “*mutual non-aggression, mutual de-targeting of strategic weapons, and non-first use of nuclear force.*”¹²⁵⁴ In 1996 and 1997, Russia, China and other participants of the Shanghai group signed two military treaties in order to, decrease, define, regulate and verify

solidarity [in the SCO] they may also be used as balancing weapons against perceived threats when necessary.” Song, “Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” p. 674.

¹²⁵⁰ Chung, “The Shanghai Co-Operation Organization: China's Changing Influence in Central Asia,” p. 992.

¹²⁵¹ Song, “Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization,” p. 675.

¹²⁵² Aris, **Eurasian Regionalism: The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation**, p. 62.

¹²⁵³ Hsiung, “Facing the “New Normal”: The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe,” p. 19.

¹²⁵⁴ **Ibid.**, p. 10.

their military presence and activities along the common border areas.¹²⁵⁵ These agreements all indicated the establishment of a non-aggression pact between China and Russia which is not categorized as an alignment with regard to our typology. In July 2001, Russia and China finally signed a 'Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation' which anchored their strategic cooperative partnership. Unlike the Sino-Soviet Friendship Treaty signed in 1950, this treaty neither defined any explicit external threat nor included a mutual defense commitment. Furthermore, it is underlined twice that the agreement is not directed against any third state.¹²⁵⁶ However, Article 9 of the Treaty codified an additional commitment for Russia and China noting that when a situation emerges in which one of the parties considers "*that peace is being threatened and undermined or its security interests are involved or when it is confronted with the threat of aggression, the contracting parties shall immediately hold contacts and consultations in order to eliminate such threats.*"¹²⁵⁷ Thus Russia and China declared the establishment of a formal entente between themselves even before the conversion of the SCO into a multilateral consultation pact.¹²⁵⁸

In the following years, Sino-Russian alignment has been enforced by formal statements on their security cooperation. The 2005 joint declaration on 'the World Order in the Twenty-First Century' noted above also referenced to the evolution of Moscow-Beijing relations "*from mistrust and competition to partnership and cooperation*" and offered it as a model for how states could "*manage their differences and work together on areas of agreement in a way that supports global order and decreases the chance that the world will descend into great-power conflict and war.*"¹²⁵⁹ Thereby, two states put forward their interests in such a transformation in great power relations at the global level. 'The Joint Declaration of 2007', also

¹²⁵⁵ **Ibid.** In this regard, the members of Shanghai Group came to an agreement "*to place their troops deployed in border areas in defensive positions, not to use forces or threaten to use force when disputes arise and not to seek unilateral military superiority over each other.*" Ahmad, **op.cit.**, p. 121.

¹²⁵⁶ See Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 5; Deng, "Remolding Great Power Politics: China's Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India," p. 878.

¹²⁵⁷ For the full text, see Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/2649_665393/t15771.shtml (22.08.2019).

¹²⁵⁸ As noted earlier the consultation commitment for the SCO was finally declared in the 2006 Summit. See De Haas, **Russia's Foreign Security Policy in the 21st Century: Putin, Medvedev and Beyond**, p. 44; and "Full Text of the Declaration on 5th Anniversary of the SCO".

¹²⁵⁹ Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 105.

acknowledged two states' objective of deepening their bilateral cooperation, while 'the China-Russia Joint Communiqué' signed on May 24, 2008, declared both countries' commitment "*to render mutual support on the issues related to each other's core interests.*"¹²⁶⁰ More recently, after the Ukraine crisis, Moscow and Beijing have upgraded their ambitions on security cooperation, which was reflected in their 'Joint Statement on Global Security' released in 2015.¹²⁶¹

One of the remarkable characteristics of the Russia-China formal entente has been that it has never remained on paper since its establishment in 2001. Rather, two sides have involved extensive consultation processes which have gone beyond the written commitment calling for such a setting only in times of emergency situations. With the establishment of several mechanisms for regular consultations, Russia-China security dialogue has grown into a multilevel infrastructure covering almost all primary government agencies including top decision-makers and their staff. Such mechanisms include, for example, 'China-Russia Staff Headquarters Strategic Consultation,' 'China-Russia Intergovernmental Joint Commission on Military Technology Cooperation' and 'Regular Meetings between Defense Ministers of Russia and China.'¹²⁶² Those bilateral platforms bring together Russian and Chinese "*ministries of foreign affairs and all their departments, defense ministries, general staffs, security councils, regional military districts, and border garrisons.*"¹²⁶³ At present, all those existing mechanisms combined promote from 20 to 30 high-level consultations per year between China and Russia with regard to security issues.¹²⁶⁴ The expansion of bilateral security dialogue through such mechanisms has coincided with an increasing number of Presidential level meetings. In the last six years, Vladimir Putin and his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping have met nearly 30 times. As a

¹²⁶⁰ Alexander Korolev and Vladimir Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies: System-Unit Dynamics and China-Russia Relations," **International Relations**, Vol. 33, No. 1, 2019, pp. 44-45.

¹²⁶¹ Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 21.

¹²⁶² See Meick, "China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation," pp. 17-18; Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," pp. 6-7. Besides the annual meetings organized in those settings, the Heads of the Security Council of Russia and the State Council of China meets four times a year since 2009. In addition to that, 'China-Russia Northeast Asia Security Dialogue' brings senior state and military officials from both states together in every two or three months in Beijing and Moscow since its creation in 2014. **Ibid.** p. 7.

¹²⁶³ Korolev and Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies: System-Unit Dynamics and China-Russia Relations," p. 43.

¹²⁶⁴ Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 6.

result, Russia has become the most-visited foreign country by the Chinese President Xi since the beginning of his term in 2013.¹²⁶⁵

The formal links of consultations between Russian and Chinese officials who are responsible for national security lead to the expansion of political and diplomatic alignment between two sides also into a limited military cooperation. This cooperation has mainly three dimensions; (i) the significant amount of high-technology arms sales from Russia to China; (ii) the common military exercises covering land, air, naval forces and even missile defense; and (iii) the exchange of military personnel for education and training.¹²⁶⁶ Below we examine these three aspects respectively, as they constitute the main pillars of actual cooperation between Russia and China in the realm of military security - a key concern of realist theories of alignment.

First of all, Russia's arms transfers to China plays a crucial role in the latter's modernization of its army. Beijing needs Russian-made arms to enhance its navy and air force, as it intends to strengthen its capabilities for maritime operations and its preparedness for events related to the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait.¹²⁶⁷ As a rising great power, China is deeply disturbed by the US dominance of East Asian military security and thus has been putting efforts to match the American position in this geographical context. However, China tries to reach this objective by modernizing its armed forces, as Beijing could not achieve to reverse the existing alliances in the region.¹²⁶⁸ Since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, around 80 percent of Beijing's total arms imports have been made from Russia. These arms transfers have accounted for nearly a quarter of total Russian arms exports, promoting China as one of Beijing has been one of Russia's primary arms clients.¹²⁶⁹

¹²⁶⁵ "China's Xi Praises 'Best Friend' Putin during Russia Visit," BBC News, June 6, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-48537663> (22.08.2019). See also Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 99.

¹²⁶⁶ See Tom Røseth, "Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing," **Problems of Post-Communism**, Vol. 66, No. 4, 2018 pp. 268-286; and Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," pp. 11-12.

¹²⁶⁷ Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," pp. 12-13.

¹²⁶⁸ Kaczmarek, **Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order**, pp. 106-107.

¹²⁶⁹ See Meick, "China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation," p. 12; and Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 89.

Nonetheless, there was a serious breakdown in high-tech arms trade between Russia and China from the mid-2000s until 2014.¹²⁷⁰ Scholars offer several reasons to explain the sharp decline in Russia-China arms trade from \$3 billion in 2005 to less than \$700 million in 2012. First of all, China's rapid rise changed Beijing's image into an emerging strategic rival in the perceptions of a large number of people in the Russian military who thought the possibility that the advanced weaponry could one day turn against Russia.¹²⁷¹ This concern became stronger with Russia's fears of 'reverse engineering' by China's defense industry which was reportedly copying technology in Russian-made arms to develop Chinese model of weapons and to resell it to third parties as China's allies.¹²⁷² Thirdly, Russia decided to balance its arms transfers to its other allies having tensions with Beijing such as India and Vietnam to avoid providing China with extra-advantages over its regional competitors.¹²⁷³

Following the Ukraine crisis, Russia finally removed its informal 10-year ban on supplying advanced weapons to China at the cost of undermining its relations with other partners in Asia and further antagonizing the United States.¹²⁷⁴ Facing the Western diplomatic pressure and severe economic sanctions posed by the US and Europe, the Kremlin turned to be willing to make concessions on arms sales to China to ensure Beijing's political and financial support, which put forward Moscow's increasing reliance on China as a result of its isolation.¹²⁷⁵ This was highlighted by two major agreements signed in 2015 on the sale of the Russian S-400 air defense

¹²⁷⁰ See Røseth, "Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing," p. 275; and Kaczmarek, **Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order**, p. 423.

¹²⁷¹ See Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 17; Jeffrey Mankoff, "US Perspective (The Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Sino-Russian Relations)," The Asan Forum, July 25, 2014, <http://www.theasanforum.org/us-perspective-3/> (28.08.2019).

¹²⁷² In this regard, Russian experts believe that J-11 fighter planes introduced by China appear as an almost exact clone of Russian Su-27 jets delivered to Beijing in the late 1990s. See *ibid*; Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 91; and John Watts, Sofia Ledberg, and Kjell Engelbrekt, "Brothers in Arms, yet Again? Twenty-First Century Sino-Russian Strategic Collaboration in the Realm of Defence and Security," **Defence Studies**, Vol. 16, No. 4, 2016 p. 432.

¹²⁷³ During this period, especially India continued to receive Russian weapons with even more advanced technology. See Marcin Kaczmarek, "The Asymmetric Partnership? Russia's Turn to China," **International Politics**, Vol. 53, No. 3, 2016, p. 423; and Røseth, "Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing," p. 274.

¹²⁷⁴ See *ibid*.; and Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 17.

¹²⁷⁵ See Meick, "China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation," p. 5; and Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 93.

system and Su-35 combat aircraft to China.¹²⁷⁶ These weapons with advanced technology strengthened China's deterrent capabilities against potential threats around its borders most likely with relevance to the Taiwan issue. In addition, the S-400 system could assist the Chinese army in achieving air superiority over the region, which would increase Beijing's ability to project power over disputed islands and maritime territories in the South China Sea.¹²⁷⁷ The US officials indeed worry that the Russian arms supplied to China could change the balance of forces in the Western Pacific.¹²⁷⁸ On the other side, Tom Røseth indicates that although the S-400 systems and Su-35s are planned to be stationed far from Russian borders, their mobility makes Russia vulnerable to China in case of possible deterioration of their relations in the future and those weapons may also pose threats to Russia's air activity in its Far East region.¹²⁷⁹

Observing the renewal of Russian-Chinese cooperation in the arms sector, Korolev infers that these two great powers play a significant role in each other's rise (or at least in China's growth and in sustaining Russia's strength as a great power). China does that by extending economic ties of cooperation in times of Western sanctions posed on Russia. In turn, Russia provides crucial military technologies supporting the modernization of the Chinese army and supplies energy sources China strongly needs.¹²⁸⁰ On the other side, the recent arms trade agreements with China also show that how Russia's strategic decisions are influenced by its perceptions on changing level of external threats surrounding itself and how these decisions could, in turn, affect security dynamics in regional and global contexts.

¹²⁷⁶ *Ibid.* pp. 88, 103. Although the agreement was reached in 2015, there were reports that the two sides were negotiating for an agreement on the sale of these weapons in March and April 2014, just following the imposition of the Western sanctions on Russia. Zachary Keck, "China, Russia Military Ties Deepen With Naval Drill in East China Sea," *The Diplomat*, May 2, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/05/china-russia-military-ties-deepen-with-naval-drill-in-east-china-sea/> (28.08.2019).

¹²⁷⁷ See Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 17; Richard Weitz, "Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises," *The Letort Papers*, Strategic Studies Institute, the U.S. Army War College, April 2015, p. 24. Retrieved from: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a616312.pdf> (28.08.2019); and Meick, "China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation," p. 3.

¹²⁷⁸ Mankoff, "US Perspective (The Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Sino-Russian Relations)," p. 14.

¹²⁷⁹ Røseth, "Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing," p. 275.

¹²⁸⁰ Alexander Korolev and Vladimir Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations in Times of Crisis: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2018 p. 413.

The growing common threat perceptions by Russia and China in recent years have not only led to the renewal of arms trade but also gave way to an increasing number of joint military exercises expanding towards different regions. Starting in the mid-2000s the regular 'Peace Mission' exercises provided a solid background for further development of Sino-Russian military relations. These exercises are organized under the auspices of the SCO in every one or two years.¹²⁸¹ The Peace Mission 2010 lasted 17 days from September 9 to September 25, 2010, which became the longest exercise ever, involving around 5,000 servicemen, more than 300 military vehicles and over 50 aircraft. During the following Peace Mission exercises, Russian and Chinese armies have continued to practice military cooperation and interoperability in anti-terrorist operations and conventional war games which provided both with some experience of aligned warfare.¹²⁸²

After the promotion of joint land exercises as a routine in the second decade of the 21st Century, Moscow and Beijing have expanded their joint exercises to include the maritime dimension. In 2012, two states launched their annual bilateral naval drills entitled as the 'Joint Sea' exercises.¹²⁸³ The first Joint Sea was conducted between 22 and 27 April 2012 in the Yellow Sea with the aim at practicing of 'anti-submarine and anti-aircraft warfare', 'anti-piracy actions', 'rescue operations' and 'naval logistics'. These drills were reportedly organized as a response to the US joint exercises conducted with South Korea and the Philippines. Furthermore, the Joint Sea 2013 took place in the Sea of Japan and mirrored the US-Japan naval exercises. A year later the Joint Sea occurred in the East China Sea against the backdrop of big tensions between China and Japan and not far from the disputed Diaoyu/Senkaku islets. Therefore it signaled another message to Washington and its regional allies.¹²⁸⁴

¹²⁸¹ See Chaka Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 2, 2012 p. 209; Kaczmariski, "The Asymmetric Partnership? Russia's Turn to China," p. 421; and Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 12.

¹²⁸² See Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p.12; and Marcel De Haas, "War Games of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization: Drills on the Move!," *The Journal of Slavic Military Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, 2016. In addition, the Peace Mission 2014 became the largest exercise since 2005 in terms of the participation of forces, which involved "7000 mostly Chinese and Russian soldiers." Watts, Ledberg, and Engelbrekt, "Brothers in Arms, yet Again? Twenty-First Century Sino-Russian Strategic Collaboration in the Realm of Defence and Security," p. 439.

¹²⁸³ Kaczmariski, "The Asymmetric Partnership? Russia's Turn to China," p. 422.

¹²⁸⁴ See *ibid.*; Watts, Ledberg, and Engelbrekt, "Brothers in Arms, yet Again? Twenty-First Century Sino-Russian Strategic Collaboration in the Realm of Defence and Security," p. 440; Mankoff, "US

The Joint Sea 2015 was organized, far from both states' territorial waters, thus had some complex geopolitical implications. In the context of the Ukraine crisis and the US-Russia tensions with regard to the Syrian Civil War, these naval drills occurred in the Mediterranean Sea where is considered by the West as 'the area of NATO.' Russia's Black Sea Port of Novorossiysk hosted the joint commanding center for these drills and therefore was visited by Chinese warships. The aim of the exercise was put forward the Chinese Defense Ministry as *“to deepen China-Russia friendly and practical cooperation and increase our navies' ability to jointly deal with maritime security threats.”*¹²⁸⁵ The Joint Sea 2016, in turn, became the first joint exercise organized in the South China Sea involving both China and a foreign country. The drills took place following the Hague-based tribunal which overruled Chinese claims of the waters with regard to its 'nine-dash line' argument; -albeit it is conducted not in disputed areas.¹²⁸⁶ One year later, the Joint Sea was again moved to Russian neighborhood namely to the Baltic Sea where became a focus on NATO-Russia tensions after the Ukraine crisis, therefore raised eyebrows in the Alliance and concerns in the Baltic countries.¹²⁸⁷

Most recently, the Joint Sea 2019 was organized in the Chinese port city of Qingdao at the Yellow Sea Coast. The exercise included 'anti-air warfare' and 'anti-submarine warfare' components, while it was the first time that Russian and Chinese warships used their short-range ship-to-air missiles.¹²⁸⁸ The Joint Sea exercises combined with the Peace Mission drills provide Russian and Chinese armies with valuable experience to improve their tactical and operational capabilities. These

Perspective (The Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Sino-Russian Relations)”; and Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 12.

¹²⁸⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, p. 15. See also pp. 12-15.

¹²⁸⁶ See Elizabeth Wishnick, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and the East Asian Order," *Asian Perspective*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2018, p. 369; Korolev and Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies: System-Unit Dynamics and China-Russia Relations," p. 43. For information about Chinese claims in the South China Sea and the decision by the Hague tribunal see Suisheng Zhao, "China and the South China Sea Arbitration: Geopolitics versus International Law," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 27, No. 109, 2018.

¹²⁸⁷ Røseth, "Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing," p. 278; Andrew Wiggins, "China and Russia Hold First Joint Naval Drill in the Baltic Sea," *The New York Times*, July 25, 2017, <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/07/25/world/europe/china-russia-baltic-navy-exercises.html> (29.08.2019).

¹²⁸⁸ Franz-Stefan Gady, "China, Russia Kick Off Bilateral Naval Exercise 'Joint Sea'," *The Diplomat*, April 29, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/04/china-russia-kick-off-bilateral-naval-exercise-joint-sea/> (29.08.2019); and "China-Russia 'Joint Sea-2019' Exercise Makes Two 'First Times'," *China Military Online*, May 5, 2019, http://eng.chinamil.com.cn/view/2019-05/05/content_9495927.htm (29.08.2019).

exercises are especially useful for the Chinese army which has not fought a major war for decades. Yet, Russia has a long naval history and experience in modern maritime operations and could provide much-needed insights and knowledge to contribute to China in reaching its military modernization goals.¹²⁸⁹

In May 2016, Russia and China launched another common military exercise named as 'Airspace Security' which marked a new dimension in their strategic cooperation. In Moscow, they conducted computer-simulated drills during five days on joint defense against 'accidental or provocative ballistic or cruise missile attacks' towards China or Russia.¹²⁹⁰ Moscow and Beijing share a longstanding disturbance about the US missile deployments and Washington's unilateral decisions on withdrawal from arms control agreements. In 2001, when the Bush administration announced the US decision to withdraw from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty (ABM), China joined Russia's criticism on this move through the SCO mechanism.¹²⁹¹ Before Washington's recent decision to leave the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF) announced in February 2019 based on the claim that Russia violates the treaty, Moscow has already signaled its intention to renegotiate it in a setting to involve other countries such as China.¹²⁹² In fact, May 2016 decision to start joint exercises for missile defense was coincided with the US-South Korea negotiations about deploying a battery of Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in the latter's territory, which was interpreted as a common threat to China and Russia. After the agreement to deploy THAAD in South Korea was reached in late 2017, Beijing and Moscow declared that they would conduct their second missile defense exercise in the same year, thus stressed their willingness to continue cooperation in this area.¹²⁹³ On the other side, Vasily Kashin, a Russian military analyst on China, suggests that two states'

¹²⁸⁹ Weitz, "Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises," p. 52; Meick, "China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation," p. 5; and Røseth, "Moscow's Response to a Rising China: Russia's Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing," p. 276.

¹²⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 278; Korolev and Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies: System-Unit Dynamics and China-Russia Relations," p. 43.

¹²⁹¹ Ferguson, "The Strategic Use of Soft Balancing: The Normative Dimensions of the Chinese-Russian 'Strategic Partnership'," p. 209.

¹²⁹² Alexander Lanoszka, "The INF Treaty: Pulling out in Time," *Strategic Studies Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 2019 pp. 48-49.

¹²⁹³ Meick, "China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation," pp. 11-12.

ability to share information in such a sensitive area like missile warning systems and ballistic missile defense signals ‘something beyond simple co-operation’,¹²⁹⁴

In this regard, one of the primary aims of all joint exercises between Russia and China seems to be sending messages about their capabilities, intentions, and respective preferences both to the international community (especially the US) and to each other.¹²⁹⁵ Some scholars put more emphasize on this objective rather than two states’ aim at increasing interoperability between their armed forces. According to John Watts et al., the symbolic value of the Peace Mission exercises appears as their implication that Russia and China could align with each other if they get further challenged by the West.¹²⁹⁶ By the same token, Julie Wilhelmsen and Geir Flikke argue that the exercises between Russia and China in the SCO framework aim at signaling that “*their combined forces may have a larger effect in international relations.*”¹²⁹⁷ Joint Sea exercises are considered as another indicator of increasing willingness by Russia and China to ‘tacitly support’ each other in their respective security problems and disputes with Western powers and their regional allies.¹²⁹⁸ The chosen stages for these exercises among the areas of tensions demonstrate Moscow’s and Beijing’s desire to signal their ‘close military partnership’ and ‘strategic unity’ in strategically most significant and volatile regions of the Eurasian continent.¹²⁹⁹

Nevertheless, these joint exercises remain far less ambitious with regard to their content and their objective on building joint interoperability between Russian and Chinese armies. According to Paul Schwartz, the Joint Sea program has done little to prepare two countries’ navies to carry out joint maritime operations against a real-world enemy. Since Russia and China are not currently formal allies, it has not become

¹²⁹⁴ Kashin’s statement is quoted in Røseth, “Moscow’s Response to a Rising China: Russia’s Partnership Policies in Its Military Relations with Beijing,” p. 278.

¹²⁹⁵ Meick, “China-Russia Military-to-Military Relations: Moving toward a Higher Level of Cooperation,” pp. 6-7.

¹²⁹⁶ Watts, Ledberg, and Engelbrekt, “Brothers in Arms, yet Again? Twenty-First Century Sino-Russian Strategic Collaboration in the Realm of Defence and Security,” p. 439.

¹²⁹⁷ Wilhelmsen and Flikke, “Chinese–Russian Convergence and Central Asia,” p. 893.

¹²⁹⁸ Schwartz, “The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations,” p. 104.

¹²⁹⁹ Dmitri Trenin, “From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente,” Carnegie Moscow Center, April 2015, p. 12. Retrieved from: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_Trenin_To_Asia_WEB_2015Eng.pdf (29.08.2019).

a priority; rather they focused on gaining operational experience and exchanging technical know-how between their navies.¹³⁰⁰ As Richard Weitz puts it;

*“Even in the SCO context, Russia and China lack the interoperability or integrated command, control, and support mechanisms required to conduct an effective combined military campaign. The Chinese and Russian armed forces do not rehearse integrated military operations to the same degree as, for example, do the U.S. military drills with its NATO allies or South Korea and Japan. The United States and other countries regularly engage in many comparably large and often more challenging exercises with foreign partners.”*¹³⁰¹

These suggestions underline that joint military exercises between Russia and China have more to do with ‘signaling of resolve balance,’ a tacit balancing strategy examined in the framework of soft balancing theory; rather than boosting two great power’s capability to use of joint military force against a third state and their deterrent in this respect. As examined in the following sections both Russia and China avoid taking open sides to support each other in their regional disputes, let alone the risk of confrontation through military engagement into one other’s security problems and crises. In this respect, Weitz also concludes that “[o]ne should not exaggerate the significance of these Sino-Russian military exercises. Russia and China do not have a formal defense alliance, and there is no pledge or expectation that they would conduct joint combat operations anytime soon.”¹³⁰²

The extensive Russian-Chinese security cooperation involving consultations, arms trade, and joint exercises has been accompanied by an increasing number of Chinese military personnel who have been studied in Russia throughout the past two decades. In this respect, Russia has become the first foreign destination for thousands of Chinese military officers for both short-term and long-term education. On the other hand, many Russian military officials have participated in military exchanges and taken short-term education at the National Defense University of China.¹³⁰³ Indeed, China has no similar type of exchanges with any of the other major powers. Although short-time education exchanges to various countries are common for China’s army officers, the long-term educational programs involved by Chinese officers who are

¹³⁰⁰ Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 97.

¹³⁰¹ Weitz, "Parsing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises," p. 55.

¹³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 54.

¹³⁰³ See Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 98; Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 11.

later to join the commanding staff are maintained only with the Russian Federation.¹³⁰⁴ Observing all aspects of military ties between Russia and China elaborated above, Korolev maintains that the current scale of bilateral cooperation reaches far beyond the cooperation and coordination level observed in some of existing formal alliances. The Author affirms that two states do not participate in a defense pact together but chooses to describe Russian-Chinese partnership as ‘on the verge of an alliance.’¹³⁰⁵ Still, there are serious impediments on the way towards building an alliance between these two great powers which would have other significant implications according to our theoretical framework. Below we focus on the negative aspects in Russian-Chinese alignment underlining such defecting factors.

B. Divergent Interests and Autonomy Concerns: The Limits of Security Cooperation

Our theoretical framework represented in Part One, Chapter One underlined some certain factors preventing major powers from lifting their security cooperation to the level of a military alliance in order to balance the United States. First, we underscored that the geography remains as a complicated factor for great powers with an interest to balance the unipole: All major powers except the US are located in and around Eurasia, whose proximity to each other may create conflicts of interest, security dilemmas and local counterbalancing. Secondly, great powers have their primary focus usually on local issues and security interests in their respective neighborhoods rather than the global balance of power. While they tend to get embedded in a regional security system surrounding themselves, great powers avoid the risk of entrapment into a conflict in another region for the sake of their allies’ security and interests. Therefore, major powers’ autonomy concerns play a critical factor for them to reject uniting in a military alliance. Having all those references in mind, below we explore the limits of security cooperation between Russia and China.

Regional Competition and Clash of Interests in Central Asia

Despite the developing security cooperation between Russia and China, there are some analysts who underline the regional competition for influence over Central

¹³⁰⁴ **Ibid.**

¹³⁰⁵ **Ibid.**, p. 15.

Asia as a primary negative dynamic in Russian-Chinese relations.¹³⁰⁶ For example, Jeffrey Mankoff argues that “*Sino-Russian relations lack trust and are characterized by strategic competition, especially in the two countries’ shared region.*”¹³⁰⁷ As examined earlier Russia and China seem to overcome their bilateral tensions on the border areas and the worries based on a security dilemma between these contiguous great powers. Yet, Central Asian politics remain a source of distrust in Sino-Russian relations, as Moscow is willing to reinforce its leadership status in this region while Beijing seeks to expand its markets and its share of regional energy sources.¹³⁰⁸ In the previous section, we suggested that the SCO appears as a useful mechanism for Russia to observe and assert some control over Beijing’s entry into the region especially in the security realm; which renders China a less threatening major power having interests in Central Asia. However it does not represent the ideal situation for Moscow with regard to regional politics, thus we also need to note the main frictions and the conflict of interests between Russia and China in this geographical context.

In fact, the Kremlin’s concerns on Chinese involvement in regional politics induce Russia to take an ambivalent stance towards the SCO. On the one side, Moscow would like to attribute a more anti-American character to the SCO by emphasizing the combined power potential of the member states and possibilities to further the military cooperation.¹³⁰⁹ On the other side, Russia holds its preference for the CSTO as the main organization responsible for military security in Central Asia to limit Chinese influence. By contrast, China has maintained a more consistent and clear standing towards the SCO from the beginning. Beijing has shown little interest in promoting the SCO as a tool for overtly challenging the West, in line with its preference for a more indirect, gradual and less confrontational approach to transforming the US-led international order.¹³¹⁰ Rather, China would prefer to use the SCO as a vehicle to enhance economic inroads into Central Asia. Therefore, Beijing strives to strengthen

¹³⁰⁶ For a review of such arguments against Russian-Chinese strategic alignment see Lo, "Introduction," pp. 4-5; and Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," pp. 4-5.

¹³⁰⁷ Mankoff, "US Perspective (The Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Sino-Russian Relations)".

¹³⁰⁸ See De Haas, "Relations of Central Asia with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Collective Security Treaty Organization," p. 11.

¹³⁰⁹ See Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 96. This trend was reinforced especially after the Ukraine crisis. For Russian proposals to enhance the SCO’s military profile and the negative reaction by the other members see Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 337.

¹³¹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 322; and Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 96.

the economic dimension of the SCO to address the economic needs of local states and serve its own regional interests.¹³¹¹

The disagreements about the SCO has led Russia to block some Chinese initiatives to further economic cooperation in the organization. Beijing has shown a long-standing interest in the creation of a free trade zone among the SCO members. When this demand was officially reiterated by Chinese premier Li Keqiang in November 2016, it was rejected by Russian Prime Minister Medvedev who argued that such a regime would be a complicated issue as “*any preferential regime always requires renunciation of internal decisions of one kind or another.*”¹³¹² Accordingly, Li’s proposal on the establishment of an ‘SCO-sponsored bank’ and a ‘development fund’ was also met with Russia’s misgivings and vetoed by the Kremlin.¹³¹³ In addition to that, Sino-Russian competition over the post-Soviet region also manifested itself in the form of overlapping regional economic projects. In 2014, Russia led to the establishment of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) as the successor of the CIS Custom Union and the EurAsEC. This organization aims at regional economic integration through promoting a single market for goods, services, labor and capital among its members; Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.¹³¹⁴ On the other side, Beijing has promoted the ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ project which then became a part of the ‘Belt and Road’ initiative in order to facilitate trade and transit routes from China to Europe via Central Asia.¹³¹⁵ The absence of political overtones and supranational structures in the latter project has indeed aroused much more sympathy among Central Asian elites. Russia has worried that the Chinese initiative could undermine its economic union plan, thus the Kremlin has worked to prevent

¹³¹¹ See *ibid.*; and Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Chinese–Russian Convergence and Central Asia," p. 885.

¹³¹² Quoted in Marc Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the ‘Crimea Effect’," Helge Blakkisrud and Elana W Rowe (ed.), **Russia's Turn to the East**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018, p. 129.

¹³¹³ *Ibid.*

¹³¹⁴ See Evgeny Vinokurov, "Eurasian Economic Union: Current State and Preliminary Results," **Russian Journal of Economics**, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2017; and David G. Tarr, "The Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Armenia, and the Kyrgyz Republic: Can It Succeed Where Its Predecessor Failed?," **Eastern European Economics**, Vol. 54, No. 1, 2016.

¹³¹⁵ See Alexander Gabuev, "Unwanted but Inevitable: Russia’s Deepening Partnership with China Post-Ukraine," Jo Inge Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (ed.), **Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019 p. 58; and Mankoff, "US Perspective (The Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Sino-Russian Relations)".

Beijing from utilizing the SCO in the implementation of its projects linked to the Silk Road Economic Belt.¹³¹⁶

As we noted in the introduction, interstate economic cooperation and competition processes remain out of the focus of this study concerning alignments in the security realm. Yet, there are possible political, geopolitical, and security implications of Sino-Russian economic competition in the post-Soviet space. Some analysts argue that Russia and China share a common interest in a stable and prosperous Central Asia for which they serve by playing complementary roles in regional security and economic development.¹³¹⁷ For example, Sergei Karaganov, who has long served as the foreign policy adviser to Putin, portrays Moscow and Beijing as the main providers of security in Eurasia suggesting that “*China is providing economic security; we are providing military-strategic security.*”¹³¹⁸ In fact, Karaganov recognizes that Chinese expansionism towards the region in economic terms is inevitable, but he also believes that it could contribute regional stability and wellbeing of the nations. According to Karaganov, without Chinese investments, many countries in Central Asia could face the danger of economic collapse. Therefore, he suggests, Russia and China will work hand in hand for military and economic security.¹³¹⁹ It has to be noted that the Kremlin has become increasingly welcoming towards this proposition after the Ukraine crisis which led to an isolation campaign on Russia by the West. As a result, Moscow broke initial hesitance towards China’s Silk Road Economic Belt project and embraced it ultimately in 2014.¹³²⁰ In May 2014, Moscow officially affirmed that the Chinese vision of an economic belt expanding into the

¹³¹⁶ **Ibid.** Criticizing Russia’s stance on this issue, a former Chinese official responsible for Central Asian policy has referred to Russia’s characterization of this region as Moscow’s ‘backyard’ and stated that “*we understand. But you’re supposed after all to look after your own yard, water the flowers.*” Quoted in “China’s Central Asia Problem,” p. 9.

¹³¹⁷ For different assessments on the argument based on such a ‘division of labor’ between Russia and China, see Lo, “Introduction,” pp. 5, 8; Kaczmarek, **Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order**, p. 86, 135-138; Gabuev, “Unwanted but Inevitable: Russia’s Deepening Partnership with China Post-Ukraine,” pp. 57-58.

¹³¹⁸ Sergei Karaganov, “A Cold War: A Forecast for Tomorrow,” Russia in Global Affairs, October 30, 2017, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/pubcol/A-Cold-War-A-Forecast-for-Tomorrow-19099> (14.09.2019). The Author served as the foreign policy advisor to the Presidential Administration of Russian Federation between 2001 and 2013. For his biography see “Sergey A. Karaganov,” Higher School of Economics, <https://www.hse.ru/en/staff/karaganov> (14.09.2019).

¹³¹⁹ Karaganov maintains that this “*is why we try to merge the Eurasian Economic Union and the One Belt One Road initiative. There will be some tensions but not a rivalry.*” Author’s interview with Sergei Karaganov.

¹³²⁰ Ying, “How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies,” p. 99.

boundaries of the post-Soviet space was ‘vitally important,’ while China, in turn, only agreed to pay regard to Russian interests in the construction of this belt.¹³²¹

In 2015, Russia and China agreed on a joint declaration to coordinate the Chinese Belt and Road project and the Eurasian Economic Union. Later in 2018, Moscow and Beijing reached another agreement to increase trade and economic cooperation between the Chinese initiative and the Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union.¹³²² For the time being, it seems that the Kremlin would not oppose China’s economic activities in the CIS, as long as Beijing formally respects the EEU and avoids seeking bilateral free trade agreements with regional states.¹³²³ Since Beijing has no wish to endanger the Sino-Russian partnership, it has long preserved its respect for Russia’s dominant role in the region. This has induced China to focus on the economic development of Central Asia, while it has limited its political clout in the region.¹³²⁴ Most importantly, China pays a special regard to Russia’s redlines on establishing alliances with regional states and military bases in the post-Soviet space, while Beijing sides with Moscow about the unacceptability of externally-manipulated regime change and other forms of intervention.¹³²⁵ So far, the tacit ‘division of labor’ in military security and economic development between China and Russia has enabled them to avoid outright competition, though it has not removed their divergent interest in Central Asia.¹³²⁶

Nonetheless, there are some others questioning the sustainability of the Sino-Russian partnership on the basis of such a ‘division of labor’ in Central Asian politics. Bobo Lo suggests that the long-time ‘division of labor’ based on Moscow’s political leadership in Eurasia and Beijing’s economic primacy is being eroded, because of the shift in the balance of power and influence between two states towards China which

¹³²¹ Mankoff, “US Perspective (The Ukraine Crisis and the Future of Sino-Russian Relations)”.

¹³²² As the first ever comprehensive agreement on such a coordination, it “*covers several areas of cooperation, such as customs, trade facilitation, intellectual property rights, sectoral cooperation and government procurement.*” See Hsiung, “Facing the ‘New Normal’: The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe,” pp. 19-20.

¹³²³ Gabuev, “Unwanted but Inevitable: Russia’s Deepening Partnership with China Post-Ukraine,” p. 58.

¹³²⁴ Shiping Tang, “Economic Integration in Central Asia: The Russian and Chinese Relationship,” *Asian Survey*, Vol. 40, No. 2, 2000, p. 368.

¹³²⁵ See Trenin, “From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente,” p. 14; and Mikhail Troitskiy, “The China Factor in U.S.-Russia Relations,” PONARS Eurasia, Policy Memo No. 287, September 2013, p. 3. Retrieved from: http://www.ponarseurasia.org/sites/default/files/policy-memos-pdf/Peprm_287_Troitskiy_Sept2013.pdf (08.09.2019).

¹³²⁶ Kaczmarek, *Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order*, p. 86.

increasingly pursues a more ambitious and globalist foreign policy. He also suggests that some Russian and Chinese academics view such a division as increasingly ‘anachronistic’ in the current era of global politics.¹³²⁷ Dmitri Trenin also does not believe in an established ‘division of labor’ between Russia and China, given that the latter also advances its armed capabilities on a very fast base. As a result of Beijing’s increasing military expenditures in recent years, China’s military budget became a couple of times bigger than the Russian one. Today China is a serious military power without much military experience but it can be compensated later. For Trenin, therefore, China is clearly on a path of becoming a major military player both in Eurasia and on the global scene in the future.¹³²⁸

Our analysis of Russia-China security cooperation up to this point shows that this alignment between two great powers has not been established on the basis of a great harmony of interests. On the Russian side, it generally appears as an effort to balance more threatening powers (the US and the West) with less threatening ones (i.e. China) in line with Walt’s balance of threat theory. The post-Ukraine crisis developments such as Moscow’s transfer of high-tech arms to Beijing, the advancement of joint military exercises and Russia’s forbearance for an increasing Chinese engagement into its near abroad all support this argument. In Korolev’s words:

*“While the level of trust between China and Russia is still a debatable issue, Moscow, at the very least, seems to be certain that any forms of “China’s threat” theory should be disregarded mostly because the US-led West is seen by Moscow as a bigger and more immediate threat. As some leading Russian China experts put it: “At present any unprejudiced person is much better aware than before that today and tomorrow Russia faces a much bigger, more dangerous and more real threat from the West than a hypothetical threat from a rising China in the day after tomorrow.””*¹³²⁹

¹³²⁷ Lo, "Introduction," p. 5. See also p. 15, endnote 8. Mikhail Troitskiy makes a parallel argument that China’s investments in the region can inevitably lead to some political interference into domestic politics. For example, Beijing may try to interfere in the setting up of governments in regional states (e.g. the promotion of ministers), which is very hard to accept by Russia. Therefore, it would potentially create tensions between the two states. Author’s interview with Mikhail Troitskiy.

¹³²⁸ Author’s interview with Dmitri Trenin.

¹³²⁹ Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 10. For the English version of Korolev’s citation from Portyakov see Vladimir Portyakov, “China’s Rise: What Next?” Russia in Global Affairs, September 23, 2014, <https://eng.globalaffairs.ru/number/Chinas-Rise-What-Next-16998> (08.09.2019).

Accordingly, China's present main rival also appears as the United States not Russia. This induces Russian belief that Moscow would not likely face a serious threat by China in a foreseeable future, as Beijing has an interest to avoid whatever may cause Russia's negative reaction and undermine their bilateral partnership.¹³³⁰ In this respect, scholars view the American policy towards Eurasia as a central variable to shape the future of Russian-Chinese alignment: If these two states' common threat perception is watered down by a gradual disengagement of the United States from the region or a decrease in its unilateralist tendencies, it could unleash a competition between Russia and China in their shared neighborhood.¹³³¹ Therefore, Russia has an interest to retain its flexibility by keeping its security cooperation with China at the level of an informal alignment, as it provides Moscow with more autonomy in its foreign relations.

Autonomy Concerns by Moscow and Beijing and Their Reactions to Each Other's Regional Security Crises

James Morrow suggests that major powers enjoy both high-level security and autonomy in international politics. They are reluctant to enter into defense pacts with other major states, as it demands a high price in autonomy to form a symmetrical alliance.¹³³² In Part One, Chapter Two, we examined how autonomy concerns by the Soviet Union and China have played a crucial role in the Sino-Soviet split and the collapse of the bilateral alliance treaty that had been signed in 1950. Regarding the current balance of power between China and Russia, it can be argued that the table has turned: The former is clearly much stronger, wealthier and more dynamic great power than the latter. According to Trenin, it has become increasingly clear for Russians that in a revitalized alliance China would enjoy the upper hand.¹³³³ The establishment of a monolithic bloc between Russia and China, a joint military command, and a formal military alliance would clearly provide Moscow with more security against the

¹³³⁰ See Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," p. 10.

¹³³¹ For example see *ibid.*, p. 6; Wilhelmsen and Flikke, "Chinese-Russian Convergence and Central Asia," p. 894; and Barry R. Posen, "It's Time to Make Afghanistan Someone Else's Problem," *The Atlantic*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/solution-afghanistan-withdrawal-iran-russia-pakistan-trump/537252/> (08.09.2019).

¹³³² Morrow, "Alliances and Asymmetry: An Alternative to the Capability Aggregation Model of Alliances," p. 313.

¹³³³ Author's interview with Dmitri Trenin. See also Trenin, "True partners? How Russia and China See each other," p. 30.

perceived threats from the US and NATO. However, much as Russia would like to resist American dominance in international politics, it does not really want to accept a subordinate position in an alliance relationship with China. In Trenin's words, "[t]o spite Washington is one thing; to accept a junior position vis-à-vis Beijing is quite another."¹³³⁴

The relative strength of Russia and China vis-à-vis each other also renders it difficult to reach a consensus about what will be the exact future shape of the international system. As examined earlier, both states agree that the US-led order is unsatisfactory in many aspects and needs to be reformed towards a more 'multilateral and 'polycentric' one. At the same time, however, they have different visions for a more equal global system. The Kremlin tends to view the world in triangular terms based on interactions between the US, China, and Russia. In such a setting, Moscow could operate as a 'global swing power.' On the other hand, Beijing considers the US as the sole counterpart to a rising China, while it has suspicions about the usefulness and reliability of Russia as a true ally.¹³³⁵ In the long term, Beijing would likely seek to establish its preeminence in Asia and eventually globally, while Moscow, without any prospect for world primacy, will maintain its efforts to remain a power center in Eurasia as a member of global concert of major powers. The interaction of these two visions in Eurasia could also possibly endanger Sino-Russian alignment.¹³³⁶

The degree of confrontation with the unipolar leader also represents a point of discord between Russia and China, although both seek to challenge the American primacy in international politics. Beijing remains much more cautious in this sense, not only because it owns a different foreign policy style, but also because China highly values its relations with the West which has become vital for Chinese economic development.¹³³⁷ Therefore China has a strong inducement to stop short to actively support Russia's military adventures in Ukraine and Syria. Many in China view the US and Russia's perceptions towards each other as heavily influenced by the Cold War thinking. In this respect, they expect these two powers to put their old enmities to rest

¹³³⁴ **Ibid.**

¹³³⁵ See Lo, "Introduction," p. 6. For a similar argument about Russia's 'power play' between the USA and China using 'the China card.' Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," pp. 21-22.

¹³³⁶ See Trenin, "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente," p. 10.

¹³³⁷ Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 22.

to see the ultimate end of the prolonged Cold War.¹³³⁸ On the other side, Beijing has worked to transform its highly-valued relations with the US towards ‘a new type of great-power relationship’ encompassing both ‘close cooperation’ and ‘peaceful competition,’ hoping that it could finally achieve equality with Washington in a longer-term.¹³³⁹ Under these conditions, China has followed a consistent line to avoid military alliances with any country let alone Russia but it has restricted its cooperation with other states to areas it can directly control.¹³⁴⁰

Another factor feeding Chinese and Russian autonomy concerns with regard to their alignment relations is the fact that they do not share the same geographical focus when it comes to their foreign security policies. As Marcin Kaczmarek points out, the Chinese position in the East Asian region defines its role and capabilities as a great power, where has been of minor importance for the Russian federation.¹³⁴¹ While China is more concerned with the developments in Asia, Moscow is traditionally oriented towards Europe from where it has historically faced the most challenging threats to its security.¹³⁴² In fact, Moscow and Beijing have criticized the US policies towards each other’s neighborhood labeling them as interventionist, unilateralist and hegemonic. However, both Russia and China have remained hesitant to spend their political capital to support one other actively in their regional disputes and crises. The complexity and ambivalence and of Sino–Russian relations, in this sense, fully surfaced during the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 and the Ukrainian crisis in 2014.¹³⁴³

In August 2008, Beijing took a nominally neutral stance towards Moscow’s use of force in response to Georgia’s attack on the Russian-backed separatist province of South Ossetia.¹³⁴⁴ The first reaction of Beijing towards the conflict became a brief message posted on the website of the Chinese Foreign Ministry including three sentences which called for a peaceful resolution. China also maintained its low profile

¹³³⁸ See Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 101.

¹³³⁹ Trenin, "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente," p. 6.

¹³⁴⁰ Matveeva, "Russia's Changing Security Role in Central Asia," p. 493. That being said, not to participate in formal military alliances that Beijing views as the remnants of the Cold War has become a core principle of China’s foreign policy. Watts, Ledberg, and Engelbrekt, "Brothers in Arms, yet Again? Twenty-First Century Sino-Russian Strategic Collaboration in the Realm of Defence and Security," p. 430.

¹³⁴¹ Kaczmarek, **Russia-China Relations in the Post-Crisis International Order**, p. 108.

¹³⁴² See Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 99.

¹³⁴³ See Korolev and Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies: System-Unit Dynamics and China-Russia Relations," pp. 44-45.

¹³⁴⁴ Trenin, "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente," pp. 5-6.

during a debate on Georgia in the United Nations.¹³⁴⁵ Even though Beijing has long recognized Russia's peacekeeping role in the region, Russian military initiative in the Georgian territory under the aegis of 'peace enforcement' was not well received by China. In fact, Beijing's ambivalent stance towards the conflict was influenced by some core principles embraced by Chinese foreign policy such as 'sanctity of borders' and 'non-intervention.'¹³⁴⁶ Chinese leaders' emphasis on Georgia's territorial integrity was also shared by Central Asian states, therefore, the SCO avoided endorsing Russian military actions in Georgia. Accordingly, none of the SCO members followed Russia to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia as independent states.¹³⁴⁷ At the same time, however, Beijing did not openly criticize Russia and avoided taking an overtly anti-Russian stance, which was starkly in contrast with the reactions by the US and European states.¹³⁴⁸

Beijing's response to the 2014 Ukraine crisis shared many similarities with its reaction to the Russia-Georgia war of 2008, which remained again by and large neutral.¹³⁴⁹ Official declarations by the Chinese government reiterated Beijing's emphasis on territorial integrity and sovereignty of states, yet it again stopped short of openly criticizing Russia's actions including the annexation of Crimea.¹³⁵⁰ It was partly because China has shown an understanding of Russia's interpretation of the reasons for the crisis including the overthrow of a legal government in a way similar

¹³⁴⁵ "China the Biggest Rival for Russia," The Financial, August 25, 2008, <https://www.finchannel.com/~finchannel/world/22072-> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁴⁶ Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," pp. 129-130.

¹³⁴⁷ See Kropatcheva, "Russia and the Collective Security Treaty Organisation: Multilateral Policy or Unilateral Ambitions?," p. 1538; and Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 328. The SCO's 2008 Dushanbe Summit declaration only noted the members' "*deep concern over the recent tensions around the issue of South Ossetia*," and called "*the parties concerned to peacefully resolve existing problems through dialogue*." In addition, the declaration expressed a vocal support to "*Russia's active role in promoting peace and cooperation in the region*." Dushanbe Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the SCO, August 27, 2008, <http://eng.sectsco.org/load/198068/> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁴⁸ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations in Times of Crisis: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation," p. 412.

¹³⁴⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 419.

¹³⁵⁰ Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," p. 131. Following the annexation of Crimea in March 2014, the spokesperson of the Foreign Ministry of China stated unequivocally that the sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity of Ukraine should be respected. The declaration also called all the parties of the conflict to resolve their differences through dialogue and to avoid activities which could worsen the situation. Quoted in Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 100.

to color revolutions and the process of NATO's eastward expansion.¹³⁵¹ On the other hand, China avoided taking any side of this conflict at the United Nations level. One day before the referendum of secession organized in Crimea, the UN Security Council voted for a draft resolution declaring the results of the referendum as invalid. The Western permanent members voted in favor of it and Russia vetoed. Yet, China abstained arguing that such a resolution would only have further complicated the situation.¹³⁵² Later on March 27, the UN General Assembly voted for a resolution discouraging the recognition of any change in the international status of Crimea. While it was affirmed by Western countries and rejected by Russia, Beijing again abstained.¹³⁵³ China did not support the economic sanctions posed on Russia by the US and European states either, therefore, became the largest economic power remaining outside of the international coalition aimed at isolating Russia due to its actions in Ukraine.¹³⁵⁴

In addition to that, China sided with Russia in criticizing the US-led 'unilateral' sanctions and calling the Western nations to give up encouraging activities aimed at changing the constitutional order in a foreign country. However, Beijing avoided taking Russia's side for the conflict resolution. Instead, China called upon all sides

¹³⁵¹ See *ibid.*, p. 100; Kaczmarek, "The Asymmetric Partnership? Russia's Turn to China," p. 431. This was put forward openly by the Chinese Foreign Ministry's declaration in March 2014 that Beijing always recognized and respected international law and the principle of non-interference but it also took "into account the historical facts and realistic complexity of the Ukrainian issue." Quoted in Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," p. 131.

¹³⁵² See Zhang Lihua, "Explaining China's Position on the Crimea Referendum," Carnegie-Tsinghua Center, April, 1, 2015, <https://carnegietsinghua.org/2015/04/01/explaining-china-s-position-on-crimea-referendum-pub-59600> (14.09.2019); and "UN Security Council Action on Crimea Referendum Blocked," UN News, March 15, 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464002-un-security-council-action-crimea-referendum-blocked> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁵³ Lihua, "Explaining China's Position on the Crimea Referendum". The resolution was adopted by a vote of 100 in favor to 11 against, together with 58 abstentions. "Backing Ukraine's Territorial Integrity, UN Assembly Declares Crimea Referendum Invalid," UN News, March 27, 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/03/464812-backing-ukraines-territorial-integrity-un-assembly-declares-crimea-referendum#.UzgPNqLRUdw> (14.09.2019). For the full text of the resolution see General Assembly Resolution, Territorial integrity of Ukraine, A/RES/68/262, April 1, 2014, <https://undocs.org/A/RES/68/262> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁵⁴ In such a troublesome period for Russia, Moscow and Beijing reached significant agreements in the economic realm, which was exemplified by a \$400 billion natural gas agreement. Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," p. 120, 131. See also Trenin, "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente," p. 6. For another study arguing that Russian-Chinese energy agreements reached since 2014 has followed the same trend in their bilateral economic relations, which had been observed well before the Ukraine crisis and that Beijing's financial contributions to that sector has not been as large as they sometimes appear, see Indra Overland and Gulaikhan Kubayeva, "Did China Bankroll Russia's Annexation of Crimea? The Role of Sino-Russian Energy Relations," Helge Blakkisrud and Elena W. Wilson (ed.), *Russia's Turn to the East*, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018.

having stakes in the crisis (Russia, Ukraine, the US, and the EU, etc.) to avoid direct conflict, to engage in diplomatic negotiations, and to promote a comprehensive political resolution.¹³⁵⁵ Besides the Chinese position, the Central Asian states' concerns on sovereignty and territorial integrity led to the failure of Moscow's initiatives in the SCO to secure the formal support of the organization to the Russian interpretation of the crisis. The declaration of the 2014 SCO Dushanbe Summit only called for the restoration of peace in the ongoing civil war in eastern Ukraine through negotiations.¹³⁵⁶

On the other side, Russia followed a similar 'balanced' approach towards China's regional security disputes and crises. While Moscow granted its diplomatic support to Beijing in opposing the US initiatives in the Chinese neighborhood, it avoided taking open sides in regional disputes between China and other Asian countries. For example, Russia has opposed the internationalization of the South China Sea dispute by the meddling of extra-regional countries (such as the United States) and advocated that negotiations should take place between the direct participants of the dispute. Unlike Washington, Moscow has never questioned the legitimacy of Beijing's nine-dash line argument claiming around 80 percent of the South China Sea. However, Russia has neither affirmed China's claims nor supported Beijing vis-à-vis the actual disputant countries such as the Philippines, Vietnam or others. Rather Russia has advocated a peaceful political resolution through negotiations, which would be acceptable to all parties involved in the dispute.¹³⁵⁷ Russia's position towards the South China Sea dispute was explicitly put forward by the statement of Russian Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova on July 14, 2016, that "*Russia is not involved in territorial disputes in that region, and that it has no intention of getting involved*" as Moscow "*consider[s] it a matter of principle not to side with any party.*"¹³⁵⁸

¹³⁵⁵ See Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations in Times of Crisis: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation," p. 420; Lihua, "Explaining China's Position on the Crimea Referendum"; and Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," p. 131.

¹³⁵⁶ See *ibid.*, pp. 130-131.

¹³⁵⁷ Korolev and Portyakov, "China-Russia Relations in Times of Crisis: A Neoclassical Realist Explanation," p. 422.

¹³⁵⁸ Zakharova also added that the Kremlin regards "*attempts to interfere in a resolution of territorial issues in the South China Sea by external parties to be counter-productive.*" "Briefing by Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Maria Zakharova," Moscow, July 14, 2016," Eagle News, July 19, 2016,

It has to be noted that Russia and China has deepened their bilateral security consultations on the international security issues in the Asia Pacific region, in recent years, such as the aggravating tensions between the US and China, the North Korean nuclear problem and the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Two states established a bilateral platform called as ‘China-Russia Northeast Asia Security Dialogue’ in April 2015, in order to exchange views and create effective security mechanisms in the region. However, this platform has focused more on opposing the common threat of the increasing US engagement towards the region instead of building common positions and policies on definite security problems. This strategic purpose was highlighted by an increasing frequency of meetings in this setting up to a bimonthly schedule immediately after the US decision in 2016 to deploy THAAD missiles in South Korea.¹³⁵⁹ In June 2016, China and Russia finally released a joint statement on ‘strengthening global strategic stability’ underlining negative factors influencing that stability such as “*the unilateral deployment of anti-missile systems all over the world.*”¹³⁶⁰ Besides sharing Chinese disturbance on the US encroachment into the region, Russia viewed the deployments primarily as a direct threat to its security given that the THAAD systems would diminish its own first and second-strike capabilities to launch missiles against the US and its regional military allies.¹³⁶¹ While the same threat also faces China, Beijing had its primary concern on the possibility that American missile deployments could undermine its capability of taking initiatives against the Taiwan problem.¹³⁶²

In fact, the only Chinese national security problem on which Russia formally takes Beijing’s side is the Taiwan issue, as Moscow like most other countries does not recognize the island as an independent and sovereign entity. Since the 1990s, Moscow

<https://www.eaglenews.ph/briefing-by-foreign-ministry-spokesperson-maria-zakharova-moscow-july-14-2016/> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁵⁹ See Korolev, "On the Verge of an Alliance: Contemporary China-Russia Military Cooperation," pp. 5-7.

¹³⁶⁰ Michael S. Chase et al., "Russia-China relations: Assessing Common Ground and Strategic Fault Lines," The National Bureau of Asian Research, Special Report, July 2017, pp. 6-7. Retrieved from: https://www.nbr.org/wp-content/uploads/pdfs/publications/special_report_66_russia-chinarelations_July2017.pdf (14.09.2019).

¹³⁶¹ See Stephen Blank, "Missile Defense in Korea Further Roils US-Russian Relations," Eurasia Daily Monitor, Vol. 13, No. 133, July 22, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/missile-defense-in-korea-further-roils-us-russian-relations/> (14.09.2019); and "Why Moscow and Beijing are Really Afraid of the U.S. THAAD in South Korea," March 1, 2017," Russia Beyond, <https://www.rbth.com/opinion/2017/03/01/moscow-beijing-thaad-south-korea-711238> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁶² Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 98.

has maintained its commitment on 'one-China policy' recognizing the government of the People's Republic of China as the only representative of the whole country including the territory of Taiwan.¹³⁶³ Article 5 of the Friendship Treaty signed with China in 2001 also codified Moscow's adherence to the Chinese 'principled stand' on the Taiwan issue and declared that Russia would oppose to 'any form of Taiwan's independence'.¹³⁶⁴ Through the 2000s, Russian diplomacy has worked against Taiwan's applications for a membership or special status to international organizations such as the World Health Organization and the United Nations.¹³⁶⁵ However, China expects more from Russia than its symbolic and diplomatic support to 'one-China policy' and looks for some tangible signs of support from its ally to its eventual mission to reunite the island mainland China. According to Shelley Rigger, Beijing is even interested in "*encouraging Russia to commit itself to intervene on China's behalf in the event of a Taiwan Strait conflict.*"¹³⁶⁶ On the other side, Moscow sees a possible escalation of the conflict as harmful to its security interest. Under current conditions, Russia lacks a clear conception of a political course with regard to Taiwan's reunification with China. Therefore Moscow appears to be willing to ignore the conflict.¹³⁶⁷

Given the Russian passive support to the Chinese position, some scholars claim that Moscow views the maintenance of this conflict indeed as advantageous concerning its strategic interests. First of all, the Taiwan issue increases China's need for Russian-made weaponry with advanced technology, as Beijing seeks to assert an air-space superiority over the Taiwan Strait. Equally significant, the external threats from the east keep Beijing's military orientation towards Taiwan and the South China Sea rather than Central Asia and Russia's borders. This situation decreases the possible negative consequences of wholesale arms transfers to rising China. In addition, the

¹³⁶³ See Shelley Rigger, "The Taiwan Issue and the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: The View from Beijing," James Bellacqua (ed.), **The Future of China-Russia Relations**, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010 p. 316; and Richard Weitz, "Why Russia and China Have Not Formed an Anti-American Alliance," **Naval War College Review**, Vol. 56, No. 4, 2003 pp. 51-52.

¹³⁶⁴ See Treaty of Good-Neighborliness and Friendly Cooperation between the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation.

¹³⁶⁵ Jeanne L. Wilson, "China, Russia, and the Taiwan Issue: The View from Moscow," James Bellacqua (ed.), **The Future of China-Russia Relations**, Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2010, pp. 297-298.

¹³⁶⁶ Rigger, "The Taiwan Issue and the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: The View from Beijing," p. 313. See also Jeanne L. Wilson, "China, Russia, and the Taiwan Issue: The View from Moscow," pp. 302-303.

¹³⁶⁷ See **Ibid.**, pp. 302, 305.

resolution of the conflict through the unification of China and Taiwan would augment Beijing's power potential and eliminate a major obstacle for closer ties between China and the US, which would decrease Russia's leverage on China as a strategic ally.¹³⁶⁸ Looking at the naval competition in Western Pacific, the Kremlin views Beijing as the challenger and Washington as a status quo power and asserts this rivalry as a factor both hindering Sino-American collusion and providing Moscow with some options vis-à-vis both sides.¹³⁶⁹ At the same time, however, Russia would not like to see an escalation of an outright military confrontation between China and the US. Given the Soviet Union's behavior towards the Taiwan issue, as a superpower formally allied with China; today's much weaker Russia would avoid involvement in such a conflict at any cost which remains peripheral to its overall geopolitical concerns.¹³⁷⁰

This fear of entrapment into a possible great power confrontation with the United States as the sole superpower does not only affect how Russia approach towards its partnership with China but also vice-versa: While Russia does not want to assist China militarily in its possible conflicts in Western Pacific, China would also avoid to entangling into a possible military confrontation between Russia and NATO in Eastern Europe, where Beijing has no vital regional security interests.¹³⁷¹ A little bit controversially, Russian and Chinese autonomy concerns also cover their interest in keeping options open in their relations with Washington, despite their common threat perceptions from the United States. Neither Beijing nor Moscow want to foreclose their opportunities to engage positively with the US and its allies, which would be

¹³⁶⁸ See *Ibid.*, pp. 301-302; Rigger, "The Taiwan Issue and the Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership: The View from Beijing," p. 327.

¹³⁶⁹ Trenin, "True partners? How Russia and China See each other," p. 46.

¹³⁷⁰ Jeanne L. Wilson, "China, Russia, and the Taiwan Issue: The View from Moscow," pp. 293-302. Russia's fear of entangling into conflicts between China and a third party was also revealed by some developments with regard to jointly organized military exercises. Before the 'Peace Mission 2005' Russia and China spent months discussing the actual location of the exercise. While China proposed Zhejiang province near the Taiwan Straits, the Kremlin found it too provocative and insisted a location in further north, which was later accepted by Beijing. Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 96. During the Joint Sea 2016 exercise held in the South China Sea, it was reported that Russian diplomats urged Beijing successfully to conduct the drills only in undisputed areas owned by China. See Wishnick, "The Sino-Russian Partnership and the East Asian Order," p. 369; and Korolev and Portyakov, "Reluctant Allies: System-Unit Dynamics and China-Russia Relations," p. 43.

¹³⁷¹ Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 34.

strikingly narrowed by the establishment of an outright military alliance between two great powers.¹³⁷²

Our analysis of the content and limits of Sino-Russian security cooperation confirms that the bilateral alignment between these two great powers can be best termed as an 'entente'. As noted in the introduction, ententes symbolize reduction of the amount of conflict between the parties and raise the expectations for mutual support and further cooperation, but the reducing level of conflict here is not adequate to transform the members' basic relationship into an alliance.¹³⁷³ Robert Kann notes another significant characteristic of ententes seemingly applicable to Sino-Russian relations: The parties of such an arrangement recognize "*the fact that agreements between them will make sense only if they serve their common interest.*"¹³⁷⁴ There are notable Chinese and Russia scholars preferring the term entente to describe the security interactions between two states.¹³⁷⁵ According to Trenin, the Sino-Russian entente is characterized by a formula de-facto accepted by two states; "*never being against each other, but not necessarily always with each other.*"¹³⁷⁶ This formula involves a solid bilateral partnership where Russian-Chinese interests meet and avoiding conflicts where they do not; while it empowers much flexibility where their interests overlap only partially.¹³⁷⁷ Confirming Trenin's argument that two states will not form an alliance, Christopher Hsiung suggests that Russia and China maintain developing existing areas of cooperation and exploring additional areas, while avoiding issues of contestation. In this respect, cooperation would likely overshadow competition in Sino-Russian relations.¹³⁷⁸ Yet, China is not the only major state that Russia looks for

¹³⁷² See Mikhail Troitskiy, "The China Factor in U.S.-Russia Relations," p. 6; and Schwartz, "The Military Dimension in Sino-Russian Relations," p. 105.

¹³⁷³ See Snyder, **Alliance Politics**, pp. 11-12.

¹³⁷⁴ Kann, "Alliances versus Ententes," p. 612.

¹³⁷⁵ See Deng, "Remolding Great Power Politics: China's Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India," p. 4, 21; and Trenin, "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente".

¹³⁷⁶ Dmitri Trenin, "Russia, China Can Help Kashmir Tensions," Global Times, October 10, 2016, <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1010455.shtml> (14.09.2019).

¹³⁷⁷ *Ibid.* A Chinese scholar similarly puts it that "[s]ometimes they agree; sometimes they do not. But they are able to acknowledge and manage their disagreements while continuing to expand areas of consensus." Ying, "How China Sees Russia: Beijing and Moscow are Close, but not Allies," p. 100.

¹³⁷⁸ Hsiung suggests that this is the most likely scenario for the future of Sino-Russian strategic alignment among the other ones considered in his study. See Hsiung, "Facing the 'New Normal': The Strong and Enduring Sino-Russian Relationship and its Implications for Europe," p. 38.

such kind of a bilateral relationship with, as the Kremlin has an interest to develop and expand a concert-type order among major powers in Eurasian security.

III. Russia, India, and Pakistan: The Implications of the SCO's Enlargement

A. The Background of Enlargement and Russia's Attitude

Since the beginning of discussions on the SCO enlargement, the Russian Federation, China, and Central Asian member states have all adopted divergent views on that issue concerning their own strategic interests. As Beijing has sought to use the SCO as a tool to expand its economic influence and satisfy its energy interests in its Western neighborhood, it has not generally interested in accepting new members to the organization. Rather China has focused on consolidating cooperation with the existing members and especially the Central Asian Republics.¹³⁷⁹ In this regard, Chinese officials have long suggested that too many members might undermine the organization's cohesiveness and that new member states could carry their own conflicts into the SCO's agenda, which might all reduce its capacity to operate as a viable regional security framework.¹³⁸⁰ The Central Asian member states have considered the SCO more as a vehicle to ensure their domestic stability and regime security with the help of two great powers, and accordingly, to receive some political and economic benefits. Therefore, they have remained cautious and passive on the issue of enlargement thinking that to add new states into the SCO would dilute their position and leverage in the organization.¹³⁸¹

On the contrary, the Russian Federation has never embraced a principled antipathetic stance towards the SCO enlargement, but it has developed a pragmatic and

¹³⁷⁹ Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 98.

¹³⁸⁰ Bobo Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," *Russie.NEI.Visions*, No. 100, Ifri, April 2017, pp. 17-22. Retrieved from: https://www.ifri.org/sites/default/files/atoms/files/lo_russia_china_india_triangle_2017.pdf (23.09.2019).

¹³⁸¹ Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 98. Umida Hasimova also touches upon such concerns by the regional states noting that those worries seemed valid given the fact that total population of India and Pakistan 20 times larger than all five Central Asian states combined including Turkmenistan which was not a member of the SCO. Umida Hasimova, "Future of the SCO under Question after Tashkent Summit," *The Jamestown Foundation*, June 29, 2016, <https://jamestown.org/program/future-of-the-sco-under-question-after-tashkent-summit/> (24.09.2019).

more flexible position on this issue. The 'pick-and-choose' approach adopted by Russia implied that Moscow might selectively welcome new members when it considered that they would bring potential benefits into the framework of the SCO.¹³⁸² In this regard, New Delhi's growing interest for full membership in the last couple of decades was positively reacted by Moscow, since India was Russia's traditional ally and one of its most significant partners in the defense sector.¹³⁸³ Moscow also recognized that both states' geopolitical and security interests in Central Asia were compatible, as religious extremism, terrorism, arms, and drug trafficking, etc. threatened Russia and India together.¹³⁸⁴ In fact, New Delhi had an interest to join the SCO's campaign against radical Islamist terrorist organizations, as they posed a serious threat to Indian security especially in the state of Kashmir, a region fiercely contested between India and Pakistan.¹³⁸⁵ Besides, India recognized that the SCO could provide a regional framework to stabilize Afghanistan after the withdrawal of the US and allied forces and wanted to join the organization to gain greater leverage in shaping the future of this country in its neighborhood.¹³⁸⁶

India's accession to the SCO as a full member was officially backed by Moscow. Russia's position was explicitly put forward during an SCO conference held in Almaty in February 2011, when Russian officials expressed their support to upgrade India's status to a full member at the Astana summit which was to be held later in June in the same year.¹³⁸⁷ Scholars confirm that one of Russia's primary motivations to see India as an SCO member was the belief that India could balance and constrain Chinese growing power and influence in the organization by supporting Russian positions in discussions and decision-making processes.¹³⁸⁸ As elaborated later, India shares

¹³⁸² Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 98.

¹³⁸³ Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 10.

¹³⁸⁴ Harsh V. Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," *India Review*, Vol. 12, No. 1, 2013, pp. 11-12.

¹³⁸⁵ Raghav Sharma, "India in Central Asia: Interests and Challenges," Institute of Peace and Conflict Studies, Special Report, No. 62, December 2008, p. 5. Retrieved from: http://www.ipcs.org/issue_briefs/issue_brief_pdf/579834852SR63-Ragav-CentralAsia1.pdf (24.09.2019).

¹³⁸⁶ Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 12.

¹³⁸⁷ See Meena Singh Roy, "Dynamics of Expanding the SCO," IDSA Comment, Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses, April, 04, 2011, https://idsa.in/idsacomments/DynamicsOfExpandingtheSCO_msroy_040411 (24.09.2019).

¹³⁸⁸ For example see Luzyanin et al., "Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 13; Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 100; Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 22; Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," p. 124;

Russian concerns to limit Chinese influence both in the SCO and Central Asia. Thus any unilateral attempt by Beijing to push the organization towards this region to support its own interests would definitely prompt a joint resistance by Russia and India both inside and outside of the SCO.¹³⁸⁹

India's growing willingness to join the SCO was coincided with neighboring Pakistan's aspirations for the full membership, which was even more enthusiastic in this sense. Even before the setting up of the SCO, Pakistan applied to participate in the Shanghai Five group in November 2000. From then on, Pakistani leaders have attended almost all the summits partly to demonstrate their genuine and strong interest in the SCO. Islamabad had strong political, security and as well as economic interests to join the organization not to mention its desire to further strengthening its ties with Beijing, a longstanding 'all-weather' ally.¹³⁹⁰ Pakistan had much deeper stakes in Afghanistan due to history and geography as a state involved both in the Soviet-Afghan War and the 'War on Terror' in that country as a non-NATO partner.¹³⁹¹ In Pakistani view, the country's geostrategic location could serve as an asset to facilitate closer cooperation within the SCO by enhancing connectivity and trade with states in Central and West Asia.¹³⁹² It is important to note that, beyond the security realm, economic, commercial, and energy interests by India and Pakistan also played significant roles in their approach towards the SCO, as both states viewed their possible membership as a mean to boost their economic cooperation with other member states.¹³⁹³

In the early 2010s, Chinese analysts and politicians came to recognize that the SCO expansion was inevitable but, at the same time, favored a slow and cautious approach focusing on the exact procedures to manage the enlargement. Beijing later dropped its opposition to India's membership primarily to open the way for Pakistan's inclusion to the SCO.¹³⁹⁴ The decision declared at the 2015 Ufa Summit on initiating

and Prithvi Ram Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," **Asian Journal of Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies**, Vol. 12, No. 4, 2018 p. 464.

¹³⁸⁹ **Ibid.**

¹³⁹⁰ See Song, "Interests, Power and China's Difficult Game in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)," p. 100.

¹³⁹¹ Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, p. 15.

¹³⁹² See Huma Rehman and M. Faisal, "SCO and India-Pakistan Conflict," **CISS Insight Journal**, Vol. 3, No. 3, 2015 pp. 31-32.

¹³⁹³ See Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, pp. 13-16.

¹³⁹⁴ See **ibid.** p. 12; and Roy, "Dynamics of Expanding the SCO" .

the procedure for the accession of India and Pakistan together represented some geopolitical compromise between Russia and China. The SCO would gain more international credibility, but India's entry into the organization would be counterbalanced to an extent by Pakistan's membership as an ally of China.¹³⁹⁵ On the other side, Russia itself viewed an opportunity in Pakistan's membership to improve its relations with Islamabad that could play a significant role in stabilizing Afghanistan. Given the rising problems in the US-Pakistani relations, Moscow also did not want to see Pakistan falling completely in the hands of China but took an inclusive approach towards Islamabad by incorporating it into the multilateral framework of the SCO.¹³⁹⁶

Positive Implications of the Enlargement: Possibilities for the Expansion of a Concert-Based Order in Asian Security

As we noted earlier, the SCO enlargement towards India and Pakistan dramatically expanded the global weight of the organization concerning its geographical scope, population base, and military potential. Yet, Russia's ideal conception of multipolarity makes more relevance to enhancing multilateralism between major powers rather than changing the global distribution of power. While examining the implications of the enlargement, therefore, we need to focus more on the former to understand how the inclusion of new members could impact multilateral practices in international security. According to Igor Istomin, Russia's approach towards the SCO enlargement runs parallel to the idea of a concert system. In order to build such an order, states should avoid 'exclusive alliances' but need to create 'inclusive structures' encompassing countries even with diverging opinions and disagreements. Istomin recognizes that India's inclusion provides a more equal distribution of power and that China and India might block each other in decision-making processes. In such situations, however, Russia could play the role of an arbiter.¹³⁹⁷ On the other side, Tatiana Shakleina explains Russian motivation for the SCO enlargement touching upon Russia's objective to see India and Pakistan in one

¹³⁹⁵ See Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 22. For the decision adopted in 2015, see Ufa Declaration by the Heads of the Member States of the SCO, July 10, 2015, <http://eng.sectsco.org/load/200119/> (24.09.2019).

¹³⁹⁶ Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 464.

¹³⁹⁷ Author's interview with Igor Istomin.

platform in order to reach a more controllable situation: The most important thing is that they will sit on the table and look at each other, so that they can discuss together when problems arise.¹³⁹⁸ There are also Pakistani scholars suggesting that the inclusion of three antagonist states i.e. China, India, and Pakistan on the same platform will help the building of mutual trust since the SCO Charter calls for seeking common positions based on a mutual understanding for the peaceful resolution of disputes.¹³⁹⁹

Scholars also argue that the accession of India and Pakistan together into the SCO will likely contribute to the region-wide counterterrorist efforts in Central Asia and Afghanistan.¹⁴⁰⁰ Both India and Pakistan are located in the Afghan neighborhood, and they would receive valuable assistance from the SCO's Regional Anti-Terrorist Structure. In addition, Pakistan's security agencies with some more expertise in Afghanistan can initiate a useful dialogue with this center to coordinate the members' efforts to fight against this challenge from the region.¹⁴⁰¹ Another possible benefit for India and Pakistan appears as the opportunity to join the SCO's counter-terrorist 'Peace Mission' exercises. The 2018 exercise in Russia brought Indian and Pakistani military forces for the first time together in a mega anti-terror drill organized by the SCO. It represented a rare opportunity for two countries to enhance military exchanges and trust, which have long involved in armed conflicts together. Given the current state of relations between India and Pakistan, joint exercises may appear as of little symbolic significance. However, such interactions provided by the SCO could suffice to maintain an open channel for contacts on security issues.¹⁴⁰²

The optimistic arguments about the SCO expansion are centered on the organization's potential to transform the relationship between its members into a more peaceful one. In fact, both India and Pakistan unconditionally signed all SCO documents and committed themselves at least in principle to promote constructive contribution to enhance and develop cooperation within this organizational

¹³⁹⁸ Author's interview with Tatiana Shakhleina.

¹³⁹⁹ Rehman and Faisal, "SCO and India-Pakistan Conflict," pp. 33-34.

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.* p. 32; Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 20.

¹⁴⁰¹ Rehman and Faisal, "SCO and India-Pakistan Conflict," p. 32.

¹⁴⁰² See "SCO Peace Mission Exercise: India, Pakistan Armies Conduct First Joint Anti-Terror Drill in Russia," Firstpost, September 24, 2019, <https://www.firstpost.com/india/sco-peace-mission-exercise-india-pakistan-armies-conduct-first-joint-anti-terror-drill-in-russia-5042681.html> (24.09.2019); and Divya Godbole, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asia: Balancing Act," Mantraya, Occasional Paper, No. 7, March 14, 2019, p. 3. Retrieved from: http://mantraya.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/03/Mantraya-Occasional-Paper_SCO-South-Asia_Balancing-Act.pdf (24.09.2019).

framework.¹⁴⁰³ With the inclusion of India and Pakistan to the SCO mechanism, it is also expected that they might benefit the organization's experience in settlement of border disputes between China and Central Asian Republics and apply it to their bilateral conflicts and disputes.¹⁴⁰⁴ Some analysts also indicate that Russia and China and are well placed to curb an Indian-Pakistani rivalry with some potential to block the SCO due to their sustained bilateral relations with these states.¹⁴⁰⁵ Especially Russia enjoys generally favorable relations with all three powers in the troubled Pakistan-India-China axis. In this regard, Moscow is willing to act as a mediator concerning the power competition and conflicts between these three states, which would, in turn, serve its great power status and international prestige.¹⁴⁰⁶

Having sought a reconciliation with China in recent years, India has a special tendency to view the SCO platform as a test case for Beijing's novel approach to international relations emphasizing a new type of great power relations and its focus on development rather than military security. In line with the Shanghai Spirit, New Delhi wants a fair and honorable resolution of its border disputes with China and insists on consultation, multilateralism and more transparency concerning Chinese regional initiatives under the Belt and Road project.¹⁴⁰⁷ Still, there are complex security problems between three powers in the SCO accompanied by some chronic conflicts and disputes in the Asia-Pacific region, which are briefly noted below. The current situation demands at least to maintain the status quo, if not the settlement of long-standing conflicts, to prevent escalation of armed conflicts and to conclude new agreements on regional stability and development based on common interests.¹⁴⁰⁸ The SCO as a multilateral consultation pact has some potential to underpin such a process.

Negative Aspects of the Enlargement: Bilateral Problems between the SCO Members

Considering the network of relations among the SCO members, the most problematic one appears as the bilateral relationship between India and Pakistan. The

¹⁴⁰³ Alimov, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its Role and Place in the Development of Eurasia," pp. 115-116.

¹⁴⁰⁴ See Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.* p. 26.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Author's interview with Mikhail Troitskiy.

¹⁴⁰⁷ See Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 463.

¹⁴⁰⁸ See Alimov, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its Role and Place in the Development of Eurasia," p. 118.

hostility and rivalry between these two states represent one of the most enduring interstate conflicts since 1947, when British India was divided into two neighboring states as independent India and Pakistan. The partition of this territory was not peaceful but accompanied by armed conflicts, border disputes, and an intense political and military rivalry. This competition led to three wars in 1948, 1965 and 1971 and recurring crises from the 1980s to the 2000s.¹⁴⁰⁹ In the current era, the dispute over Jammu and Kashmir maintains a principle cause of conflict between two antagonistic states, which represents a strategic territory where China, India, Pakistan, and the former-Soviet Union converge.¹⁴¹⁰ The nuclear tests conducted by both countries in 1998 added another dimension into the Kashmir conflict and prompted a missile development rivalry between India and Pakistan, which carried the interstate tensions and mutual threat perceptions to a higher level.¹⁴¹¹

Article 2 of the SCO Charter commits the member states to avoid aggression, intervention into domestic affairs and seeking unilateral military superiority in adjacent territories; while it calls for peaceful resolution of disputes among themselves.¹⁴¹² There are certain elements in Indian-Pakistani relations running contrary to such principles, which remain still valid after their inclusion into the SCO. The bilateral tensions between India and Pakistan were recently flared up in August 2019, when New Delhi moved to abolish the special status of Indian-administrated Kashmir and sent thousands of troops to this area while cutting down the communication facilities in the region. In reaction, China expressed its support to Islamabad and requested a meeting on behalf of Pakistan to discuss the situation in Kashmir in the UN Security Council.¹⁴¹³ Despite formally committing themselves to

¹⁴⁰⁹ Rehman and Faisal, "SCO and India-Pakistan Conflict," p. 30.

¹⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 31. Besides all political, socio-economic, religious and ethnic dimensions of the Kashmir conflict, Sadia Fayaz indicates the exact geo-political and economic significance of this territory noting that "*its possession by India in entirety would cut-off Pakistan from China and its entire possession by Pakistan would leave India with no common border with the former Soviet Union*", i.e. Central Asia. Sadia Fayaz, "Kashmir Dispute between Pakistan and India: The Way Out," **The Dialogue (Pakistan)**, Vol. 11, No. 1, 2016 p. 66. For another recent analysis about different dimensions of the Kashmir dispute and conflict and peace processes over the region see Navnita C. Behera, "The Kashmir Conflict: Multiple Fault Lines," **Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs**, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2016.

¹⁴¹¹ In fact, the nuclear dimension of the conflict can be traced back to India's successful nuclear test in the mid-1970s, while Pakistan's first successful nuclear explosion test was in 1998. Today both states possess a near nuclear parity, which enables Pakistan to maintain its dispute and conflicts with New Delhi on a more equal basis despite the growing gap in the relative economic and military capabilities in favor of India. Rehman and Faisal, "SCO and India-Pakistan Conflict," pp. 30-31.

¹⁴¹² Charter of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

¹⁴¹³ See "Indian Government Moves To Revoke Disputed Kashmir's Special Status," RFE/RL, August 5, 2019, <https://www.rferl.org/a/indian-government-moves-to-revoke-disputed-kashmir-special->

the documents and procedures concerning the joint counter-terrorism efforts in the SCO, India and Pakistan also accuse each other of supporting cross-border terrorism mainly in disputed areas between two states. After joining the SCO, India expects the organization to address its problem on Pakistan-linked Islamist terrorist activities in Kashmir.¹⁴¹⁴

To note again, the RATS is involved to the efforts to define terrorist groups operating in the SCO area, though the implementation of counter-terrorist practices and operations remains under the members' sovereign jurisdictions. China made it clear that it would object any Indian attempt to discuss Islamabad's role in sheltering terrorist groups both inside and outside of the SCO, while continuing to portray Pakistan as a country 'at the forefront of counter-terror efforts.' China sometimes did not avoid condemning some actions by Pakistan-based anti-Indian organizations such as Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) and Laskar-e-Taiba.¹⁴¹⁵ In fact, the former is currently blacklisted as a terrorist group by both India and the United Nations. However, the attempts to set international sanctions against the JeM leader Masood Azhar are routinely blocked by China at the UN Security Council. Beijing has also prevented the recognition of Laskar-e-Taiba as an international terrorist organization by the UN and blocked sanctions against Pakistan for harboring its primary leader, Zakir-ur-Rehman Lakhvi.¹⁴¹⁶

In addition to those problems, China and India maintain some border disputes tracing back to the Cold War period, which are to be examined in the following

[status/30091964.html](https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/status/30091964.html) (24.09.2019). On 16 August, 2019, the UNSC hold a closed-door meeting but it failed to issue any statement considering the crisis due to divergent views among the permanent members and the avoidance by some of them from interfering into the Kashmir Conflict. Richard Roth, "UN Security Council has its First Meeting on Kashmir in Decades -- and Fails to Agree on a Statement," CNN, August 16, 2019, <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/08/16/asia/un-security-council-kashmir-intl/index.html> (24.09.2019).

¹⁴¹⁴ See Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 25; and Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," pp. 462-463. Before the above-mentioned crisis, on 14 February 2019, a vehicle-borne suicide bomber attacked Indian forces in the Indian-administrated Kashmir leaving at least 46 casualties behind. Pakistan-based Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) terrorist group has claimed the responsibility. See "Pulwama attack: What is militant group Jaish-e-Mohammad?" BBC, February 15, 2019, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-47249982> (24.09.2019); and Godbole, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asia: Balancing Act," p. 5. On February, 26, Indian forces engaged in air strikes targeting the Balakot camp used by the JeM in Pakistan as a retaliation, which brought India and Pakistan into the closest point to a breakout of war since the major Kargil conflict in 1999. *Ibid.*

¹⁴¹⁵ See Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," pp. 333-334.

¹⁴¹⁶ See Godbole, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asia: Balancing Act," pp. 4-5.

subsection. In this regard, some analysts raise their suspects that the enlarged SCO might turn into a regional framework debilitated to conduct its primary functions concerning regional security and stability due to Pakistan-India-China strategic competition.¹⁴¹⁷ Others underline that the membership of India and Pakistan expanded the organization's geographic scope towards the complex South Asian region and thus imported new regional conflicts into its already extensive agenda. This may move the SCO's attention away from the challenging problems of security and stability in Central Asia, especially terrorism and religious extremism.¹⁴¹⁸ Last but not least, the SCO expansion may harm its internal cohesion and reduce its ability to stay unified vis-à-vis the outside world, as an integrated security platform with anti-Western characteristics.¹⁴¹⁹

For sure, these problems will influence the future development of the SCO as an organization claiming responsibility to contribute regional security and stability in its geographical area. As this study examines Russia's alignment behavior underlining its links to Moscow's main strategic objectives at the regional and global levels, first and foremost, we need to consider the implications of enlargement on those strategic goals. The primary objective of the Kremlin concerning regional security in Central Asia is to ensure its special great power role and interests, rather than to encourage other major powers to expand their roles and influence in the post-Soviet space. Although Russia welcomes the multilateral engagement of extra-regional powers supporting its regional security objectives and all the related norms, the shift in the SCO's focus from the actual security problems in Central Asia does not represent a daunting and immediate risk for Moscow. Beyond the CIS, Russia seeks to increase the number of its allies based on mutually recognized interests and multilateralism in Eurasia. Below we examine Russian efforts to enforce its security partnerships with both India and Pakistan together, though they remain as mutually hostile neighbors. Nonetheless, we should also note that the internal problems of the SCO examined

¹⁴¹⁷ See Alimov, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: Its Role and Place in the Development of Eurasia," p. 117; Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," pp. 22-23; and Lanteigne, "Russia, China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Diverging Security Interests and the 'Crimea Effect'," p. 125.

¹⁴¹⁸ See *ibid.*, p. 124; Godbole, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asia: Balancing Act," p. 6; and Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 332.

¹⁴¹⁹ See *ibid.*, p. 338; and Mikhail Troitskiy, "A Russian Perspective on the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 40.

above create serious handicaps for Russia's objective of creating a concert-like regional security order in Asia and promoting it as a successful model of multilateral security platform to be recognized by the West.

B. Russia-India Alignment: Old and New Dynamics of Security Cooperation in the 21st Century

As a distinguished Indian scholar of international relations puts it, there are few examples of a bilateral relationship between two states, which has been as stable as the one between Russians and Indians almost for the last sixty years.¹⁴²⁰ As examined in Part One, Chapter Two, Indo-Russian alignment has gained momentum since the early 1960s coinciding with the Sino-Soviet split and China-India border conflicts, though New Delhi has avoided an alliance with Moscow on the basis of its autonomy concerns and formal adherence to the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). Even after the end of the Cold War and the collapse of bipolarity, Indo-Russian relations have been not much affected by such deep structural changes at the system level. Moscow and New Delhi have soon come together on their convergent regional and global interests following a brief period of neglect during Russia's troubled years in the 1990s.¹⁴²¹ In January 1993, the Russian Federation and India signed a new Treaty of Friendship marking the renewal of their historical 'entente.' This agreement obliged two sides to set immediate contacts in case of an outbreak of situations that, according to the parties, "*constitute a threat to peace or a violation of peace*" in order "*to coordinate their positions in the interests of removing such threat or in reestablishing peace.*"¹⁴²²

With Putin's rise to power, Russia refocused its attention on India as he gave special importance to India as a major power whose cooperation with Russia might be critical in hard times.¹⁴²³ During Putin's visit to India in 2000, two states formally declared their 'Strategic Partnership.' This partnership was institutionalized with annual meetings between the Russian President and the Indian Prime Minister which have been regularly held since then. The bilateral meeting in 2010 lifted the status of the bilateral relationship to a 'Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership.' Russia

¹⁴²⁰ Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 1.

¹⁴²¹ *Ibid.* pp. 1-2.

¹⁴²² See "Alliance Treaty Obligations and Provisions," <http://atop.rice.edu/> (04.06.2017).

¹⁴²³ See Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 6; and Sahar A. Khan, Uroosa Ishfaq, and Muhammad U. Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," *Global Regional Review*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2018 p. 160.

also maintains some regular consultation and dialogue mechanisms with New Delhi that report to the leaderships of two states, such as the ‘Inter-Governmental Commission on Military and Military-Technical Cooperation’ co-chaired by both countries’ ministers of defense.¹⁴²⁴ Recently, Russia’s Foreign Policy Concept declared in 2016 made a special emphasis on India noting Moscow’s commitment to further enhancing its privileged partnership with India “*based on shared foreign policy priorities, historical friendship and deep mutual trust, as well as strengthening cooperation on urgent international issues.*”¹⁴²⁵ Below we examine the main drivers of Indo-Russian alignment in the 21st Century touching upon the shared regional and global interests, as well as the tacit collaboration between two states on their common objective on limiting China’s political and military clout in Central Asia.

Convergent Interests in Regional Stability and Common Perspectives towards a ‘Multipolar’ World Order

As noted earlier, New Delhi has serious threat perceptions from non-state actors and radical Islamist movements in Central Asia regarding their possible repercussions in India and especially Kashmir. From the Indian perspective, there are region-wide dangerous ties between Central Asian terrorist groups (such as the IMU), the Taliban in Afghanistan, anti-Indian radical Islamist groups, as well as some figures in Pakistan’s intelligence agency (Inter-Services Intelligence, ISI). Drug trafficking is also seen as a major security threat not only in itself but also because it is used to fund activities of Islamist terrorist networks. Besides, New Delhi worries about the proliferation of weapons and illegal trafficking on nuclear raw materials (such as uranium) from Central Asia to some states hostile to India and even to non-state actors linked to them.¹⁴²⁶ For all those reasons, the security situation in and around Afghanistan has been a key concern for both Russia and India. This promoted a convergent point of view that “*the fight against terrorism cannot be selective, and drawing false distinctions between ‘good’ and ‘bad’ Taliban would be*

¹⁴²⁴ The other institutionalized dialogue mechanism is called as the ‘Inter-Governmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific, Technological and Cultural Cooperation.’ It is co-chaired by the Deputy Prime Minister of Russia and the Foreign Minister of India. For an official review by Indian authorities on Indo-Russian relations and their strategic partnership see “70 years of India-Russia relations: A Historic Milestone,” Embassy of India - Moscow, Russia, January 29, 2018, <https://indianembassy-moscow.gov.in/70-years-of-india-russia-relations-a-historic-milestone.php> (25.09.2019).

¹⁴²⁵ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, 2016.

¹⁴²⁶ See Raghav Sharma, “India in Central Asia: Interests and Challenges,” pp. 5-8.

counterproductive."¹⁴²⁷ Based on this principle, Russia and India have stepped up cooperation in recent years against non-traditional threats in the region.¹⁴²⁸

While dealing with Central Asia, India has always been sensitive towards the characteristics of the region and the niceties of political systems in local states. India has a valuable historical experience to contact authoritarian communist regimes sharing similarities with the current regimes in the region. Hereby, New Delhi refrains from overt intervention in the domestic affairs of post-Soviet states. While putting a special emphasis on the SCO's principle of non-interference, it also shares the organization's disapproval of the Western democracy promotion initiatives.¹⁴²⁹ In addition to India's concerns on non-state threats operating in Central Asia, the region also maintains a geopolitical significance for Indian security concerning its location vis-à-vis Pakistan and China. Therefore, India has also sought enforcing bilateral alignments with regional states like Uzbekistan and Tajikistan through implementing some agreements on military training and exchanges presumably to enhance their capability to fight against terrorist threats.¹⁴³⁰

India's engagement into the Central Asian security, however, did not result in a strategic competition or a confrontation with Russia, as New Delhi respected Moscow's red lines. India has avoided forming bilateral alliances in military security with the regional states, and it has never established a strategically meaningful military presence in the region. In 2002, India started operating the Farkhor airbase in Tajikistan with the Kremlin's acquiescence in order to transport its relief and reconstruction supplies into Afghanistan. In fact, Tajikistan has been a crucial country for India since its borders are located just 16 kilometers away from the Pakistan-administrated Kashmir. However, New Delhi could not transform this facility into a foreign airbase, which can be utilized as a possible alternative attack route against Pakistan, because it avoided deploying active combat aircraft due to its close ally Russia's sensibilities.¹⁴³¹ India has also spent \$70 million between 2002 and 2010 to

¹⁴²⁷ Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 10.

¹⁴²⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 10-12.

¹⁴²⁹ See Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 334; and Raghav Sharma, "India in Central Asia: Interests and Challenges," pp. 14-15,

¹⁴³⁰ See *ibid.*, pp. 6, 13.

¹⁴³¹ See Micha'el Tanchum, "China's Tajikistan Military Base Eclipses India's Central Asian Ambitions," East Asia Forum, March 23, 2019, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2019/03/23/chinas-tajikistan-military-base-eclipses-indias-central-asian-ambitions/> (26.09.2019); and Rajeev Sharma, "India's Ayni Military Base in Tajikistan is Russia-locked," Russia Beyond, October 26, 2012,

renovate another air facility in Tajikistan, the Ayni base, but the disagreements with Russia have also blocked New Delhi's plans to maintain an offensive capability there.¹⁴³²

This recognition of Moscow's sensibilities in its near abroad can also be attributed to India's approach towards a 'multipolar' world which shares certain similarities with the Russian conception of such an order. India attaches great importance to its strategic autonomy, as a state with ambitions to ensure both a preeminent position in its region and a globally recognized great power status. As Baldev Nayar and T.V. Paul suggest, the US aspirations for hegemony, in one shape or another, and India's emphasis on autonomy put two states on a long-standing course of political conflict with each other in the post-Cold War era.¹⁴³³ Similarly with Russia, India does not welcome but seeks to oppose attempts by extra-regional states to meddle in regional security affairs of the Indian Ocean, which is interpreted by some as a repetition of the 'Monroe Doctrine' by New Delhi.¹⁴³⁴

From the Indian perspective, the triangular shape of the country projecting into the Indian Ocean presupposes the natural domination of very critical trade routes for New Delhi, although it does not possess sufficient military capability.¹⁴³⁵ India's desire for a 'multipolar' world shares Russian and Chinese emphasis on the related norms such as sovereignty and non-intervention in domestic politics of other nations. However, it becomes problematic for India, like the other two powers, when it comes to its approach towards weaker states in proximity such as Bangladesh and Sri-Lanka. Therefore, India's approach towards 'multipolarity' also seems to have its primary emphasis on multilateralism in great power relations.¹⁴³⁶

In this respect, Indian political leaders continued to cooperate with Russia to oppose the unipolar world order, a process accompanied by India's rise in the global power hierarchy. This cooperation was also expanded to an extent into a Russia-India-

https://www.rbth.com/articles/2012/10/26/indias_ayni_military_base_in_tajikistan_is_russia-locked_18661 (26.09.2019).

¹⁴³² *Ibid.*

¹⁴³³ Baldev R. Nayar and T. V. Paul, **India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status**, New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003 p. 222. See also Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," p. 157.

¹⁴³⁴ Jan Hornat, "The Power Triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States," **Cambridge Review of International Affairs**, Vol. 29, No. 2, 2016 p. 432.

¹⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 431.

¹⁴³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 437.

China (RIC) strategic tringle. As examined earlier, this idea of grouping three major powers had been originally proposed by Russia's Prime Minister Yevgeny Primakov in the late 1990s to promote 'multipolarity' which would ensure greater regional and international stability.¹⁴³⁷ In the early 2000s, New Delhi joined Russia and China to criticize the US unilateral military engagement towards Eurasia after the 9/11, which only reinforced American traditional alignment with Pakistan. It also strengthened New Delhi's concerns on the US double standards on democracy and human rights as it tolerated the authoritarian regime in Islamabad that was now called a 'major non-NATO ally.'¹⁴³⁸ Since the early 2000s, India, Russia and China has come together in different platforms such as RIC trilateral meetings, BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and the SCO to make statements supporting their common vision of 'multipolarity' and the related norms such as equality, sovereignty, territorial integrity, international law, the centrality of UN, the indivisibility of security, and multilateralism.¹⁴³⁹ In recent years, however, bilateral tensions between India and rising China and their geological competition in the Asia-Pacific region which is examined below rendered the RIC format increasingly dysfunctional. Thus, Russia moved its focus towards the other two platforms having a more multilateral structure.¹⁴⁴⁰

While seeking to improve its status in such a 'multipolar' world order, New Delhi is aware that it remains the weakest one among the four global players, including the US, China, Russia, and itself. India is apparently in no position to assert a primary influence on global events, let alone the regional affairs in South Asia and Asia-Pacific. Therefore, New Delhi needs diplomatic and strategic alignments with other available major powers willing to contribute its interests and objectives.¹⁴⁴¹ At this point, Russia emerges as a valuable partner for India as it plays an important great

¹⁴³⁷ See Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 8; and Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," pp. 6-7.

¹⁴³⁸ Hak Yin Li, **China, India and Russia: Cooperation and Construction of the Asia-Pacific Order in the 21st Century**, Köln: LAP, 2009, pp.44-45.

¹⁴³⁹ For example see Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 23; and "India, China and Russia for Multi-Polar World," Financial Express, February 14, 2007, <https://www.financialexpress.com/archive/india-china-and-russia-for-multi-polar-world/191966/> (30.09.2019). For information about BRICS and its pursuit of a 'multipolar' world order see Mihaela Papa, "BRIC's Pursuit of Multipolarity: Response in the United States," **Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences**, Vol. 7, No. 3, 2014.

¹⁴⁴⁰ Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," pp. 23-24.

¹⁴⁴¹ Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 458.

power role in international security. It also appears as a reliable and affordable supplier of weapons, arms technology, and energy sources, all contributing to India's rise as a major power.¹⁴⁴² Furthermore, Russia routinely supports India's bid to join the UN Security Council as a permanent member, which would satisfy its aspirations for great power status.¹⁴⁴³

India's sympathy towards its strategic ally Russia and their common perspectives on 'multipolarity' have induced New Delhi to recognize Russia's special great power role in the post-Soviet region. Yet, this recognition has not evolved into open support to Russia's positions in regional security crises in the CIS. India's long-standing problem of separatism in Kashmir and its territorial disputes with Pakistan and China, which claim some ethnic, religious, and historical ties with groups in the country have prevented New Delhi from endorsing Russia's revisionist military and political actions in the region.¹⁴⁴⁴ In this respect, New Delhi did not follow Moscow's recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia after Russia's war with Georgia in August 2008, while it officially put forward "*India's consistent position that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be full respected by all states.*"¹⁴⁴⁵ At the same time, however, India's joint declaration with Russia during the Russian President's visit to New Delhi in December 2008 suggested that "*India supports the important role of the Russian Federation in promoting peace [and] cooperation in the Caucasian region.*"¹⁴⁴⁶

During the Ukraine crisis, the Indian perspective on territorial integrity and separatism also led it to adopt an ambiguous position vis-à-vis its close ally's policies towards its neighbor. In fact, India shared Russia's disapproval of the Western actions during the domestic protests in Ukraine in 2013 and 2014 on the basis of its opposition to intervention by external actors in other countries' domestic affairs. It also shared the

¹⁴⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 463.

¹⁴⁴³ See Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," p. 155. For a recent expression of support by the President Putin for the UN Security Council reform to include India see "Russia Reiterates Support for India's Bid for Permanent UNSC Membership," TASS, October 5, 2018, <https://tass.com/politics/1024682> (27.09.2019).

¹⁴⁴⁴ Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 334.

¹⁴⁴⁵ Nivedita D. Kundu, "India's Strategic Cooperation with Russia and its 'Near Abroad' States," *India Quarterly*, Vol. 64, No. 4, 2008 pp. 93-94.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Quoted in Rajeev Sharma, "How Indian Support for Russia Has Evolved from Georgia to Ukraine," *Russia Today*, March 21, 2014 <https://www.rt.com/op-ed/indian-support-russia-crimea-317/> (30.09.2019).

SCO's concerns on the overthrow of a constitutionally elected government by public protests. Yet these concerns were outweighed by India's disapproval of the military intervention by Russia in support of separatism in a neighboring state. New Delhi again underlined "*the consistent position India had on the issues of unity and territorial integrity.*"¹⁴⁴⁷ Considering its alignment relations, however, India has avoided direct criticism of Russia's actions in Ukraine. Some government officials also opposed Western-imposed sanctions against the Kremlin and noted 'legitimate Russian interests' involved in Ukraine.¹⁴⁴⁸ Last but not least, like China, India also abstained from voting for the UN General Assembly resolution to discourage the recognition of any change in the international status of Crimea.¹⁴⁴⁹

China Factor in Indo-Russian Alignment: Common Interests in Limiting Beijing's Influence in Eurasia

As examined earlier in Part One, the border conflicts between China and India and the security dilemma between these two neighbors have underpinned India's reliance on Russian as its primary supplier of arms and a reliable diplomatic ally. Today, China still maintains border disputes with India despite the fact that it has resolved a full of seventeen of twenty-three disputes with other states during which it has generally been willing to make apparent concessions to reach a settlement.¹⁴⁵⁰ Some scholars argue that China deliberately maintains border disputes with India to keep it under strategic pressure as well as to deter potential dangerous 'anti-China' behaviors by New Delhi.¹⁴⁵¹ The SCO has not yet facilitated the resolution of these

¹⁴⁴⁷ Grant, **Aggression against Ukraine: Territory, Responsibility, and International Law**, p. 70. See also Allison, "Protective Integration and Security Policy Coordination: Comparing the SCO and the CSTO," p. 334.

¹⁴⁴⁸ The declaration by the Indian national security advisor, Shivshankar Menon, maintained that India "*would hope that whatever internal issues there are within Ukraine are settled peacefully and that the broader issues of reconciling the various interests involved, and there are after all legitimate Russian and other interests involved, are discussed, negotiated, and that there is a satisfactory resolution to them.*" Tanvi Madan, "India's Reaction to the Situation in Ukraine: Looking beyond a Phrase," Brookings, March 14, 2014, <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2014/03/14/indias-reaction-to-the-situation-in-ukraine-looking-beyond-a-phrase/> (30.09.2019). See also Srinivas Mazumdar, "India's Balancing Act in Crimea Crisis," Deutsche Welle, April, 1, 2014, <https://www.dw.com/en/indias-balancing-act-in-crimea-crisis/a-17534847> (30.09.2019).

¹⁴⁴⁹ **Ibid.**

¹⁴⁵⁰ See Thomas Kellogg, "The China-India Border Standoff: What Does Beijing Want?" Foreign Policy, September 1, 2017, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/01/the-china-india-border-standoff-what-does-beijing-want/> (30.09.2019).

¹⁴⁵¹ According to Brahma Chellaney border disputes force India to deploy thousands of Indian troops on the Himalayan region, who could otherwise be positioned vis-à-vis China's close ally Pakistan. In addition, the unresolved border issues keep open the Chinese card of a possible military confrontation with India, if New Delhi again turns to support the civil or armed resistance against the Beijing's rule

border disputes. Furthermore, China and India have fallen into a political confrontation and military stand-off concerning a disputed border region during June 2017 when India was accepted in the organization. For four weeks, both states have deployed additional troops and closely watched each other in the common border area, which indicated continued mutual distrust between two powers.¹⁴⁵²

Besides border disputes between China and India, Beijing actively supports Islamabad in the Kashmir dispute, contributes to Pakistan's nuclear program, and opposes India's membership to the UN Security Council, which represent other bilateral problems between two major states.¹⁴⁵³ India's concerns on the special alignment ties between China and Pakistan were further emboldened by the ambitious Belt and Road Initiative. The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) interlinked to the BRI feeds into India's threat perceptions on encirclement by Beijing as it has the potential to strengthen the China-Pakistan axis further. Besides, New Delhi firmly opposes the CPEC since it goes through Pakistan-controlled Kashmir that is also claimed by India. Therefore, the project is seen as a direct challenge to India's sovereignty and territorial integrity.¹⁴⁵⁴

It is obvious that New Delhi has deep apprehensions concerning the BRI in economic, strategic, and security terms. The latter makes relevance to India's considerations about the safety and the security of such a grand infrastructure project going through some of the most volatile and dangerous areas in Eurasia. This situation requires China to focus on providing regional security to create and protect economic assets in this geo-economic and geopolitical corridor.¹⁴⁵⁵ In this regard, economic expansion may inevitably lead to Chinese military expansion to ensure its access to

in Tibet or seeks to form an overt military alliance with the US against itself. Brahma Chellaney, **Asian Juggernaut: The Rise of China, India and Japan**, New York: Harper, 2010 p. 170. For similar arguments on China's intentions see John W. Garver, "The Unresolved Sino-Indian Border Dispute: An Interpretation," **China Report**, Vol. 47, No. 2, 2011 p. 99.

¹⁴⁵² See "What's behind the India-China Border Stand-off?" BBC, July, 5, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-40478813> (30.09.2019); and Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, p. 12.

¹⁴⁵³ See Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 15; Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 462; and Deng, "Remolding Great Power Politics: China's Strategic Partnerships with Russia, the European Union, and India," p. 886. For a list of some other significant bilateral problems in different regional sub-systems see Mohan Malik, "India Balances China," **Asian Politics & Policy**, Vol. 4, No. 3, 2012, p. 349.

¹⁴⁵⁴ See Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, p. 14, Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," pp. 460, 462.

¹⁴⁵⁵ **Ibid.**, pp. 460-461.

markets and resources. This relationship could account for the rapid growth of China's military expenditures accompanying its economic development.¹⁴⁵⁶ Therefore, India shares an interest with Russia to limit Chinese economic, political and military clout in a vast geography extending from Central Asia to West Asia and Eastern Europe. At least, New Delhi would like to see to the maintenance of the 'division of labor' between China and Russia regarding economic and security affairs in Eurasia to balance Chinese influence on its northern borders. Although it is not always publicly articulated, these common concerns vis-à-vis China will be a basic dynamic for Indo-Russian strategic cooperation in the next years to come both inside and outside of the SCO.¹⁴⁵⁷

In recent years, China's rise led to an increasing asymmetry between Beijing and other major powers in Asia, which may end up with, according to the Indian perspective, a Chinese hegemony over the region. Under these conditions, New Delhi goes on relying on Russia for its increasing defense needs, which is India's largest military partner supplying 70% of its imports.¹⁴⁵⁸ This partnership in the defense sector does not only include traditional arms trade but also expands into joint weapon development and production through the share of technology.¹⁴⁵⁹ In recent years, India's geographical position has slowly pushed its army's mindset from 'continental' to 'maritime.' Russia also supports India's naval aspirations, which was exemplified by a \$1.2 billion agreement signed in 2010 to supply twenty-nine MiG 29K naval fighter planes to India. Furthermore, Russia transferred a 'Kiev-class aircraft carrier INS Vikramaditya' which entered into service in 2013.¹⁴⁶⁰ In addition to that Russia

¹⁴⁵⁶ Malik, "India Balances China," p. 345.

¹⁴⁵⁷ See Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 465; and Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 7.

¹⁴⁵⁸ See *ibid.*, pp. 7-8; and Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," p. 155.

¹⁴⁵⁹ See "70 years of India-Russia relations: A Historic Milestone". As Harsh Pant notes, India locally produces some Russian military products such as T-90 Tanks, Sukhoi combat planes, and Brahmos supersonic missiles. Moscow has a tendency to share some sophisticated technology with India, while the US and Western powers seem to be reticent about this issue. Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 7.

¹⁴⁶⁰ Hornat, "The Power Triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States," p. 432; "INS Vikrant: India's New Carrier," Defense Industry Daily, May 6, 2019, <https://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/ins-vikramaditya-may-hit-delay-cost-increases-03283/> (30.09.2019).

has long contributed to India's nuclear programs in both civilian and military terms as an external power involving Indian nuclear submarine projects.¹⁴⁶¹

Recently in October 2016, Russia and India signed a \$5 billion agreement for the delivery of S-400 air defense systems, which marked a new phase in Indo-Russian cooperation in the military sector. It became a symbol of both states' willingness to revitalize their decades-old partnership in need of time when Russia was facing an international isolation campaign and had to rely on much more on China, an adversary of India.¹⁴⁶² With the activation of five battalions of the S-400 system in the early 2020s, India will significantly strengthen its defense capability against China and especially Pakistan.¹⁴⁶³ On the other side, by selling S-400 missile systems to both China and India, the Kremlin has demonstrated that it will not take a side between two antagonistic powers, which enforced Russia's strategic autonomy in major power politics in Asia.¹⁴⁶⁴

While strengthening its strategic alignment with China, Russia also maintained bilateral joint military exercises with India. In October 2017, Indo-Russian joint exercise (Indra) was conducted near Vladivostok in the Sea of Japan, which became the first exercise to include all the three services of military (i.e. army, navy and air force). Most recently, in December 2018, two states organized the tenth of their regular Indra exercises at the Babina military station in India, which aimed at enhancing the interoperability between their armies and providing a valuable source of experience for both sides.¹⁴⁶⁵ However, it has to be noted that there are some critical views in the Indian military complaining about over-reliance on Russia for India's defense needs. In an international environment where the regional and global balance of power changes to the detriment of both Moscow and New Delhi and in favor of China, Indian authorities also suspect whether Russia can be an adequate balancer against Beijing.

¹⁴⁶¹ See "70 years of India-Russia relations: A Historic Milestone"; and Petr V. Topychkanov, "US–Soviet/Russian Dialogue on the Nuclear Weapons Programme of India," *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. 42, No. 3, 2018 p. 257.

¹⁴⁶² Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 19; and Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," pp. 156-158.

¹⁴⁶³ As suggested by Khan et al., the 400 km range of S-400 system exposes a remarkable threat to air activity of Pakistani armed forces. If it is to be installed in Himachal Pradesh, the S-400's range will cover almost all territory of Kashmir, while deployed to Jalandhar it would enable the Indian army to shot down Pakistan's aircraft flying over the capital Islamabad itself. *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹⁴⁶⁴ See *ibid.*, pp. 156, 163.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Ankit Panda, "India, Russia Conclude Indra 2018 Military Exercises" *The Diplomat*, December 2, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/12/india-russia-conclude-indra-2018-military-exercises/> (29.09.2019).

In this regard, scholars suggest that while strengthening its traditional ties with Moscow, India has to maintain a multi-vector foreign policy to engage simultaneously with other powers with interest to contain China's rising power and influence.¹⁴⁶⁶

Autonomy Concerns in Indian Foreign Policy and New Delhi's Strategic Relations with the US

As examined earlier, one of the important reasons for India to avoid a military alliance with Moscow in the Cold War years has been Indian concerns on autonomy in its foreign relations. New Delhi has sought to keep its relations as warm as possible with Western powers and especially the US that has been a primary source of economic assistance and technology for India.¹⁴⁶⁷ In the post-Cold War era, India has continued to maintain friendly relations with the US especially in economic terms, which has been supported by the process of India's opening into the global economy. In recent years, the rapid rise of China and the convergent geopolitical interests between New Delhi and Washington in the Indo-Pacific region have renewed their willingness to cooperate in political, economic and even military terms.¹⁴⁶⁸ This led to an increase in the US arms deliveries to India by 557 percent from 2013 to 2017 compared to the previous five-year period.¹⁴⁶⁹ Currently, American arms supplies account nearly for 30 percent of India's total military imports making the US the second-biggest defense partner after Russia.¹⁴⁷⁰

It is true that from the late 1990s onwards, India has joined Russian and Chinese efforts to oppose and undermine the US unilateralism in international politics. New Delhi has sought to promote a more equal international system through contributing to the soft balancing coalition emerging among like-minded powers.¹⁴⁷¹ However, India has always avoided open confrontation with Washington due to its

¹⁴⁶⁶ See Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," pp. 8, 14; and Malik, "India Balances China," p. 368.

¹⁴⁶⁷ See Menon, "India and the Soviet Union: A New Stage of Relations?," pp. 749-750.

¹⁴⁶⁸ Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 465.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Pieter D. Wezeman et al., "Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2017," Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, Fact Sheet, March 2018, p. 3, https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf (30.09.2019).

¹⁴⁷⁰ Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," p. 161.

¹⁴⁷¹ For arguments on India's involvement into soft balancing efforts against the US primacy see Daniel Flenes, "India-Brazil-South Africa (IBSA) in the New Global Order: Interests, Strategies and Values of the Emerging Coalition," *International Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 4, 2009; and Kai He and Huiyun Feng, "If Not Soft Balancing, Then What? Reconsidering Soft Balancing and Us Policy toward China," p. 368.

special interests in relations with the West. That is why India has sometimes found itself at pains to explain Washington that its attempts to come together with other major powers closer are in no way directed at the United States.¹⁴⁷² India has tried to balance its partnership with the SCO members by extending its security cooperation also with the US on an informal and ad hoc basis, which falls short of a military alliance. For example, during the process of India's membership to the SCO, New Delhi signed a major 'Logistics Exchange Agreement' with Pentagon in August 2016.¹⁴⁷³ This agreement aimed at facilitating 'reciprocal logistic support' between the Indian and the US militaries to be utilized 'during authorized port visits, joint exercises, and humanitarian assistance efforts' based on prior consent of the parties for each time. The agreement stressed that it would neither create any obligations for 'joint military activity' nor lead to the establishment of 'foreign military bases' on the territory of participating states. Yet, the United States, having numerous overseas military bases and facilities reaching from the Persian Gulf to the Western Pacific, gained a valuable and alternative logistical partner for its naval activities.¹⁴⁷⁴

The renewal of the security cooperation between the US and India can be viewed as a natural response by India concerning the changing balance of power, and especially the distribution of threats facing itself in nearby regions. In the late 1990s and 2000s, New Delhi welcomed the Russian initiative to build a strategic triangle with China and India to contain the American primacy in world politics. However, two simultaneous factors, the rapid rise of China pursuing much more ambitious foreign policy and the gradual decrease in the US military engagement into Central Eurasia, altered India's strategic calculations. These developments rendered China as the most threatening power for India in its immediate vicinity. Still, India continued pushing Moscow to play a bigger role in the Eurasian strategic landscape and increased its political coordination with Russia on regional security issues.¹⁴⁷⁵ At the same time, however, Russia's turn to China after the Ukraine crisis examined above was not welcomed by India. In this regard, New Delhi became disturbed to see some mutual

¹⁴⁷² Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 16.

¹⁴⁷³ For information about the agreement see "India and the United States Sign the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)" Press Information Bureau Government of India, August 30, 2016, <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/mbErel.aspx?relid=149322.%20> (30.09.2019).

¹⁴⁷⁴ See Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 466.

¹⁴⁷⁵ Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 16.

signals by Russia and China underlining their willingness to further security cooperation, such as the 'Joint Sea' exercises. These exercises aroused some concerns by the Indian government on the possibility that the Sino-Russian partnership could evolve into an alliance or a quasi-military alliance.¹⁴⁷⁶

The greatest source of Sino-Indian geopolitical competition is that two states aspire to the same objectives at the same time, not only over the same contested strategic landmass but also over its adjacent waters. Each major power is increasing its activities in maritime areas that are seen as its 'backyard' by the other. In recent years China increased its investments into littoral states of the Indian Ocean, a critical route for Chinese oil imports from the Middle East and Africa, through building ports, infrastructure and supplying defense equipment.¹⁴⁷⁷ India became increasingly concerned with what analysts call as the Chinese strategy of 'string of pearls,' which allegedly created to contain a rising India by cultivating close ties with several local states like Pakistan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka. New Delhi worries that one day, those facilities could serve as naval bases for Chinese military forces, although there is no hard evidence for such an objective by Beijing.¹⁴⁷⁸ In this respect, India and China seem to be locked in a classical security dilemma as New Delhi interprets Beijing's actions to ensure its security interests as a direct threat to its own security. What is clear under this context is that the geopolitical and geo-economic interests of India and the US began to converge as both states are willing to contain Chinese rising influence in the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁴⁷⁹

During the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Washington in June 2016, the United States declared India as a 'major defense partner' and reportedly offered India the same level of access to American defense technologies, which is enjoyed by its closest allies.¹⁴⁸⁰ In the post-Ukraine period, the US, Israel, and France all remarkably increased their arms sales to New Delhi, while Russia suffered a

¹⁴⁷⁶ Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," pp. 17-18.

¹⁴⁷⁷ Malik, "India Balances China," pp. 354, 372.

¹⁴⁷⁸ See Hornat, "The Power Triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States," p. 430; Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 16; and Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 460.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 465.

¹⁴⁸⁰ See *Ibid.*; and Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 18.

decrease around 40 percent in its bilateral arms trade with India.¹⁴⁸¹ India also gave importance to bilateral exercises with the US which reached far beyond the number of Indo-Russian military exercises.¹⁴⁸² Unlike Russia's neutral stance towards the South China Sea dispute, India also aligned with the US on this issue. Beijing's claims on those waters posed a serious concern for India which uses the South China Sea routes for 55 percent of its total trade. This led to diplomatic collaboration and joint statements between India, the United States and its regional allies in the Pacific region such as Japan and Australia.¹⁴⁸³ Furthermore, in 2015, Japan was admitted as a permanent participant in the regular 'Malabar' naval exercises between the US and India, which focus on various areas from maritime patrol to high-end warfighting skillsets.¹⁴⁸⁴

In point of fact, India's orientation toward the US in the Indo-Pacific region is caused by the fact that there is no alternative power that could support India to counter China's ambitions in this region, just as there is no alternative for Russia to balance Chinese influence in the Eurasian landmass. These facts force India to follow a two-track multi-alignment strategy with both external powers under different regional contexts.¹⁴⁸⁵ Indian security objectives could not be achieved by overtly with one side at the expense of the other i.e. Russia and the United States. Therefore New Delhi seeks to retain its flexibility and autonomy by remaining as a major friend for both.¹⁴⁸⁶ Scholars underline that India would not likely to enter in a formal alliance with the US either, in order to contain China considering the risk of confrontation with this great

¹⁴⁸¹ The statistics represent a comparison concerning the period between 2014 and 2018 and the previous five years. "Russian arms exports to India fell by 42 percent between 2014-18 and 2009-13," The Economic Times, March 11, 2019, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/russian-arms-exports-to-india-fell-by-42-percent-between-2014-18-and-2009-13-report/articleshow/68352681.cms> (30.09.2019).

¹⁴⁸² As Pant suggests, Russia also cancelled a number of joint exercises with India signaling its disappointment due to New Delhi's rejection of Russian offer for a \$10.4 billion agreement on the sale of 126 medium multi-role combat aircraft in favor of Rafale combat planes produced by France, though Moscow has never confirmed its disturbance in public. Pant, "India-Russia Ties and India's Strategic Culture: Dominance of a Realist Worldview," p. 8.

¹⁴⁸³ See Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, *op.cit.*, p. 11; and Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," pp. 466-467.

¹⁴⁸⁴ See Franz-Stefan Gady, "India, US, and Japan to Hold 'Malabar' Naval War Games This Week," June 05, 2018, The Diplomat, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/06/india-us-and-japan-to-hold-malabar-naval-war-games-this-week/> (30.09.2019).

¹⁴⁸⁵ Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," pp. 457, 459. For a larger interpretation of the 'multi-alignment' strategy paying regard to states in the Asia-Pacific region see Malik, "India Balances China," p. 369.

¹⁴⁸⁶ See Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," p. 158.

power having greater offensive capabilities and its possible retaliation by boosting its military cooperation with Pakistan.¹⁴⁸⁷

Nonetheless, the mutual threat perceptions between China and India and the US policies towards the region demonstrate that there are enduring security dilemmas in Asia, which could be manipulated and exploited for American power projections. Under these conditions, Indo-Russian partnership would likely preserve its key elements of cooperation in the trilateral setting of Asian major power politics. However, its relative importance would possibly decline compared to the Sino-Russian alignment which represents the most influential and effective entente in the region.¹⁴⁸⁸

C. Pakistan between the US and China: Possibilities for a Closer Security Cooperation with Moscow

Unlike India, Russia has never enjoyed favorable relations with Pakistan from the Cold War years to the 1990s. Although two states have never involved in a bilateral dispute with each other, their alignment ties, geopolitical interests, as well as political and ideological worldviews have all complicated the problematic bilateral relations between Moscow and Islamabad.¹⁴⁸⁹ In the bipolar world order, Pakistan explicitly joined the Western bloc by signing the SEATO and CENTO alliances in the 1950s. In turn, the Kremlin openly supported India in its bilateral problems with Pakistan, particularly Kashmir. During the Soviet invasion into Afghanistan between 1979 and 1989, Pakistan was a major backer of the Afghan resistance against the USSR, which trained the Mujahedeen and provided resource base, sanctuary, as well as weapons to them.¹⁴⁹⁰

¹⁴⁸⁷ See Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," pp. 34-35; Malik, "India Balances China," p. 363. In general, India remains adamant of conceding from its 'strategic autonomy,' a concept formulated in its early independence period. This concept presupposes a neutral position for India on the basis of not joining formal military alliances. In the Cold War period, it led to the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement, while Indian authorities still do not favor the idea of joining military alliances which would limit their options in international politics. See Khan, Ishfaq, and Ullah, "Indo-Russian Missile Defense Deal: Re-Calibration of Ties," p. 157; and Hornat, "The Power Triangle in the Indian Ocean: China, India and the United States," p. 433.

¹⁴⁸⁸ See Lo, "New Order for Old Triangles? The Russia-China-India Matrix," p. 35.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Muhammad T. F. Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 38, No. 2, 2018, p. 88.

¹⁴⁹⁰ See *ibid.*, p. 96; Nazir Hussain and Quratulain Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," *Central Asia*, No. 72, 2013, pp. 3-5; and Tasneem Sultana, Sahar Afshan, and Zobi Fatima, "Pak-Russia Relations in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Environment," *Journal of European Studies*, Vol. 35, No. 1, 2019 p. 46.

During the 1990s, Russian-Pakistan relations remained generally unfavorable, mostly due to the latter's support to the Taliban movement in Afghanistan and other radical Islamist groups in Central Asia like the IMU. Moscow also accused Pakistan of supporting terrorist groups and separatism in Chechnya and Caucasus.¹⁴⁹¹ However, September 2001 became a turning point in Russian-Pakistani relations as Islamabad made a U-turn in its policy towards Afghanistan in the wake of the US-led military operation and ceased its support to the Taliban along with some other Islamist groups.¹⁴⁹² This led to a slow but progressive rapprochement between Russia and Pakistan. Below, we examine the main drivers of this process such as both states' convergent interests in regional stability, the recent tensions between Washington and Islamabad, and Pakistan's growing bid for closer cooperation with the members of the SCO and China.

The Recognition of Common Interests in Regional Peace and Stability

In the 2000s, Russia has begun to articulate its interest in working with Pakistan against non-traditional threats in the Afghanistan region such as terrorism, illicit drug, arms, and human trafficking. The security interests of Russia and Pakistan have been intertwined given the increasing mobility of non-state threats and challenges. There is certain evidence that citizens of Russia and other post-Soviet states have ties with terrorist groups operating in Pakistan, along with their illegal training camps and religious schools. Pakistan also appears as a primary route for terrorists moving from South Asia and Central Asia to the Middle East and Europe.¹⁴⁹³ In recent years, the growing ISIS threat in the Afghanistan region has been a common concern for both Russia and Pakistan, as the latter also became a victim of the terrorist organization's attacks in its territory.¹⁴⁹⁴ With all these challenges to domestic security in Pakistan,

¹⁴⁹¹ See Sarfraz Khan and Noor-Ul Amin, "An Overview of Pak-Soviet/Russia Relations," **Central Asia**, No. 71, 2012, pp. 9-10; Richard Weitz, "Storm Clouds over Central Asia: Revival of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU)?," **Studies in Conflict and Terrorism**, Vol. 27, No. 6, 2004 pp. 509-510; and Tahir Amin, "Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding "New Great Game" in South Asia," Helena Rytövuori-Apunen (ed.), **The Regional Security Puzzle around Afghanistan: Bordering Practices in Central Asia and Beyond**, Opladen: Barbara Budrich Publishers, 2012, pp. 197-198.

¹⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁴⁹³ Vladimir Moskalenko and Petr Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," Carnegie Moscow Center, May 2014, pp. 1, 7-8. Retrieved from: https://carnegieendowment.org/files/russia_and_pakistan2014.pdf (06.10.2019).

¹⁴⁹⁴ See Sultana, Afshan, and Fatima, "Pak-Russia Relations in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Environment," pp. 46-47; Khalid Iqbal, "Pakistan between Russia and America," **Defence Journal**, Vol. 21, No. 11, 2018 p. 67. For general information about the ISIS Khorasan (ISIS-K) which operates in Afghanistan and its neighborhood and claims some territory in proximate states such as Pakistan and

Russia became increasingly concerned about the uncertain future of the weak regime in this country, especially after the withdrawal of coalition forces from Afghanistan. The possible crises in Pakistan may lead to more conflicts, anarchy, and loss of control over certain areas within the country, which would have ramifications not only in Pakistan's adjacent neighborhood but also in the Russian Federation as well.¹⁴⁹⁵

On the other side, China's Belt and Road initiative and the related China-Pakistan Economic Corridor Project recently emerged as a game-changer in the formulation of Pakistan's regional interests and its foreign relations. When the CPEC is completed, it is expected to half the trade costs for China that turns out to be one of the biggest mass suppliers of low-cost goods and technology in the world.¹⁴⁹⁶ This mega project aims at opening up new economic zones and constructing a significant network of transportation in Pakistan's territory, which would likely bring some unprecedented economic benefits to the country. It would also open space for new regional alignments with external states having an interest in the CPEC. The planned facilities in the Gwadar port of Pakistan will connect the landlocked Central Asian states for regional trade and energy transportation.¹⁴⁹⁷ The success of all these projects with potential benefits to Pakistan's socio-economic conditions is closely dependent on the conditions of regional peace and stability.¹⁴⁹⁸ In this respect, Pakistan linked its national renewal to regional development and turned to be an important stakeholder in

India see "Islamic State Khorasan (IS-K)," Center for Strategic and International Studies, November 9, 2018, <https://www.csis.org/programs/transnational-threats-project/terrorism-backgrounders/islamic-state-khorasan-k> (06.10.2019); and Robert Postings, "ISIS Announces New India and Pakistan Provinces, Casually Breaking up Khorasan," The Defense Post, May 15, 2019, <https://thedefensepost.com/2019/05/15/islamic-state-pakistan-province-al-hind/> (06.10.2019).

¹⁴⁹⁵ See Moskalenko and Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," pp. 6-7. Hussain and Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," p. 13. Beside the ISIS-K, Pakistan's armed forces have been fighting with the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) since 2007 in the 'Federally Administered Tribal Areas' close to the Afghan border. Those operations have been conducting for the unity of the state and to prevent an anarchy from emerging. Amin, "Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding "New Great Game" in South Asia," p. 202.

¹⁴⁹⁶ See Muhammad Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," p. 98; and Arhama Siddiq, "Significance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) for Pakistan," Institute of Strategic Studies, Issue Brief, June 9, 2016, p. 8. Retrieved from: <https://www.issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2016/06/Final-Issue-brief-arhama-dated-09-6-2016.pdf> (06.10.2019).

¹⁴⁹⁷ See *ibid.*, and Muhammad Ihsan Qadir and Saif Ur Rehman, "Expansion of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Harbinger of Regional Peace and Prosperity," **Journal of Political Studies**, Vol. 23, No. 1, 2016, p. 127.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, pp. 16-18.

regional security cooperation, which prompted a crucial realignment in its foreign policy.¹⁴⁹⁹

All these facts account for Pakistan's aspirations to cultivate ties with the SCO and its individual members during the last two decades, an organization aiming at security and economic cooperation in the region.¹⁵⁰⁰ As Pakistan's Defense Minister Khawaja Asif put it, Pakistan began to view Russia as a 'great regional power' which should not be ignored and encouraged both Moscow's and Beijing's engagement into the region and the Afghanistan peace process.¹⁵⁰¹ On the other side, the Kremlin recognized Pakistan as a vital partner for the settlement of the Afghanistan conflict and an integral part of any lasting peace.¹⁵⁰² As suggested by Ruslan Pukhov, a noted Russian defense analyst, Islamabad exercises a huge influence over Afghanistan. Moscow has been 'racking its brains' on the issue of how to ensure the security of the southern borders of the post-Soviet region after the withdrawal of the US and NATO forces from Afghanistan. In this regard, Pukhov concludes that if Moscow "*continues to snub Pakistan in favor of India, it would ultimately run contrary to the interests of Russia's security.*"¹⁵⁰³

The Recent Tensions and Problems between Washington and Islamabad

Another principal system-level factor for the Russian-Pakistani rapprochement has been the United States' alienation of itself from Islamabad in recent years, while Washington increasingly tilted towards India to balance the rapidly rising China.¹⁵⁰⁴ Yet, the origins of bilateral problems between the US and Pakistan can be traced back to the 1990s, when the latter's geostrategic importance for Washington dramatically fell with the collapse of the Soviet Union. As a result, Islamabad had to bear the

¹⁴⁹⁹ Sarwat Rauf, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO): Opportunities for Pakistan," **NUST Journal of International Peace and Stability (NJIPS)**, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2019, p. 15.

¹⁵⁰⁰ See Z. Ahmed, S. Ahmed, and Bhatnagar, **op.cit.**, p. 18.

¹⁵⁰¹ Mateen Haider, "Pakistan Wants Russian Engagement in Afghan Peace Process," Dawn, November 22, 2014, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1146194> (09.10.2019).

¹⁵⁰² See Vinay Kaura, "Russia's Deadly Embrace of Pakistan," BESA Center, Perspectives, No. 936, August 31, 2018, <https://besacenter.org/perspectives-papers/russia-pakistan-navies/> (09.10.2019); and Sultana, Afshan, and Fatima, "Pak-Russia Relations in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Environment," p. 37.

¹⁵⁰³ Quoted in Sergei Strokan, "Pakistan and Russia Move Closer toward Military Cooperation," Russia Beyond, October 10, 2012, https://www.rbth.com/articles/2012/10/10/pakistan_and_russia_move_closer_toward_military_cooperation_18965.html (09.10.2019).

¹⁵⁰⁴ See Sultana, Afshan, and Fatima, "Pak-Russia Relations in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Environment," pp. 37, 49.

struggle on its own against the enduring negative results of the Afghan war, which brought thousands of refugees along with militant groups inside of the Pakistani territory on the common border area. Besides, Pakistan's nuclear test in May 1998 and the military coup d'état occurred in Islamabad in the following year further strained relations. These developments even led the US to adopt some sanctions against Pakistan and to cut its military and economic assistance towards the country.¹⁵⁰⁵ The post-9/11 years brought an end to the international isolation of Pakistan and renewed its alignment with Western powers. However, the withdrawal of the US-led coalition forces from Afghanistan put Islamabad again in a position of uncertainty.¹⁵⁰⁶ In this respect, some Western scholars affirm that after the withdrawal is completed Pakistan and Russia would probably have more in common concerning the Afghanistan problem than the US has with either. It represents a 'real turnaround' from the history of these two countries now having common interests in a shared neighborhood.¹⁵⁰⁷

After reaching power, the US President Donald Trump announced a new American strategy towards South Asia and Afghanistan, which criticized Islamabad's role and peace-building efforts in that country. As the US relations with India became better than ever since 2016, American civil and military assistance to Pakistan dramatically dropped around 40 percent. Washington also blocked the delivery of six F-16 aircraft to Pakistan under New Delhi's pressure.¹⁵⁰⁸ In 2017, Trump called for more Indian assistance to the peace process in Afghanistan implicitly bypassing Islamabad, while he praised Kashmir's 'freedom struggle' against terrorist movements and accused Pakistan of 'harboring terrorism'.¹⁵⁰⁹ In June 2018, the Financial Action Task Force, an international watchdog on money laundering, put Pakistan back on the 'grey list' on the charge of failing to crack down terrorism financing, which further

¹⁵⁰⁵ See Muhammad Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," p. 93.

¹⁵⁰⁶ See *ibid.*, p. 94; Hussain and Fatima, "Pak-Russian Relations: Historical Legacies and New Beginnings," p. 1; and Moskalenko and Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," pp. 6-7.

¹⁵⁰⁷ For comments by Daniel Markey, a professor of international relations at John's Hopkins University, see "Analysis: Why Russia is Warming up to Pakistan," Dawn, February 27, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1392060> (09.10.2019).

¹⁵⁰⁸ See Iqbal, "Pakistan between Russia and America," p. 67; and Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," p. 89.

¹⁵⁰⁹ See Godbole, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization and South Asia: Balancing Act," pp. 4-5; and Kunwar K. Shahid, "Trump's Warning To Islamabad Has Formalised The China-Pakistan-Russia Axis," Huffingtonpost, August 30, 2017, https://www.huffingtonpost.in/kunwar-khuldune-shahid/trump-s-warning-to-islamabad-has-formalised-the-china-pakistan-russia-axis_a_23188832/ (09.10.2019).

deteriorated its relations with the West.¹⁵¹⁰ In reaction to the US accusation of Pakistan of supporting terrorism in Afghanistan and its neighborhood, Russia and China did not join the campaign but came to Islamabad's help suggesting that shifting all the blame on Pakistan would only serve for further destabilization in the region.¹⁵¹¹

During the Cold War years, the US has utilized Pakistan as a springboard to contain the Soviet Union, the biggest global competitor, which resulted in a close alliance and military collaboration with this local power. In the current regional and global geopolitics, however, the US now considers Pakistan as an 'accomplice' to Beijing's aspirations for being a global power, which appears as the only competitor for a superpower status. So it seems difficult to ameliorate the US-Pakistan relations unless the latter gives up its close alignment with China and abandon the CPEC and the BRI projects. Under this context, it is more likely that Pakistan's security interest would be risked by a growing US-Indian alignment and its possible isolation in South Asia.¹⁵¹² The growing ties between Pakistan and Russia and Islamabad's bid for closer cooperation with the SCO can be understood in this context.¹⁵¹³ Below we focus on the development of Russia-Pakistan security cooperation and the main constraining factors in this bilateral alignment.

The Rising Security Dialogue and Cooperation between Russia and Pakistan: Main Achievements and Enduring Obstacles

As we noted, Pakistan's decision to cut its support to the Taliban in the wake of the US intervention into Afghanistan eliminated a main friction in Russian-Pakistani relations. Soon after the 9/11 attacks, two states established regular contacts that led to the institutionalization of the 'Pakistan-Russia Joint Working Group on Terrorism' in 2002.¹⁵¹⁴ In February 2003, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf visited Moscow, where he explicitly declared that Pakistan considers Chechnya as Russia's internal problem and that they would play no role in supporting Islamist networks in the Russian Federation or any place in Central Asia. This visit created two more joint

¹⁵¹⁰ See Kaura, "Russia's Deadly Embrace of Pakistan".

¹⁵¹¹ Iqbal, "Pakistan between Russia and America," p. 68.

¹⁵¹² See Muhammad Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," pp. 101-102.

¹⁵¹³ See *ibid.* pp. 89-90; and Sultana, Afshan, and Fatima, "Pak-Russia Relations in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Environment," p. 48.

¹⁵¹⁴ Rashid Siddiqi, "Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement," *Strategic Studies*, Vol. 37, No. 2, 2017, p. 61.

dialogue mechanisms on ‘strategic stability,’ and ‘economic and cultural cooperation.’¹⁵¹⁵ A Pakistan-based analyst, Khalid Iqbal, suggests that after the 9/11 attacks Pakistan realized that Washington would likely abandon Pakistan again after making use of the country with regard to its military plans. Therefore Pakistan turned to concerted efforts to diversify its external relations, which eventually led to a slow but steady transition in its security orientation.¹⁵¹⁶

In 2009, Russia initiated another dialogue mechanism with Islamabad on the issues concerning regional stability in the form of annual summits between Russia, Pakistan, Tajikistan, and Afghanistan which was called as the Dushanbe Four.¹⁵¹⁷ In 2011, Russia openly supported Pakistan’s SCO membership, primarily to open the way for India’s accession into the organization. In November 2011, Moscow also condemned NATO’s cross-border airstrike on Pakistan’s check post on its Afghan border, causing 24 casualties, on the basis of “*the unacceptability of violating the sovereignty of states, including during the planning and carrying out of counter-terrorist operations.*”¹⁵¹⁸ In addition, Russia, Pakistan and China held trilateral meetings together in Beijing (April 2013), Islamabad (November 2013), and Moscow (December 2016) which emphasized their common position to encourage an inclusive ‘Afghan-owned’ and ‘Afghan-led’ peace process. In fact, the third meeting just followed the first-ever trilateral meeting held between the US, India, and Afghanistan in New York in September 2016.¹⁵¹⁹

Besides Pakistan’s joining to the SCO and all these multilateral settings, Russia also promoted bilateral arrangements for security cooperation with Islamabad. The first-ever visit by a Russian Defense Minister to Islamabad was held in November 2014, at a crucial time point regarding the US withdrawal plans. During the visit, two states signed a military cooperation agreement presented as a ‘milestone’ in their relations, which aimed at information exchanges and cooperation on politico-military

¹⁵¹⁵ Amin, "Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding “New Great Game” in South Asia," pp. 198-199.

¹⁵¹⁶ Iqbal, "Pakistan between Russia and America," p. 66.

¹⁵¹⁷ See Moskalenko and Topychkanov, “Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities,” p. 9.

¹⁵¹⁸ Siddiqi, "Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement," p. 61.

¹⁵¹⁹ Amina Khan, “Russia-China-Pakistan Third Trilateral Dialogue on Afghanistan,” Institute of Strategic Studies, Issue Brief, January 17, 2017, pp. 2-3. Retrieved from: http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Final_IB_Amina_dated_17-1-2017.pdf (09.10.2019).

issues such as counter-terrorism, arms-control, and peace-keeping operations.¹⁵²⁰ Russia and Pakistan organized their first-ever joint military exercise in the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa province from 24 September to 10 October 2016, a year later the regional branch of ISIS conducted its terrorist attacks in Pakistan. It was followed by the second two-week joint counter-terror exercise in 2017 in Russia's North Caucasus where was a controversial area for the Russia-Pakistan relations back in the 1990s.¹⁵²¹ The third bilateral military exercise was organized in 2018 in the Cherat region and Pabbi National Counter-Terrorism Center in Pakistan to enhance joint cooperation against terrorism and the growing ISIS threat from Afghanistan. In August 2018, two states signed another military agreement to initiate Russian military training programs for Pakistani officers and conducted the first meeting of the 'Russia-Pakistan Joint Military Consultative Committee' which emerged as the highest platform for bilateral military cooperation.¹⁵²²

Concerning the bilateral relations in the defense sector, Russia took a landmark decision in 2014 to lift its long-standing and self-imposed arms embargo against Pakistan to assist Islamabad's growing needs for military hardware in order to combat terrorism effectively. It was followed by an agreement on the sale of MI-35 combat helicopters from Russia to Pakistan.¹⁵²³ Indeed, Islamabad has signaled its interests in buying T-90 Tanks and other Russian weapons with more advanced technology and offensive capability. On the other side, Pakistan is seen as an alternative market by Russia for its defense industry that is a main driver for its economy now facing a recession.¹⁵²⁴ However, Russia's arms trade with Pakistan lags much behind those with all other SCO members let alone China and India who were provided with the most advanced air-defense systems by Moscow. The primary reason obstructing the

¹⁵²⁰ See "Pakistan, Russia Sign Milestone Military Co-op Pact," *The Nation*, November 21, 2014, <https://nation.com.pk/21-Nov-2014/pakistan-russia-sign-milestone-military-co-op-pact> (09.10.2019); Amin, "Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding "New Great Game" in South Asia," pp. 200-201.

¹⁵²¹ See Kaura, "Russia's Deadly Embrace of Pakistan"; and Sultana, Afshan, and Fatima, "Pak-Russia Relations in the Emerging Geo-Strategic Environment," p. 45.

¹⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹⁵²³ See Zachary Keck, "Russia Ends Arms Embargo against Pakistan," *The Diplomat*, June 04, 2014, <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/russia-ends-arms-embargo-against-pakistan/> (09.10.2019); and Franz-Stefan Gady, "Pakistan Begins Receiving Advanced Attack Helicopters From Russia," *The Diplomat*, April, 12, 2018, <https://thediplomat.com/2018/04/pakistan-begins-receiving-advanced-attack-helicopters-from-russia/> (09.10.2019). Moscow also allowed the re-export of 150 Russian-made engines from China to Pakistan that were used in Chinese JF-17 aircraft. Siddiqi, "Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement," p. 63.

¹⁵²⁴ See Kaura, "Russia's Deadly Embrace of Pakistan"; and Muhammad Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," p. 98.

development of Russia-Pakistan defense cooperation remains as India's disturbance of any collaborative ties between these two states. Given the existence of an obvious security dilemma between India and Pakistan, a compressive arms deal between Russia and the latter could be regarded by New Delhi as a direct challenge to the balance of power in South Asia. Moscow keeps arms trade with Pakistan at a very limited scale to avoid damaging its special partnership with India which is considered as Russia's primary major power ally in South Asia.¹⁵²⁵

In this regard, scholars suggest that Russian-Pakistani relations have been historically a 'function of the Indian factor,' and that Moscow still considers its Pakistan policy in relation to its policies towards other powers, especially India.¹⁵²⁶ Such considerations even influence the planning of presidential level visits. Vladimir Putin canceled his planned trip to Pakistan for the Dushanbe Four meeting in October 2012, following his re-election to the presidency. Putin decided not to visit this country until he would once visit India, but like the other prior Russian leaders, he has never visited Islamabad since then.¹⁵²⁷ On the other side, India did not avoid officially expressing its displeasure on developing Russia-Pakistan security cooperation suggesting it as a 'wrong approach' that would only 'create problems.' In October 2016, Indian Prime Minister Modi revealed their unhappiness about joint military exercises between two states, citing a Russian adage "*an old friend is better than two new friends*," at a joint press event with the Russian President in India.¹⁵²⁸ In June 2017, Russian Foreign Ministry felt obliged to stress that Russia's relationship "*with other countries will not dilute Moscow's ties with India*," quoting the original words of Vladimir Putin, while making an assessment on the continuing Russia-Pakistan joint military exercises.¹⁵²⁹

¹⁵²⁵ See Moskalenko and Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," pp. 10-11; and Amin, "Pakistan-Russia Relations and the Unfolding 'New Great Game' in South Asia," p. 191.

¹⁵²⁶ See *ibid.* p. 205; and Siddiqi, "Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement," p. 70.

¹⁵²⁷ See Moskalenko and Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," p. 11; and Andrew Korybko, "Pakistan-Russia Relations: Upcoming Putin-Khan Meeting on Sidelines of SCO Summit," Global Research, June 09, 2019 <https://www.globalresearch.ca/pakistan-russia-relations-upcoming-putin-khan-meeting-on-sidelines-of-sco-summit/5680046> (09.10.2019).

¹⁵²⁸ See Siddiqi, "Prospects for Russia-Pakistan Rapprochement," pp. 63-64.

¹⁵²⁹ See "Russia's position on Kashmir is clear: MEA," Business Standard, June 2, 2017, https://www.business-standard.com/article/news-ani/russia-s-position-on-kashmir-is-clear-mea-117060200102_1.html (09.10.2019).

Scholars also suggest some other factors inhibiting the development of an alignment between Russia and Pakistan whose government indeed strongly needs external assistance in the face of growing non-state threats from its territory and the region. Despite the recently recognized common interests, two countries still have to overcome some enduring difficulties which undermine their mutual thrust, including common experiences from their conflict-ridden history.¹⁵³⁰ On the other side, one should not disregard Pakistan's autonomy concerns in its relations with Russia and other great powers as well. First, Pakistan still seeks to ensure a stable and favorable relationship with the US which maintains a significant influence amongst Pakistani state and military officials as well as the society. Secondly, the Russian-Pakistani rapprochement is still at an infancy stage, while China has been doing much more to infill the gap left by the United States in political, economic and military terms.¹⁵³¹ Under these conditions, Pakistan would likely seek a diverse and balanced relationship with multiple actors and especially great powers having an interest in working with Islamabad.¹⁵³² Looking from the Russian side, this represents an opportunity to maintain a limited alignment with Pakistan based on mutually recognized common interests, while keeping the balance concerning its relations with India. The maintenance of security dialogue and cooperation with each state in the troubled China-India-Pakistan axis would likely put Russia into a special favorable position in both the SCO and the Asian continent. It seems to be a much better one compared to the Cold War period when the Kremlin faced a hostile alignment between Beijing and Islamabad supporting jihadist forces in Afghanistan.

IV. Russia-Iran Alignment: Moscow's Soft Balancing Strategy against the US and its Relations with Tehran

An analysis of Russia's alignment strategies in Eurasia, which does not cover Iran would remain short-handed for several reasons. First of all, as noted in the introduction, Russia-Iran cooperation is portrayed as a typical example case for soft balancing theory. Secondly, Iran is currently an observer state in the SCO with formally-expressed aspirations to join the organization that is a central regional

¹⁵³⁰ See Moskalenko and Topychkanov, "Russia and Pakistan: Shared Challenges and Common Opportunities," p. 3.

¹⁵³¹ See Iqbal, "Pakistan between Russia and America," pp. 66-67; and Khan, "Pakistan's Growing Relations with Russia: Factoring in the Role of the Us," p. 90.

¹⁵³² See *ibid.*, p. 99.

security institution for this dissertation. Thirdly, our examination on the evolution of Russia's foreign policy thinking in the 1990s put forward that Iran has been a primary actor for the Kremlin's plans to build 'multipolarity,' and a significant bargaining factor in Russia's relations with the US since the Primakov years. Fourthly, like the case of Pakistan, Russia's security cooperation with Iran also represents a comprehensive and useful example to examine Russian alignment behavior towards regional powers outside of the post-Space. Last but not least, Iran has played a crucial role in helping Russian military efforts to ensure the survival of the Assad regime during the Syrian civil war, which renewed the Kremlin's high-level regional profile in the Middle East and enhanced its role in international security affairs in the post-Cold War era.¹⁵³³

Iran is located in a critical geostrategic position vis-à-vis Russia, which has enabled it to influence the developments in and around the Caucasus, Caspian Sea region, Central Asia as well as the Middle East. Since the early 1990s, Russia has felt compelled to discuss a wide range of regional issues with Iran, such as the Nagorno Karabakh conflict, the stability of Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia. The shared vision of both countries on those various issues prevented a geopolitical competition from emerging, while it is believed that Iranian support to Moscow's standing towards regional issues helped Russia to restore and strengthen its regional position in the CIS after the fall of the Soviet Union.¹⁵³⁴ On the other side, Iran represents one of the leading economic and military powers in the Middle East. Tehran enjoys remarkable influence in Shi'a dominated Iraq and other significant actors in the Middle East such as Hezbollah operating in Lebanon and Syria. Therefore, Iran would be a crucial player in the future of the regional peace process.¹⁵³⁵ Given the fact that Russia's re-engagement into the Middle East is mostly motivated by its return into the 'global geopolitical chessboard' as a great power, Russian-Iranian alignment also

¹⁵³³ While examining Russia's alignment strategies, this study maintains its focus on the post-Soviet area and the regional security frameworks i.e. the CSTO and the SCO in line with the conception of Eurasia in Russia's political discourse. Therefore, the following pages focus more on the first four aspects concerning Russia's security cooperation with Iran. It avoids elaborating much-heated contemporary debates on Moscow's military campaign in Syria and its implications on the regional security of the Middle East as a whole.

¹⁵³⁴ Nikolay Kozhanov, "Russian-Iranian Dialogue after 2012: Turning a New Page?" *Russian Analytical Digest*, No. 192, November, 10, 2016, p. 3.

¹⁵³⁵ See Mudiam, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Gulf: Will India Prefer a Further Westward Expansion of the SCO or Its Consolidation?," p. 471.

makes relevance to one of the main objectives in its overall alignment strategies.¹⁵³⁶ Below we examine the development of security dialogue and cooperation between Moscow and Tehran which expands from the post-Soviet space to the Middle East, starting with their convergent geopolitical interests throughout this vast geography.

A. Common Regional and International Interests: Main Underpinnings of Iran's Bid to Join the SCO

Russian-Iranian convergent geopolitical and security interests can be deduced to their common goal of curbing the US power and influence in international politics. While Russia views this objective more globally and seeks to assert itself as a key player to determine the international order at the expense of the US primacy, Iran focuses more on its immediate region and tries to ensure its dominant position and regional interests in the Middle East. What these two states define as the US 'unilateralism' in the global area and regional subsystems unites Russia and Iran together in seeking a 'multipolar' world order.¹⁵³⁷ In this respect, two states call for a poly-centric world order and the strengthening of the UN's role in international affairs. Moscow views Iran as an important partner to build such an order at least in the regional dimension, and as well as, to stabilize the post-Soviet area with regard to Russia's great power role and interests.¹⁵³⁸

Both Russia and Iran are apparently against a Western-led unilateral world order holding their belief in traditional norms and rules such as national sovereignty in the Westphalian sense and non-intervention into domestic affairs. The most significant joint goal of Russian and Iranian foreign policy is to prevent the US pressure for isolating both states, while they seek to ensure higher international

¹⁵³⁶ Dmitri Trenin, "What drives Russia's policy in the Middle East?," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secieru (ed.), *Russia's Return to the Middle East Building Sandcastles?*, Chaillot Paper, No. 146, July 2018, p. 21. Retrieved from: https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/CP_146.pdf (15.10.2019).

¹⁵³⁷ See Ellie Geranmayeh and Kadri Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," European Council of Foreign Relations, Policy Brief, September 2016, p. 2. Retrieved from: https://www.ecfr.eu/page/-/ECFR_186_-_THE_NEW_POWER_COUPLE_RUSSIA_AND_IRAN_IN_THE_MIDDLE_EAST_PDF.pdf (15.10.2019); and Witold Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," OSW Commentary, No. 292, January 30, 2019, p. 2. Retrieved from: https://www.osw.waw.pl/sites/default/files/commentary_292.pdf (15.10.2019).

¹⁵³⁸ See Ibid; and Pyotr Topychkanov, "Iranian and Russian Perspectives on the Global system," Igor Ivanov (ed.), *Russia-Iran Partnership: An Overview and Prospects*, RIAC Report, No 29, 2016, p. 32. Retrieved from: <https://russiancouncil.ru/upload/RIAC-IRAS-Russia-Iran-Report29-en.pdf> (15.10.2019).

freedom of action by cooperating with other governments with similar dissatisfaction about the existing international order.¹⁵³⁹ In addition to that Moscow and Tehran have a common concern about the expansion of military influence by the US and NATO into the neighboring regions of the Caucasus and Central Asia.¹⁵⁴⁰ In this regard, Iran's attitude towards Russia-Georgia war in August 2008 was viewed as de-facto pro-Russian, as Tehran showed an understanding towards Russian account of the crisis on the basis of NATO's series of provocations.¹⁵⁴¹ Similarly, Moscow and Tehran commonly opposed attempts for a pro-Western regime change pursued under the guise of 'color revolutions' such as Georgia and Ukraine or through military means that were, according to them, put into practice in Syria.¹⁵⁴²

Russian-Iranian cooperation on such common positions and principles indeed can be traced back to the early 1990s. Soon after the Soviet collapse, both states recognized their common interest in cooperation vis-à-vis the rising regional conflicts as well as the risk of spreading of Western influence towards the CIS.¹⁵⁴³ The regional cooperation reached to the extent that Iran supported Armenia against pro-Western and pro-Turkish Azerbaijan in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict along with Russia's general policy towards the Caucasus.¹⁵⁴⁴ Furthermore, Tehran closed its position towards the Russian one in the Caspian Sea dispute for determining the area of influence for the

¹⁵³⁹ See Jahangir Karami, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose To Each Other?" Igor Ivanov (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 26-27.

¹⁵⁴⁰ See Davood Kiani, "Common Security Challenges and Prospects for Cooperation," Igor Ivanov (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 73-75; and Mohammad A. Mousavi and Esfandiar Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," *Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 1, 2013, p. 198.

¹⁵⁴¹ See Nikolay Kozhanov, "Is Iran bargaining chip for Russia in relations with the US?" *Al Monitor*, July 6, 2019, <https://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2019/07/russia-iran-us-bargaining-chip.html#ixzz62RkRBB5> (15.10.2019). On 24 August, Iran's Foreign Minister, Manouchehr Mottaki warned that the South Ossetian crisis could prompt the start of a new Cold-War era. He maintained that "[t]he extra-regional power would suffer the same fate they have (in Afghanistan and Iraq) should it seek to destabilize the Caucasus." "Iran Warns US over Caucasus Crisis," August 25, 2008, Press TV, <http://edition.presstv.ir/detail/67562.html> (14.10.2019).

¹⁵⁴² See Clément Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," *The Middle East Journal*, Vol. 72, No. 4, 2018 p. 559; and Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," pp. 2-3. While sharing Russian concerns on Western-manipulated regime changes, Iran has developed a balanced and neutral approach towards the Ukraine crisis. Tehran decided not to recognize the Crimean annexation in March 2014 and took a similar approach to its stance towards Georgia crisis in August 2008 when it had refused to recognize Abkhazia and South Ossetia. One of the main reasons for Iran to remain cautious concerning the Ukrainian crisis was the fact that the events occurred in the process for its nuclear deal with the West. Therefore, Iran preferred not to take sides to avoid the risk of undermining the negotiations and its newly reached 'détente' with Europe. *Ibid.* p. 12.

¹⁵⁴³ Jahangir Karami, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose To Each Other?" p. 24.

¹⁵⁴⁴ See Kaweh Sadegh-Zadeh, "Iran's Strategy in the South Caucasus," *Caucasian Review of International Affairs*, Vol. 2, No. 1, 2008.

shareholder states including Iran.¹⁵⁴⁵ In Russia's North Caucasus, Iran distanced itself from the separatism in Chechnya and simultaneously showed a positive gesture towards Russia's policies during the First Chechnya War (1994-1996) and the second military campaign by the Kremlin that started in 1999.¹⁵⁴⁶

Despite being a non-secular Islamic Republic, Iran has also distanced itself from the rising Islamist movements in Central Asia after the Soviet collapse. It is important to point here that the Iranian majority of people and Muslim populations in Central Asian and Russia follow two different branches of Islam, thus, religion has ironically inhibited Iran's possible influence in the region.¹⁵⁴⁷ Iranian Muslims are Shiites, while Islamist movements in Central Asia follow the Sunni-Hanafi school that is ideologically close to Salafism. Accordingly, they have active offices in Pakistan and Saudi Arabia, a mutually antagonistic power with Tehran, due to these states' Hanafi and Wahhabi population. Those Islamist groups have neither organic ties with Iran nor offices in this country.¹⁵⁴⁸ Under these conditions, Iran favored cooperation with the Russian Federation and the pro-Russian authoritarian regimes in Central Asia vis-à-vis regional religious groups such as the IMU, Hizb ut-Tahrir and the Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan.¹⁵⁴⁹

Iranian position towards Islamist movements and radical groups in the region opened the way for a joint dialogue and cooperation with Russia to stabilize Central Asia. During the Tajikistan civil war examined earlier, Russia sought the collaboration

¹⁵⁴⁵ See Muhammad Y. Naseem and Hoshimjon Mahmadv, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," *The Journal of Iranian Studies*, Vol. 2, No. 1 p. 99; and Helen Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2009, pp. 121-123.

¹⁵⁴⁶ See Nansi Paulraj, "The JCPOA and Changing Dimensions of the Russia-Iran Relations," *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, Vol. 3, No. 1, 2016, pp. 104-106; and Matthew Brummer, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Iran: A Power-Full Union," *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 60, No. 2, 2007, p. 192.

¹⁵⁴⁷ See Rasoul Mousavi, "Cooperation between Iran and Russia in Struggling Terrorism and Religious Extremism," Igor Ivanov (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 89; and Shahram Akbarzadeh, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy," *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 69, No. 1, 2015, p. 96.

¹⁵⁴⁸ Mousavi and Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 202. For Iran's threat perceptions from Salafi Islamist movements which are seen in close cooperation with Americans to promote the US geopolitical interests, and as well as, to confront 'true Iranian Islam.' see Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," p. 557; and Sergey Demidenko, "Cooperation between Iran and Russia in Struggling Terrorism and Religious Extremism," Igor Ivanov (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 78-84.

¹⁵⁴⁹ Naseem and Mahmadv, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 99; and Rasoul Mousavi, "Cooperation between Iran and Russia in Struggling Terrorism and Religious Extremism," pp. 88-90.

of Iran for the peace settlement as a country with strong ethnic, cultural, and linguistic ties with Tajiks. It was with Iran's assistance that Russia managed to initiate negotiations between the regime and opposition groups by the spring of 1994.¹⁵⁵⁰ Both Moscow and Tehran hosted a series of meetings between the parties during which Iran did not tilt towards the Islamists but indeed behaved like an honest broker between those groups and the government. When the political agreement was signed in December 1996, Russia's Foreign Minister Primakov himself indicated that the Russian-Iranian cooperation was a crucial factor which helped to achieve the peace settlement.¹⁵⁵¹

Another issue on which Russia and Iran continuously cooperated was the Afghanistan crisis which was culminated by the Taliban's victory in 1996. Until the US-led operation in 2001, Moscow and Tehran actively supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban, while Iran even used Russia's territory for transit of arms to anti-Taliban forces.¹⁵⁵² In the following years, two states continued a bilateral dialogue on their common interest in establishing peace and minimizing the American presence in Afghanistan.¹⁵⁵³ Since both Russia and Iran face substantial number of threats linked with the spread of Sunni Islamic radicalism throughout Central Asia and the Middle East, they would likely work together on the Afghan problem and continue to develop a joint strategy including providing further political, economic, military and humanitarian assistance to the present Afghanistan leadership.¹⁵⁵⁴ In contrast to the Western discourse, Russia does not view Iran as a main source of instability in the Islamic world. Moscow sees Iran rather as a reliable partner against terrorist and extremist groups such as the Taliban, the Al-Qaeda and the ISIS. According to some Iranian scholars, the endorsement of Tehran's policies against such actors by the SCO members, including Russia, could be one of the factors which led to the consensus on accepting Iran as an observer member in the organization in 2005.¹⁵⁵⁵

¹⁵⁵⁰ See Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, p. 120.

¹⁵⁵¹ See *ibid.*; Mousavi and Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 197; and Karami, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose To Each Other?" p. 24.

¹⁵⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹⁵⁵³ Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 7.

¹⁵⁵⁴ Demidenko, "Cooperation between Iran and Russia in Struggling Terrorism and Religious Extremism," pp. 83-84.

¹⁵⁵⁵ Mousavi and Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," pp. 195-197

Besides Iran's common threat perceptions against non-state extremist actors with the SCO members, Tehran's view of the SCO as a 'global counterweight' to the US in the region also fed its aspirations to join the organization. From the beginning, Iran recognized the SCO's potential to keep American presence in check and prevent Washington from furthering its military engagement towards the region. Furthermore, Iran was keen to join the SCO, because the organization was conferring legitimacy to authoritarian regimes against Western criticism. During Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's presidency (2005-2013) who held a stricter combating view against the US and Israel and faced serious mass domestic protests, the importance of the SCO in Iranian foreign policy grew.¹⁵⁵⁶ Ahmadinejad made a high-profile appearance in the 2006 Shanghai Summit declaring Iran's wish to join the SCO which, according to him, had the potential to block threats and 'unlawful strong-arm interference' from various states.¹⁵⁵⁷ This move prompted a negative reaction from the United States. Donald Rumsfeld, then the US Secretary Defense, suggested that the SCO claimed to be a counter-terrorism organization but wanted to accept 'one of the leading terrorist nations in the world.' In response, then the SCO Secretary-General, Zhang Deguang denied that the Tehran government sponsored terrorism and emphasized the SCO members' consensus to accept Iran as an observer.¹⁵⁵⁸

Iran first submitted its official application for upgrading its status to the full membership in the SCO in March 2008, while Iran's desire to join the organization was formally reiterated later in 2011.¹⁵⁵⁹ So far, the SCO has not positively replied to Iran's request. The most significant reason for this remains as the fact that both Russia and China, the main drivers of the SCO, do not want to be overtly provocative in their general approach towards the US, though they seek to contain the American influence in the region. The accession of Iran to the SCO would mean moving the fight between Tehran and the West and the nuclear dispute into the organization, a concern generally

¹⁵⁵⁶ Akbarzadeh, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy," pp. 92, 99-100. For anti-government protests in Iran see Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," p. 559; and Hamid Dabashi, "What happened to the Green Movement in Iran?" Al Jazeera, June 12, 2013, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2013/05/201351661225981675.html> (16.10.2019).

¹⁵⁵⁷ Aylin Ü. Noi, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Changing International Environment," *Indian Journal of Asian Affairs*, Vol. 25, No. 1/2, 2012, p. 50.

¹⁵⁵⁸ See Song, "Feeling Safe, Being Strong: China's Strategy of Soft Balancing through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 680.

¹⁵⁵⁹ John C.K. Daly, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Set to Expand," *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst*, August 14, 2014, <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13022-shanghai-cooperation-organization-set-to-expand.html> (16.10.2019).

shared also by the other members.¹⁵⁶⁰ It was bad news for Tehran when the SCO outlined the criteria for the membership in June 2010, including the non-existence of the UN sanctions over an aspiring country, which apparently run in support of international efforts to pressure Iran about its nuclear problem.¹⁵⁶¹

Some officials from the SCO member states have asserted that Iranian nuclear deal with the West based on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached in July 2015 removed this formal obstacle in front of Iran's membership. However, the opposition among the SCO member states has continued to block Iran's bid for the full membership until the present, which can be possible only through reaching a difficult consensus in this respect. The issue became more complicated by the US decision to withdraw from the JCPOA which was recently discussed in the SCO's May 2018 meeting in China and attended by the Iranian president Hassan Rouhani.¹⁵⁶² Although it has not been accepted into the SCO, Iran continues to pursue its objective to join the organization that opposes the military option to resolve its nuclear problem and also contributes Iran's efforts to break international isolation over itself.¹⁵⁶³

B. The Primary Components of Bilateral Security Cooperation: Iran's Nuclear Program, Arms Trade, and the Syrian Civil War

After examining common threat perceptions and mutual interests between Russia and Iran and the latter's position towards the SCO, now it is important to consider how Moscow supports Tehran national and regional security objectives. Accordingly, we should examine the actual place of Iran in Russia's alignment strategies concerning its general objectives at the regional and international levels.

¹⁵⁶⁰ See Akbarzadeh, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Ideology and Realpolitik in Iranian Foreign Policy," p. 93; Brummer, "The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Iran: A Power-Full Union," p. 196; and Mousavi and Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," p. 200.

¹⁵⁶¹ See *ibid.*, pp. 200-201; and Kenneth Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," U.S. Congressional Research Service, July 23, 2019, p. 49. Retrieved from: <https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1027350.pdf> (16.10.2019).

¹⁵⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 49.

¹⁵⁶³ See Daly, "Shanghai Cooperation Organization Set to Expand"; and Noi, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in the Changing International Environment," p. 50. For example, the 2012 SCO summit declaration asserted that "[a]ny attempts to solve the Iranian problem with force are unacceptable and could lead to unpredictable circumstances threatening stability and security in the region and the entire world" The SCO also called upon "all parties to exercise maximum restraint and avoid statements or actions that might trigger further confrontation." Beijing Declaration by the Heads of Member States of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, June 7, 2012, <http://eng.sectsc.org/load/199515/> (21.10.2019).

Scholars agree that Russia's relationship with Iran is generally motivated by its goal of (soft) balancing against the American dominance in international politics and the US political and military engagement into Eurasia. For example, Witold Rodkiewicz suggests that Russia uses its cooperation with Tehran to enhance its bargaining position in its relations with Washington.¹⁵⁶⁴ Therefore Russia's Iran policy is 'not an end in itself' but one part of a 'larger puzzle,' including multiple actors, particularly the United States.¹⁵⁶⁵ In Helen Belopolsky's words, the Iran "*case was the clearest illustration of how the American factor played into Russian alignment policy.*"¹⁵⁶⁶ According to Clément Therme, Moscow will go on to 'leverage its relations with Tehran in its relationship with the US,' by reinforcing its cooperation with Tehran in crucial areas such as nuclear technology, the military sector, and their joint struggle against what they define as terrorist actors in their neighborhoods.¹⁵⁶⁷ Below we respectively focus on those three particular areas to comprehend Iran's significance in Russian soft balancing strategy against the United States.

Nuclear Energy Cooperation between Russia and Iran

Like other areas of cooperation, Russia utilized the Iranian nuclear program as a bargaining chip vis-à-vis the US but not without limitations. At certain times, Russia did not avoid endorsing certain UN Security Council resolutions that imposed economic sanctions against Tehran, while Moscow also played a significant role in the negotiations for nuclear deal held in the P5+1 format.¹⁵⁶⁸ Russia's support to Iran's capacity to produce nuclear energy can be traced back to the early 1990s. From the beginning, Washington sought to end this cooperation and even imposed sanctions over some Russian institutions that were believed to feed Iran's capacity to build nuclear weapons.¹⁵⁶⁹ In January 1995, Moscow signed an agreement with Tehran on

¹⁵⁶⁴ Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 1.

¹⁵⁶⁵ Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," p. 6.

¹⁵⁶⁶ Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, p. 97.

¹⁵⁶⁷ Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," p. 562.

¹⁵⁶⁸ See Jo I. Bekkevold, "China, Russia and the Great Power Contest in the Middle East," Jo I. Bekkevold and Bobo Lo (ed.), **Sino-Russian Relations in the 21st Century**, Cham: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019, p. 151. For more information about the P5+1 negotiations including the five permanent members of the UNSC, Germany as well as the Tehran government see David Hannay and Thomas R. Pickering, "Building on the Iran Nuclear Agreement," **Survival**, Vol. 59, No. 2, 2017.

¹⁵⁶⁹ See Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, p. 102; and Naseem and Mahmado, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 98.

the construction of the Bushehr nuclear power plant, which provisioned Russian scientific and technological assistance, the transfer of three reactors and nuclear fuel to Iran, and the education of 20-30 Iranian nuclear scientist at Russian institutions. At the same time, however, Moscow refused to construct a 'heavy-water' nuclear plant in Iran that could have been developed and used for the production of nuclear weapons.¹⁵⁷⁰

Iranian nuclear crisis culminated during the 2002-2003 period when the reports by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) revealed that Iran had been advancing its nuclear program to the extent beyond its international commitments. The atmosphere of the Iraq war and the US-Iranian contestation in the Middle East further strained Iran's relations with the West. In the Bush administration's terminology, some countries including Iran were described as 'rogue states' or 'an axis of evil', which were allegedly working together to undermine the international peace and stability.¹⁵⁷¹ While the building of Russian nuclear facilities continued, the US, its European allies and Israel began to threaten Iran for destroying its nuclear plants, as the latter had actually done with Iraqi nuclear facilities in 1980. Furthermore, the US invasion into Afghanistan and Iraq also signaled a significant threat for Iran pressuring it to reverse its defense plans and especially nuclear program. However, Tehran smartly utilized Russia's diplomatic and defense capabilities, an actor which was also disturbed by the unilateralist policies by the Bush administration, to avert the American-Israeli threat of attacking against Iran.¹⁵⁷² During this period, Russia protected Iran in the UNSC from a possible military enforcement action based on Chapter VII of the UN Charter and strongly warned against armed strikes by the Western powers.¹⁵⁷³

At the same time, the Russian Federation indeed was not interested in Iran's acquiring of nuclear weapons or at least attempted to delay this process.¹⁵⁷⁴ In fact,

¹⁵⁷⁰ See Bulent Aras and Fatih Ozbay, "Dances with Wolves: Russia, Iran and the Nuclear Issue," **Middle East Policy**, Vol. 13, No. 4, 2006, p. 133; and Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," p. 9.

¹⁵⁷¹ See Paulraj, "The JCPOA and Changing Dimensions of the Russia-Iran Relations," p. 100; and Mousavi and Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," pp. 198-200.

¹⁵⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

¹⁵⁷³ John W. Parker, "Russia-Iran: Strategic Partners or Competitors?," Rice University's Baker Institute for Public Policy, Working Paper, 2016, p. 1. Retrieved from: <https://scholarship.rice.edu/bitstream/handle/1911/91818/WorkingPaper-Iran-Parker-042716.pdf?sequence=1> (18.10.2019).

¹⁵⁷⁴ Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," pp. 1, 5.

Russia became increasingly skeptical like other Western countries about a nuclear-armed Iran that could further destabilize the complicated situation in the Middle East. Accordingly, Russia also concerned that if diplomatic negotiations failed, Washington might take the military option against Iranian nuclear ambitions, which would also have undisputable destabilizing effects on regional stability.¹⁵⁷⁵ From time to time, Russia utilized the nuclear issue to raise the stakes up in its competition with the US and to further its cooperation with Iran in various regional issues. However, Moscow also had to consider its broader interest at the global level. As often reiterated by this study, Russia wants to act as a key mediator on crucial international security issues. Therefore Russia had no intention of sacrificing its 'responsible great power status' concerning the issue of nuclear proliferation.¹⁵⁷⁶ All these circumstances changed Russia's stance after Iran's non-compliance with the requirements set by the IAEA, and thus, Iran was forced to enter into international negotiations by 2002.¹⁵⁷⁷

The first round of negotiations between Iran and the group of Russia, Germany, France, and Britain between 2002 and 2006 was crucial for opening dialogue, but it felt short to ensure Iran's compliance with the requirements set by the IAEA. In 2006, the setting of negotiations was broadened to include five permanent UNSC members and Germany in the P5+1 format, which was maintained from 2006 to 2015.¹⁵⁷⁸ During the 2006-2010 period, Russia did not veto six important UNSC resolutions (and even did not abstained from voting), which imposed economic sanctions over Iran. As examined later in the following pages, the UNSC Resolution 1929 imposing a limited arms embargo over Iran was adopted in June 2010 when the Obama government was seeking to ameliorate its relations with Russia through the 'reset' policy. However, Russia also maintained its opposition to unilateral sanctions bypassing the UNSC framework, let alone the possibility of military strikes.¹⁵⁷⁹

It is important to note that Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov's proposals in 2012 set the ground for the next round of negotiations resulted in the signature of the JCPOA between the P5+1 group and Iran, which led to the beginning of lifting the

¹⁵⁷⁵ Paulraj, "The JCPOA and Changing Dimensions of the Russia-Iran Relations," p. 95.

¹⁵⁷⁶ See Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," p. 553.

¹⁵⁷⁷ Paulraj, "The JCPOA and Changing Dimensions of the Russia-Iran Relations," p. 101.

¹⁵⁷⁸ Naseem and Mahmadv, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," pp. 106-107.

¹⁵⁷⁹ See Bekkevold, "China, Russia and the Great Power Contest in the Middle East," p. 151; Pyotr Topychkanov, "Iranian and Russian Perspectives on the Global system," p. 33; and Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," pp. 6-7.

sanctions over Iran partially. Russia was an active participant in negotiations for the multilateral agreement on the suspension of uranium enrichment by Iran, which was reached in July 2015.¹⁵⁸⁰ Russia's interest in the settlement of Iranian nuclear problem included ensuring that Iran would not turn to another 'hot-spot' for regional instability in the periphery of the CIS. In addition, Russia thought that the agreement would allow Moscow to actively cooperate with Iran on the wide range of common interests outlined above without the risk of being accused of supporting a 'rogue state' undermining international peace.¹⁵⁸¹ Furthermore, Moscow wanted to benefit from economic and nuclear energy cooperation with Iran, respecting the limits of Tehran's international legal commitments. During the negotiations on Iran's nuclear problem, Russia completed the Bushehr nuclear power plant that became operational in 2011. In 2016, Iran announced that it would construct a second facility again with Russian help.¹⁵⁸²

After President Trump's May 2018 decision to withdraw from the nuclear deal with Iran, Russia became a fierce critic of this unilateral move, which according to Russians, proved the US as an 'unreliable negotiator.' The Kremlin also expressed its continuing support to the JCPOA even without American participation. Renewed anti-Iranian rhetoric of Washington raised the prospect of military strikes by the US against Iran. In this context, European states found themselves closer to the Russian position towards the nuclear agreement, a more important issue for them than their NATO ally.¹⁵⁸³ Given Russia's disturbance of the US unilateralist moves and the fact that Russian-Iranian relations develop much more at times of strained relations between Moscow and Washington, it could be asserted that Trump's decision to quit the deal pushed Russia and Iran closer.¹⁵⁸⁴

¹⁵⁸⁰ See Kozhanov, "Russian-Iranian Dialogue after 2012: Turning a New Page?" p. 2; and Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 5. Russia also helped Iran to meet a key requirement of the agreement by shipping out almost all of its stockpile of low-enriched uranium starting in December 2015. Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," p. 55.

¹⁵⁸¹ Kozhanov, "Russian-Iranian Dialogue after 2012: Turning a New Page?" p. 2.

¹⁵⁸² Carole Nakhle, "Russia's energy diplomacy in the Middle East," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secieru (ed.), op.cit, p. 34.

¹⁵⁸³ See Trenin, "What drives Russia's policy in the Middle East?" pp. 22, 26; Naseem and Mahmadoy, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 108; and Andrey Sushentsov, "A Russian View on America's Withdrawal from the Iran Deal," *The National Interest*, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/russian-view-americas-withdrawal-the-iran-deal-25836> (21.10.2019).

¹⁵⁸⁴ See Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," p. 560.

Russia's Arms Transfers to Iran

Like Russia's stance towards Iran's nuclear program, the arms trade relations between Moscow and Tehran have also followed a fluctuating course concerning Russia's relations with the US and other powers. Russian-Iranian arms cooperation has started in the first half of the 1990s, based on Tehran's increasing demand for weapons in the turbulent Middle East and the need for hard currency by the Russian military sector. The most significant military hardware transferred to Iran included Su-24 and MIG-29 combat aircraft, T-72 Tanks, diesel-electric submarines, S-200 long-range surface-to-air defense systems, and some other air-launched missiles that strengthened Iranian air force.¹⁵⁸⁵ Yet, Russia also sought to calm the American concerns on the development of Iran's offensive capability during the Yeltsin years.¹⁵⁸⁶ Despite those efforts, the American pressure on Russia resulted in the signature of a secret deal in June 1995 between the US Vice President Al Gore and then Russian Prime Minister Viktor Chernomyrdin about the termination of Russia's military exports to Iran by 1999.¹⁵⁸⁷

After coming to power, President Putin exposed the secret Gore-Chernomyrdin deal and canceled it in November 2000.¹⁵⁸⁸ From then on, arms sales to Iran were used to gain leverage in Russian relations with Washington and a demonstration of Moscow's independent standing as a great power against the United States, which could cooperate with any power it prefers.¹⁵⁸⁹ As noted, the Bush administration labeled Iraq, Iran, and North Korea as an 'axis of evil' in 2002, while the US invasion into Afghanistan and Iraq made Tehran's threat perceptions culminated.¹⁵⁹⁰ This led to much stronger cooperation with Russia in the defense sector between 2002 and 2007 based on new agreements about the sale of SU-25-UBK attack jets and the upgrade of

¹⁵⁸⁵ See Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, p. 107; and Naseem and Mahmadoov, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 98. For a detailed table on 'Iran's conventional military arsenal' including Russian-made weapons see Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," pp. 18-19.

¹⁵⁸⁶ Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, p. 107.

¹⁵⁸⁷ Ibid. 98; Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," p. 6.

¹⁵⁸⁸ See Naseem and Mahmadoov, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 100; and Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, pp. 127-128.

¹⁵⁸⁹ Ibid., pp. 109-110.

¹⁵⁹⁰ Mousavi and Khodaei, "Iran and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," pp. 198-199; and Naseem and Mahmadoov, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 105.

Iran's old Mig-29 and SU-24-MK combat aircraft. In November 2005, Russia signed an agreement about 29 TOR-M1 anti-aircraft missile systems which were delivered within two years in time considering the credible threat of American-Israeli attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities. In 2005, Moscow and Tehran also reached a deal on the transfer of 40 launchers of the S-300 air defense system, for which Iran paid \$800 million to Russia by 2007.¹⁵⁹¹

The souring of the US-Russian relations during two terms of Bush's presidency saw a new uprising in early 2009 with Barack Obama's reach to power who had different views on the US military engagement into Eurasia. Washington soon announced its intent to 'reset' its relations with the Kremlin which were facing a serious crisis with Russia's intervention to Georgia. The US reset policy unfolded American willingness to ignore the developments in the Caucasus in favor of the growing need for the US-Russia cooperation on a number of more crucial problems, including nuclear proliferation, North Korea, and especially Iran.¹⁵⁹² Having satisfied with the changing approach by the US towards its near abroad, Russia supported the UNSC resolution 1929 imposing limited arms embargo over Iran, and it further made a gesture by canceling the delivery of S-300 missiles to Iran.¹⁵⁹³ Moscow also partially suspended other military supplies to Iran during a five-year period beginning in 2010.¹⁵⁹⁴ Nevertheless, the developments in the following years proved that the reset initiative did not bring any gains to Moscow in its relations with Washington, which could compensate its losses with Iran.¹⁵⁹⁵

With the Ukraine crisis and the beginning of Russian military operation towards the Syrian civil war in 2015, Russian-American relations again soured. It was

¹⁵⁹¹ See *ibid.*, p. 101; Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," p. 19; and Belopolsky, **Russia and the Challengers: Russian Alignment with China, Iran and Iraq in the Unipolar Era**, p. 110.

¹⁵⁹² See Arthur R. Rachwald, "A 'Reset' of Nato-Russia Relations: Real or Imaginary?," **European Security**, Vol. 20, No. 1, 2011 pp. 121-122. As a part of its reset policy, Obama supported the signing of a civilian nuclear cooperation pact. While delivering a speech to the congress requesting support for the agreement he argued "*the situation in Georgia need no longer be considered an obstacle*" and "*that the level and scope of U.S.-Russia cooperation on Iran are sufficient to justify resubmitting the proposed Agreement.*" "Message from the President Regarding a Peaceful Nuclear Agreement with Russia," The White House Archive, May 10, 2010, <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/realitycheck/the-press-office/message-president-regarding-a-peaceful-nuclear-agreement-with-russia> (19.10.2019).

¹⁵⁹³ Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," pp. 6-7. In fact, the transfer of would not have violated the Resolution 1929, since the S-300 missiles was not included in the UN Registry on Conventional Arms. Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," p. 19.

¹⁵⁹⁴ Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 6.

¹⁵⁹⁵ Kozhanov, "Russian-Iranian Dialogue after 2012: Turning a New Page?"

accompanied by the renewal of Moscow-Tehran military cooperation. In April 2015 Putin annulled the presidential decree on the ban of the delivery of S-300s to Iran which led to the beginning of actual transfer later in 2016.¹⁵⁹⁶ Some reports linked Russia's increasing defense cooperation with Iran also to the Kremlin's disturbance to the Western military assistance to Kiev in the ongoing civil war in eastern Ukraine.¹⁵⁹⁷ This supports the argument that Russia uses its cooperation with Iran as a trump card against the US policies towards its near abroad.

Military Cooperation in the Syrian Civil War

Russia's direct military intervention in Syria in late 2015 directly influenced Moscow's general policy towards the Middle East vis-à-vis global and regional powers having stakes in the ongoing civil war as well its ties of security cooperation with multiple local actors. Here we elaborate neither this complex network of relations nor Russia's strategy towards the Syrian conflict but briefly outline its impacts on the actual security cooperation between Moscow and Tehran. We will turn to this issue later in this chapter to indicate some limitations in this bilateral cooperation falling short of an alliance.

From the beginning of the Syrian crisis, Russia and Iran shared a common interest in opposing what they perceived as a US-led initiative to orchestrate regime change in this country, even though they viewed the domestic conflict through different lenses. For the Kremlin, Syria gained importance in the context of world order concerning Russian objective to prevent or undermine unilateral US attempts to design political changes across the international system. On the other side, Iran's perspective was rather centered on its regional position and security in the Middle East, against the hostile coalition of the United States, Israel, and Arab-Gulf countries.¹⁵⁹⁸ Nonetheless, the overlapping interest on the survival of the pro-Russian and Iranian Assad regime led to collaborated efforts on the battlefield, despite these two states'

¹⁵⁹⁶ Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," pp. 6-7. For other recent arms transfer from Russia to Iran see Timofey Borisov, "Russian arms exports in the Middle East," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru (ed.), op.cit, p. 40.

¹⁵⁹⁷ Josh Cohen, "If U.S. Arms Ukraine, Russia Could Arm Iran," The Moscow Times, February 16, 2015, <https://www.themoscowtimes.com/2015/02/16/if-us-arms-ukraine-russia-could-arm-iran-a43928> (19.10.2019).

¹⁵⁹⁸ Julien Barnes-Dacey, "Russia and the 'Resistance Axis'," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru (ed.), op.cit, p. 66.

disagreements and divergent interests about Syria's future.¹⁵⁹⁹ In August 2016, Iran even allowed Russia's combat aircraft to use Iran's Hamadan airbase to launch strikes in Syria. It was for the first time that the Islamic Republic conceded the use of its military facilities by a foreign power.¹⁶⁰⁰

When the Kremlin initiated its military operation in Syria in the autumn of 2015, Russia and Iran became informal and de facto allies at a real war stage. Indeed, Russia's campaign was preceded by several months of military consultations between national armed units of two countries.¹⁶⁰¹ The air force activities by Russia shored up the position of both pro-Assad forces and Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps operating in Syria.¹⁶⁰² The Russian army did not only collaborated with these two forces but also with the Lebanese militant group Hezbollah having close relations with Tehran and a wide array of Iranian-supported militia forces, including from Iraq. The combined efforts of all those forces have ensured Assad's survival in the civil war, though the regime failed to re-gain control of the entire country. Concerning the Syrian conflict, Russia also established a joint security and intelligence-sharing cooperation mechanism together with the coalition of regional governments, including Iran, Iraq, and Syria.¹⁶⁰³ In addition to that, Iran and Iraq allowed Russia to conduct cruise missile attacks over their territory from its naval ships in the Caspian Sea into certain targets in Syria, which was interpreted as a part of Russia's intensive information campaign about its power projection capability towards the region.¹⁶⁰⁴

In January 2015, Russian and Iranian defense ministers signed an ad hoc military cooperation agreement on the contacts between their command structures, the exchange of intelligence, and as well as joint military exercises. As a result, two states began to organize naval exercises in the Caspian Sea, while Iranian officers

¹⁵⁹⁹ See Sazhin, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose to Each Other?," p. 16; and Pyotr Topychkanov, "Iranian and Russian Perspectives on the Global system," p. 32.

¹⁶⁰⁰ Katzman, "Iran's Foreign and Defense Policies," p. 16.

¹⁶⁰¹ See Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 3.

¹⁶⁰² Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," p. 4.

¹⁶⁰³ See Barnes-Dacey, "Russia and the 'Resistance Axis'," p. 66; and "Iraq, Russia, Iran and Syria coordinate against ISIL," Al Jazeera, September 27, 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/09/iraq-russia-iran-syria-coordinate-isil-150927125919507.html> (15.11.2015).

¹⁶⁰⁴ See Paul Rogers and Richard Reeve, "Russia's Intervention in Syria: Implications for Western Engagement," Oxford Research Group, Global Security Briefing, October 2015, pp. 2-3. Retrieved from: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/194291/PR%20briefing%20October%202015.pdf> (19.10.2019).

participated in military drills conducted in Russia.¹⁶⁰⁵ Recently, Iranian authorities announced that they are planning joint exercises with the Russian navy in the Hormuz Strait and the northern part of the Indian Ocean, representing more strategically contested areas.¹⁶⁰⁶ In the diplomatic realm, Russia led to the establishment of structured negotiations together with Iran and Turkey called as the Astana process in December 2016, which has sought to ‘de-escalate’ the war through reaching an agreement between those three key external actors concerning the military dynamics of the Syrian crisis.¹⁶⁰⁷ Despite all those advanced ties in diplomatic and military realms, Russia-Iranian partnership still remains as a pragmatic security cooperation rather than a long-term alignment on a well-defined common strategy and vision because of some certain factors examined below.

C. The Limitations of Russia-Iran Alignment: Russia’s Soft Balancing Logic and its Relations with other Regional Powers

Our historical analysis on the Kremlin’s Cold-War-era alignments with Third World states, including those from the Middle East, put forward that those represented rather transitory and loose alignments based on pragmatic interests. Through such alignments with the Soviet Union, local states sought to satisfy their defense needs and conceded military facilities as the price for arms transfers. However, those local states did not avoid taking unilateral military actions sometimes when they had crucial stakes in regional security affairs, which run quite contrary to Moscow’s strategic interests.¹⁶⁰⁸

The current security cooperation between Russia and Iran also appears as a pragmatic and tactical alignment on certain joint interests rather than a well-

¹⁶⁰⁵ See Rodkiewicz, “Russia vis-à-vis Iran,” p. 6; and Mark Episkopos, “Iran and Russia: Getting Ready to Hold Joint-Naval Drills in the Strait of Hormuz?,” *The National Interest*, August 6, 2019, <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/iran-and-russia-getting-ready-hold-joint-naval-drills-strait-hormuz-71661> (19.10.2019).

¹⁶⁰⁶ **Ibid.**

¹⁶⁰⁷ See Aron Lund, “From Cold War to Civil War: 75 Years of Russian-Syrian Relations,” *The Swedish Institute of International Affairs*, U.I. Paper, No. 7, 2019, pp. 31-32. Retrieved from: <https://www.ui.se/globalassets/ui.se-eng/publications/ui-publications/2019/ui-paper-no.-7-2019.pdf> (19.10.2019); Barnes-Dacey, “Russia and the ‘Resistance Axis’,” p. 66; and Dimitar Bechev, “Russia and Turkey: The Promise and the Limits of Partnership,” Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru (ed.), **op.cit.** p. 98.

¹⁶⁰⁸ See Allison, *The Soviet Union and the Strategy of Non-Alignment in the Third World*, p. 222-223; and Alford, “The New Military Instruments ” pp. 18-19.

established strategic entente with an institutional dimension.¹⁶⁰⁹ In fact, Russia neither wants to lose Iran that is a useful regional ally nor to strengthen it to such an extent that could transform it into a dangerous actor concerning regional stability in the Middle East and Russia's relations with the Western world.¹⁶¹⁰ Like Russia's Third World allies in the Cold War period, Iran has sought unconditional Russian support against its external threat perceptions, particularly from the US, but Moscow cooperated with Tehran only on a case-by-case basis.¹⁶¹¹ The asymmetry in Russian-Iranian relations and the Kremlin's hesitance to overtly challenge the United States prevented this security partnership from evolving into an effective consultation pact, let alone a formal alliance.¹⁶¹²

Russia's security assistance to Iran has followed a changing course from the Yeltsin period to the Putin's one and from Obama's reset policy to the Syrian and Ukrainian crises. This demonstrates that Russia wants to engage with the United States for promoting its national interests, despite remaining antagonistic to that superpower on certain issues like the NATO expansion and its unilateral tendencies. However, anti-Americanism is a 'fundamental ideological tenet' for Iran structuring its political system since the Islamic revolution, which goes beyond a simple foreign policy issue.¹⁶¹³ In this respect, the Kremlin's willingness to contribute international pressures over Iran especially when it enjoys more favorable relations with the West makes Iran question Russia's utility as a long-term reliable strategic ally.¹⁶¹⁴

¹⁶⁰⁹ Since 2000, Russia has signed strategic partnership documents with approximately fifteen states including the SCO members such as China, India, and Uzbekistan, as well as other regional states including Azerbaijan, Algeria, Egypt and Vietnam. However, Moscow has avoided declaring such a partnership with Iran. See Naseem and Mahmado, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 110; and Vladimir Sazhin, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose to Each Other?," Igor Ivanov (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 10. In contrast to Russia's bilateral relations with the SCO members e.g. China, India and Pakistan, Moscow and Tehran did not establish effective and formal consultation mechanisms with regard to military and security issues but preferred maintaining their dialogue through frequent meetings between their senior officials. See Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," pp. 4-5. The information center established for intelligence-sharing in Baghdad cannot be considered as such a formal mechanism. It is rather an information channel to communicate for "*ad hoc cooperation, and no more than just that, is in place instead of close coordination.*" Nikolay Kozhanov, "Iranian and Russian Views on the Situation in the Middle East: How Do We See the Future of the Region?," Igor Ivanov (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 55.

¹⁶¹⁰ Naseem and Mahmado, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," p. 113.

¹⁶¹¹ Kozhanov, "Russian-Iranian Dialogue after 2012: Turning a New Page?," pp. 3-4.

¹⁶¹² See Therme, "Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?," p. 549.

¹⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 551.

¹⁶¹⁴ For the lack of thrust in the Russia-Iran Partnership see Sazhin, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose to Each Other?," pp. 10-12.

Although Iran looks for Russian support to its national defense and security objectives, Tehran also does not want to concede its freedom of action in its external relations by getting closely tied to Russia.¹⁶¹⁵ As we noted in Part One, Chapter Two, after the 1979 revolution, Iran did not compensate its ending alignment with the US by re-aligning closely with Moscow but followed a more independent policy under the formula ‘neither West nor East.’ Russia’s military engagement into Syria, in fact, represents a challenge to Iran’s traditional approach towards an ideal security environment in the Middle East where Tehran could assert its dominance regarding the ideology of the Islamic Republic. Iran’s military doctrine underscores the necessity of a Middle East free from any military interference by external global powers.¹⁶¹⁶ By the same token, Iran’s constitution bans the establishment of any foreign military bases in its sovereign territory. That is why Iran kept Russia’s use of the airbase in Hamadan for its operations in Syria as a secret for about one year until the information was revealed by Russian Media. In the wake of a possible domestic constitutional crisis, Tehran immediately terminated the special agreement with Russia on this issue.¹⁶¹⁷

Although the Syrian civil war led to an unprecedented security collaboration between Russia and Iran, their approach towards Syria does not lack disagreements, some elements of competition about long-term influence as well as various tactical differences.¹⁶¹⁸ Russian military’s view that no war could be won through air campaigns alone has enhanced two states’ informal military cooperation in the ongoing conflict. However, Russia’s reliance on Iranian military support is currently declining; therefore two states’ relations are expected to shift gradually from cooperation to competition.¹⁶¹⁹ Russia indeed has never supported Iran’s ambitions to control Syria through its ties with the Assad regime, Alawites as well as its active military presence in the country. Since Russia traditionally favors a strong central state, it seeks to ensure that Iran would not create ‘a state within a state’ in Syria. This explains Moscow’s uneasy relationship with pro-Iranian non-state actors in Syria and

¹⁶¹⁵ This tendency was reinforced especially after the 2015 nuclear deal which decreased tensions and threat perceptions in Iran’s relations with the West. Parker, “Russia-Iran: Strategic Partners or Competitors?” p. 1.

¹⁶¹⁶ Therme, “Iran and Russia in the Middle East: Toward a Regional Alliance?,” p. 555.

¹⁶¹⁷ See *ibid.*, p. 556; and Katzman, “Iran’s Foreign and Defense Policies,” p. 16.

¹⁶¹⁸ Rodkiewicz, “Russia vis-à-vis Iran,” p. 3.

¹⁶¹⁹ See Gil D. Murciano, “Preventing a Spillover of the Iran-Israel Conflict in Syria: E3+Russia Should Lead the Way out,” SWP Comment, No. 27, 2018, p. 4; and Trenin, “What drives Russia’s policy in the Middle East?,” p. 23.

particularly Iran-backed militia groups operating in the country.¹⁶²⁰ Russia's concerns over this issue moved Moscow closer to the Israeli view, while Moscow has even indicated its support for Israeli position that Iranian forces have to depart from the South of Syria. In May 2018, the Kremlin tolerated Israel's large-scale air strikes against Iran's positions and infrastructure in Syria, provided that the regime was not attacked. Some argue that Russia could be seen even as a beneficiary of Israeli actions, as it shared the latter's motivation of curbing Iranian influence but lacked the leverage to achieve that.¹⁶²¹

Another relevant concern by Moscow preventing the deepening of Russia-Iran alignment is Russia's fear of entrapment into armed conflicts in the turbulent Middle East, which would possibly involve the United States and Israel.¹⁶²² At the beginning of Russia's military operation into Syria, Russia signed agreements with both the US and Israel to prevent aircraft collisions and other incidents over Syrian territory. It was the mechanism created by that agreement, which enabled the Israeli air force to destroy Iranian targets in Syria without the risk of becoming the target of Russian air defense systems deployed in this country.¹⁶²³ By the way, unlike the CIS, Russia is neither the dominant military power of the Middle East nor the region's recognized 'security overlord.' The Kremlin lacks the necessary means and capacity to prevent it if Israel and Iran are determined to engage in an escalation into a real war. In this case, Moscow would likely avoid intervening and step aside at a cost to its relations with both Iran and Israel. Under these conditions, Russia only tries to support the mutual deterrence between two antagonists and seeks a balance between what it considers as legitimate security interests of both countries vis-à-vis each other.¹⁶²⁴

In this respect, Russia also disapproves of the Islamic Republic's ideological standing in its foreign policy, which defines Israel as a 'Small Satan' after the US and

¹⁶²⁰ See *ibid.*; Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," p. 6; and Barnes-Dacey, "Russia and the 'Resistance Axis'," pp. 67-68.

¹⁶²¹ Murciano, "Preventing a Spillover of the Iran-Israel Conflict in Syria...", p. 5. According to some scholars, Israel also wants Russians to remain in Syria to contain and minimize Iranian military influence in this country. Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru, "Conclusion: Russia in the Middle East – from Surge to Quagmire?," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 111.

¹⁶²² See "U.S., Russia Reach Agreement on Syrian Flights," *The Wall Street Journal*, October 20, 2015, <http://www.wsj.com/articles/u-s-russia-reach-agreement-on-syrian-flights-1445371698> (21.10.2015); and Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 4.

¹⁶²³ *Ibid.*

¹⁶²⁴ Trenin, "What drives Russia's policy in the Middle East?," pp. 25-26.

adopts a radical discourse towards it, even referring to ‘erasing Israel from the world map.’¹⁶²⁵ Israel is closely allied with the US that is often considered as Russia’s greatest adversary. However, the Kremlin does not automatically regard Israel as a potentially hostile power. Russia and Israel have developed close friendly relations and cooperated extensively in economic, military, technology and intelligence areas especially since Putin’s first rise into power in 2000.¹⁶²⁶ If Iran is defined as a ‘situational ally,’ Israel could be considered as a ‘valuable partner’ as well as an indispensable regional power for Moscow.¹⁶²⁷

Similarly, Russia does not give support Iranian ideological expansionist stance across the Middle East by building a ‘Shia Crescent’ that spreads from Iran to Iraq, Syria, Lebanon as well as Gulf countries. Russia openly declared that it is not a party to the Shia-Sunni ideological and religious dispute and called two sides for dialogue to reach a peaceful *modus vivendi*. Russia makes every effort to avoid being embroiled into a violent conflict in Iraq and elsewhere which looks like an Islamic sectarian confrontation.¹⁶²⁸ A close alignment with Iran’s positions on regional security issues may seriously harm Moscow’s relations with Sunni governments in the Middle East.¹⁶²⁹ The Kremlin is keen to preserve positive relationships with Tehran’s regional rivals, such as Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. For example, when it comes to an agreement among the members of OPEC+ group on oil production, Russia considers its own national interest and takes a closer position to Saudi Arabia than to Iran.¹⁶³⁰ Furthermore, Russia has grown its reach to the arms market of the GCC countries and signed several agreements with those local states to sell its combat aircraft and air defense systems in recent years, as a result of their increasing defense needs in the post-Arab spring period.¹⁶³¹ In this regard, Russia has recently managed to build normal relations with almost all the countries in the

¹⁶²⁵ See Naseem and Mahmadv, "Russia-Iran Defense Cooperation: Past and Present," pp. 108-109.

¹⁶²⁶ Mark N. Katz, "Russia and Israel: An Improbable Friendship," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru (ed.), *op.cit.*, p. 103.

¹⁶²⁷ Trenin, "What drives Russia’s policy in the Middle East?," p. 25.

¹⁶²⁸ See Sazhin, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose to Each Other?," p. 17; Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," pp. 3-4; and Vladimir Evseev, "Common Security Challenges and Prospects," Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secrieru (ed.), *op.cit.*, pp. 70-71.

¹⁶²⁹ Kozhanov, "Russian-Iranian Dialogue after 2012: Turning a New Page?," p. 4.

¹⁶³⁰ See Geranmayeh and Liik, "The New Power Couple: Russia and Iran in the Middle East," p. 8; and Trenin, "What drives Russia’s policy in the Middle East?," p. 26.

¹⁶³¹ Borisov, "Russian arms exports in the Middle East," pp. 41-42.

region including Tehran's main adversaries, which rendered an all-out alliance with Iran as a much distant possibility.¹⁶³²

Above all, Russia's soft balancing logic vis-à-vis the United States represents the biggest obstacle to carry Russian-Iranian military cooperation to a higher level. In the current era, Russia does not directly oppose the United States but rather exploits local states' disappointment with the US and European states' policies by adopting practical moves contracting with those policies. The sharp fall of Russian political and economic capabilities after the collapse of the Soviet Union made the Kremlin recognize that it can compete with the US anymore on the same terms.¹⁶³³ In this regard, Russia seems to give up the traditional zero-sum thinking in the Middle East which called for creating a counterweight axis of client states vis-à-vis Washington's regional allies. On the basis of a pragmatic thinking, Russia is willing to deal with all relevant actors treating none of them as an all-weather ally nor an adversary and seeks to overcome chronic conflictual divides of the region.¹⁶³⁴ Scholars suggest that the Kremlin's agile diplomacy and flexible cooperation with regional states have turned Russia into an indispensable power in the region, at least in the short term.¹⁶³⁵ As noted earlier, one of the primary characteristics separating great powers from regional ones is their capability to operate in more than one region.¹⁶³⁶ Therefore Russia's enlarged role of over the regional security of the Middle East contributes to its global power ambitions.

Russia's alignment strategy vis-a-vis Iran and other local actors in the Middle East examined above follows a similar pattern to what we observed throughout this study. While Russia prefers to create exclusive military alliances in the CIS vis-à-vis NATO and extra-regional powers, the Kremlin's main tool to challenge the US influence in other parts of the international system became 'multilateralism' built upon more flexible ties and inclusive frameworks of security cooperation. In this respect, Moscow's Middle Eastern policy is subordinated to Russia's global strategy towards the unipole. Russia seeks to create a regional variant of what it views as the best model

¹⁶³² Sazhin, "Iran-Russia Strategic Partnership at the New Stage: What Could We Propose to Each Other?," p. 17.

¹⁶³³ Gawdat Bahgat, "Russia-Iran Relations," Nurşin A. Güney (ed.), **The New Geopolitical Realities for Russia: From the Black Sea to the Mediterranean** Lanham: Lexington Books, 2019, p. 89.

¹⁶³⁴ Trenin, "What drives Russia's policy in the Middle East?" p. 21.

¹⁶³⁵ Nicu Popescu and Stanislav Secieru (ed.), **op.cit.**, p. 6.

¹⁶³⁶ Buzan and Ole Waever, *Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security*, p. 34.

of international order, namely a concert of powers including, apart from itself, Iran, Israel, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and as well as the US.¹⁶³⁷ In July 2019, Russia's Foreign Ministry already hosted an official presentation about the Russian proposal for a new security concept in the Persian Gulf region on the basis of 'collective security,' which was joined by representatives from Turkey, Iran, Arab states, the Arab League, the five permanent members of the UNSC and the BRICS countries.¹⁶³⁸ The concept runs in stark contrast to a simultaneous proposal by the Trump administration calling for the establishment of an 'Arab NATO' which would contain and isolate Tehran by deepening the security cooperation between Arab states on various areas such as diplomatic cooperation, counter-terrorism, military training, and missile defense.¹⁶³⁹ Russian proposal, on the other side, calls for a 'truly inclusive regional security system' among all the states in the region based on multilateralism, international law, the UN Charter, the Security Council resolutions, and as well as equality, which all represent the main tenets of Russia's view towards the international system.¹⁶⁴⁰

¹⁶³⁷ Rodkiewicz, "Russia vis-à-vis Iran," p. 2.

¹⁶³⁸ See "Presentation on Russian Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf Region," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, July 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2GEjHtB> (21.10.2019). For the full text of the proposal see "Russia's security concept for the Gulf area," The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, July 23, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2Yr7Zw8> (21.10.2019).

¹⁶³⁹ Maxim A. Suchkov, "Intel: Why Russia is Calling for Rethinking Gulf Security," Al Monitor, July 24, 2019, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-gulf-alliance/trump-seeks-to-revive-arab-nato-to-confront-iran-idUSKBN1KH2IK> (21.09.2019).

¹⁶⁴⁰ See "Presentation on Russian Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf Region".

CONCLUSION

This dissertation represents a comprehensive study about Russia's alignments in different regional subsystems expanding from Eastern Europe to South Asia. Besides, it examines Russia's security cooperation with multiple powers possessing various levels of capabilities ranging from China as a great power to Armenia as a weak local state. The wide-range focus of this study allows us to make a comparison between those various cases of alignments with different characteristics. This comparison, in turn, could be useful to comprehend Russia's alignment behavior under the influence of different structural variables. Below we draw our conclusions about distinctive characteristics of Russia's alignments with the post-Soviet regional states, the regional countries outside of the CIS (i.e., Pakistan and Iran), and as well as, the major powers in Asia (China and India). Later we will move our focus towards regional implications of Russia's alignment strategies concerning its sphere of influence over the CIS and global implications with regard to Russia's influence on the transformation of great power relations at the international system level.

Theoretical Implications: Russia's Choices between Formal Alliances and More Flexible Arrangements for Security Cooperation

The present analysis by and large confirmed the three main assumptions which were derived from realist theories of alignment and represented in Part One, Chapter One. Considering the first assumption, Russia managed to form an asymmetrical military alliance with several post-Soviet states, which provided security assistance to those regional states in exchange for definite concessions they made to Moscow. However, Russia kept its security cooperation with other regional states outside of the CIS under certain limitations and did not seek to establish military alliances beyond the post-Soviet region. Having examined Russia's alignment strategies towards this kind of local states like Iran and Pakistan, we can offer an explanation based on some structural factors such as geography, distribution of power, and, accordingly, security dilemmas under different regional contexts.

When we look from Russia's perspective, the only great power of the CIS region, to maintain formal alliances with post-Soviet states appears as a very cost-effective strategy. Morrow's alliance trade-off model suggests that such alliances increase a great power's international freedom of action through concessions made by its weaker allies, but potentially decrease its security concerning the military commitment to defend those small states against possible external threats. Under the unipolar structure of the CIS region, however, Russia does not face a substantial risk of entrapment into conflicts for the sake of its regional clients. Russia has a great power preponderance in this region, especially considering its offensive military capabilities. Combined with its geographical proximity and historical experiences of military intervention towards the region, Russia has an unrivaled deterrent capability in regional security affairs. As a result, Russia enjoys significant leverage not only over the CSTO members but also other local states' behavior. As examined in Part Two, Chapter One, some regional states outside of the CSTO, such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan, maintain significant political and military disputes with Russia's formal allies, but they remain cautious vis-à-vis Russia and avoid taking bold steps in order not to provoke the dominant power of the region. In August 2008, Georgia's challenge to the status quo in the breakaway conflicts of South Ossetia was failed, while the following armed conflict with Russia further undermined its security. This historical experience represents a deterrent factor for other local states involving in regional conflicts in the CIS.

While Russia is the only great power at the post-Soviet regional level, it also appears a primary military force at the global level with its advanced nuclear capabilities. The CSTO currently represents a full-fledged collective defense organization that even integrates the air defense systems in its area of membership. Therefore this institutionalized regional military alliance also deters the theoretical threat of external aggression towards any member by extra-regional powers.

However, the situation is different in other regions which consequently leads Russia to avoid expanding its military alliance network beyond the unipolar post-Soviet space. Our historical analysis over the Soviet alignments with Third World states, including some Middle Eastern countries, put forward that the Kremlin has never enjoyed significant leverage over its local clients, which have sometimes taken unilateral military actions without consulting Russians. The current era Middle East

still preserves its multipolar structure along with its perennial conflicts.¹⁶⁴¹ Under these conditions, some regional actors pursue their political and military ambitions towards becoming the dominant power of the region that is located away from great powers. Despite its limited military intervention into Syria, Russia is not even close to the position of dominant power or 'security overlord' of the region; it does not have strong leverage over its partners and other regional states. If Russia goes beyond the current level of security cooperation with regional actors, it may lead to embroilment into political disputes and armed conflicts in this troubled region which is not of the primary strategic interest for Moscow. As we outlined in the dissertation, South Asia also involves chronic interstate tensions and territorial disputes between regional actors, especially Pakistan and India. Despite the growing power preponderance in favor of the latter, the possession of nuclear weapons by both states, the relevant arms race, and the use of asymmetrical threats in this competition (particularly in Kashmir) promote serious risks for armed escalations in the region.¹⁶⁴² Historically, Russia has never directly involved in those regional conflicts controlled by their own independent dynamics. Therefore, South Asia represents another troubled region where Russia should avoid forming alliances with any regional actor at the expense of others.

Besides the risk of entrapment into conflicts, military alliances could lead to a second adverse effect considering participant states' bilateral relations with third parties. The establishment of an alliance may create a security dilemma for non-members, especially when a third state maintains hostile relations with one of the participants. This may prompt that state to form a counterweight alliance to balance the growing external threat in line with Walt's balance of threat theory. Considering Russia's superiority in the post-Soviet area, however, an alliance between Russia and a weak local state could only marginally change the distribution of power and external threats within this regional context. Maybe more importantly, there is no possibility for regional states to create a counterweight alliance together and they cannot find any available extra-regional ally that could balance Russia and deter any Russian move

¹⁶⁴¹ For theoretical studies on regional subsystems defining the Middle East as a multipolar region see Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 37; and Stewart-Ingersoll and Frazier, **Regional Powers and Security Orders: A Theoretical Framework**, pp. 58-59.

¹⁶⁴² For theoretical arguments about the transition of the South Asia region from bipolarity towards unipolarity based on India's power preponderance, see *ibid.*, pp. 64-66; and Buzan and Waever, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, pp. 101-105.

undermining their security. As examined in this study, Russia's former military allies such as Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan were disturbed from the enhancing military cooperation between Moscow and local states neighboring themselves, as well as the increasing Russian military presence in certain parts of the region. Yet, it is hard to argue that those initiatives fundamentally altered the character of their relations with Moscow and its formal allies. Instead, they sought to balance their relations with Russia in order to avoid isolation from the region and falling into an unfavorable position among other local states.

The deepening and strengthening of Russia's military alliances with post-Soviet states could only lead a real security dilemma between Russia and NATO and, to a lesser extent, with other local states with aspirations for joining the Alliance (i.e., Ukraine and Georgia). Viewing itself as a status quo power, however, Russia considers NATO's expansion as the most significant challenge to the distribution of power in Eastern Europe and seeks to prevent another enlargement at any cost. In this regard, we underlined that maintaining formal alliances with local states in Russia's near abroad has long served Moscow's interest in preserving its sphere of influence and great power interests in the post-Soviet region.

Beyond the CIS, however, one of the biggest concerns of Russia with respect to its alignment relations with regional powers becomes their possible adverse effects on Russia's relations with other states sharing the same neighborhood. Russian increasing concerns in this sense can also be attributed to structural factors such as regional balance of power and security dilemmas. As we noted above, an alliance between Russia and its weak neighbors could only slightly shift the distribution of capabilities in the CIS region even more towards what is perceived as the status quo i.e., unipolarity. However, the formation of an alliance with formal military commitments between Russia and a regional state (like Iran and Pakistan) would become a serious blow to the balance of power in different regional contexts. This will likely influence external threat assessments by proximate actors and generate a security dilemma between Russia and its ally on the one side, and the latter's regional rivals on the other. As a result, Russia's relations with some regional states will be seriously deteriorated.

Given the higher level involvement by extra-regional major powers into the regional security affairs in some areas like the Middle East and the Indian Ocean, the development of defense cooperation between Russia and some local states could easily lead to counterbalancing efforts. Russian further military assistance to Pakistan may move India much closer to the United States since New Delhi could perceive that it is being contained by two major Asian powers, Russia and China, together. Similarly, a deeper and strategic military cooperation between Russia and Iran would seriously damage Moscow's relations with Israel and the GCC countries, while it could stimulate a higher level of involvement by the US into the region in favor of its regional clients. Russia's main strategy to challenge the US primacy and influence beyond the near abroad appears as 'multilateralism' rather than establishing and expanding military alliances which might lead to some self-defeating results. In this regard, the most effective way for Russia to undermine the US power projections towards different regions is to exploit the disappointment of some local states (e.g., Iran and Pakistan) with American policies and to develop limited security cooperation with those states on the basis of common pragmatic interests.

Our analysis also affirmed the utility of certain realist alignment theories to explain Russia's strategic behavior. As we argued at the end of Part One, Chapter One, Russia successfully used and manipulated regional threats in the post-Soviet area emphasized by balance of threat and omnibalancing perspectives. External threat perceptions have been an important factor for security orientations of some local states (such as Armenia and Belarus), while almost all the CSTO members have appreciated Russian assistance to their regime security. Central Asian states would likely continue to seek Russia's political and military support against various internal threats to their rule such as terrorism and extremist movements. The lack of an alternative power with long-term influence in the region to support those security objectives induces regional states to maintain formal alliance ties with Russia through participating in the CSTO alliance with binding commitments.

Balance of threat theory suggests that states generally balance external threats facing themselves. However, it maintains that weak states could give up balancing and choose to bandwagon when they face a much powerful opponent and there is no available ally to balance such an imminent threat. Under these conditions, balancing might not be a rational policy to survive, and bandwagoning could even do better. In

the study, we examined how Russia has followed threatening policies against local balancers in the CIS in order to push them into security cooperation, to take a more neutral position, or at least to block the expansion of foreign military alliances towards its borders. Russia's assertive and threatening policies towards Azerbaijan, Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine were also accompanied by direct military interventions in the breakaway conflicts in all these countries. Our analysis put forward Russia managed its strategic objective vis-à-vis Azerbaijan and Moldova more successfully as these states abstained from seeking their NATO membership, thinking that such a balancing strategy would further undermine their security. However, the other two countries with aspirations to join NATO (i.e., Georgia and Ukraine) suffered much more in this process. So far, the Kremlin successfully eliminated the threat of NATO expansion towards its borders, but it was done at the expense of serious crises with these two countries, which further enhanced anti-Russian orientation in their foreign policy.

Soft balancing theory helped us to explain Russia's alignment strategies towards major powers in Asia, which shared Moscow's interest to resist the United States' unilateral policies towards the region, and as well as, Russian vision of a 'multipolar' world. We also underlined the hesitance of Russia, China, and India to openly confront the United States and their willingness to engage with Washington on issues of common interests, which represented two primary factors that prevented a counterbalancing alliance from emerging. The autonomy concerns of these major powers in their external relations also make relevance to Morrow's model on symmetrical alliances. As these nuclear-capable major powers enjoy a high level of security vis-à-vis external threats, they do not want to make concessions from their autonomy through establishing formal defense pacts with other great powers. Besides, Moscow and Beijing also are not willing to grant open support to each other in regional security crises such as Ukraine and Taiwan, which would damage their relations with the US for the sake of their ally's interests.

Besides the explanations offered by soft balancing theory and Morrow's model on symmetrical alliances, we can suggest the relative power distribution between these major powers as another factor that induces Russia to follow a more flexible alignment strategy towards China and India. It is much easier to decide to establish long-term military alliances with local states that have limited capabilities and options in their foreign policy like the CIS countries. Yet, China and India represent two major rising

powers of the 21st Century, which have conflicting geopolitical and geo-economic interests with each other and possibly with Russia. In contrast, Russia represents a descending great power concerning its economic capabilities and demographic facts. In Part Two, Chapter One, we discussed how China's rise could challenge Russia's special interests over the post-Soviet area in the future. After the Ukraine crisis, Russia began to rely increasingly on China in response to the deterioration of its relations with the West. In the long term, however, Moscow faces the risk of being a 'junior partner' of Beijing in a global competition vis-à-vis the United States. Currently, Russia seeks to balance its growing alignment with China through a tacit collaboration with India to limit Chinese initiatives to build a political clout and economic domination over the post-Soviet states; but the sustainability of this strategy is in question. On the other side, the rise of Asian powers could also provoke an increasing involvement by the US as the unipolar leader towards China's Asian and Pacific neighborhood. Based on the future options and policies of the United States, this may represent a security challenge to Russia, or, in contrast, it could take the US attention and focus away from regional affairs close to the Russian borders. Concerning such uncertainties and future scenarios on the distribution of power and threats among great powers, Russia has a continuous interest to engage in more flexible arrangements of security cooperation with other major powers.

Regional Implications: Russia's Sphere of Influence over the CIS

In the 21st Century, Russia seeks to preserve its dominance and leadership role in military security affairs of the post-Soviet region through maintaining asymmetrical alliances and using assertive methods of strategic pressure over the other regional countries that can be considered as local balancers. As we examined, this strategy goes back to the years of the Soviet collapse, during which some forces in the Russian state and military did not want to pull out from the region, which was in a state of conflict and authority crisis. From then on, Russia followed its genuine interests to stabilize the ethnic conflicts, but, at the same time, developed a policy to utilize those conflicts in pursuit of its strategic interests vis-à-vis regional states and the Western powers. Considering its benefits, Russia chose its own way to pacify the conflicts as the only power capable of forcing a cease-fire regiment and ensuring a protectorate over the conflicts.

In this respect, the ethnic conflicts of the CIS have been a primary tool for Russia to ensure its sphere of influence over the western part of the region. As Nicole Jackson suggests, Russia had to withdraw from the Baltic Republics peacefully by 1994, where there were no armed violence and conflicts.¹⁶⁴³ Then, those states were free to follow their path to join NATO. However, the situation in the field of ethnic conflicts in other states like Georgia, Moldova, and Ukraine provided Russia with a useful military presence. Russia also ensured the status quo in the Nagorno Karabakh conflict inside Azerbaijan's borders through its alliance with Armenia. As a result, Russia's military presence over the former Soviet Republics became not limited to the CSTO area but expanded to other regions including local states with different security orientations. Russia's alliance network and power projections throughout the region have so far preserved the unipolar structure of the CIS with its current borders against the expansion of foreign alliances and other military encroachments by extra-regional great powers.

At the same time, however, Russia's military presence and control over the region remain much more limited compared to the Soviet era or the situation in Eastern Europe during the Cold War. Unlike the Warsaw Pact, which had included a centralized military command center, Moscow could not convince its CSTO allies to establish even a joint military coordination body under the Russian leadership. As examined in Part Two, Chapter One, the CSTO members preserved their national sovereignty over their armed forces and domestic affairs, while most of them followed multi-vector foreign policy through establishing ties with extra-regional actors and institutions like the EU and NATO. Under these conditions, we cannot define a Russian hegemony over the CIS comparable to the Soviet Union or the Warsaw Pact. This fact is also recognized by Vladimir Putin, who has publicly suggested that: *"Whoever does not miss the Soviet Union has no heart. Whoever wants it back has no brain."*¹⁶⁴⁴

As neorealist scholars suggest for the unipolarity at the global level, Russia's power superiority over all other regional states in the CIS did not result in a political and military hegemony concerning the relations of influence under this geographical

¹⁶⁴³ Jackson, **Russian Foreign Policy and the CIS: Theories, Debates and Actions**, p. 77.

¹⁶⁴⁴ Quoted in Andrew S. Weiss, "Five Myths about Vladimir Putin."

context. However, the Russian-led unipolarity is more than nothing. As we observed during this study, it definitely creates some structural constraints over local states' behavior in this regional subsystem. In this respect, the unipolarity in the CIS has an obvious impact on the established practices of use of force, the conflict and peace processes, and, as well as, regional alignment formation in this geographical context. The constraining effects of unipolarity over these three dimensions of regional politics represent the main constituents of Russia's sphere of influence over its near abroad.

As noted above, Russia maintains some military presence over the CSTO area and most of the local conflicts in other post-Soviet states. Albeit it is limited, Russia's military presence over conflict zones *de facto* forbids 'unauthorized' use of force in the region, either by regional countries or outside powers interested in the post-Soviet region.¹⁶⁴⁵ Russia still represents a primary military and nuclear power in the world with second-strike capabilities, even *vis-à-vis* the only superpower, the United States. Neither the US nor NATO members are ready to venture an armed escalation with Russia for the sake of the destiny of small CIS countries, while Russia seems to be determined to respond to armed challenges towards its military positions beyond its borders, especially in its near abroad. In August 2008, Georgia, as a regional power, tried to challenge the status quo in the South Ossetian conflict, but this 'unauthorized' military move was responded directly with a disproportional use of force by Russia. As we examined, Azerbaijan's restriction of itself during the 'four-day conflict' over Nagorno Karabakh in April 2016 demonstrates that Baku recognizes the established practices of use of force in the CIS region.

Secondly, Russia as the only great military power actively operating in the CIS has an unmatched long-term influence in all conflict and peace processes throughout the region. As examined in this study, the frozen conflicts of the CIS in Transnistria, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno Karabakh all pacified in the 1990s with Russian-brokered ceasefire agreements while Russia deployed its peacekeeping forces into the first three conflict zones. Since then, Russia has enjoyed significant leverage on all sides of these conflicts. Russian peacekeeping forces have also been the guarantor of the political settlement reached after the Tajik civil war. In the following years, Russia played the most determinant role during re-escalations of violence in

¹⁶⁴⁵ See Trenin, "Russia's Spheres of Interest, Not Influence," pp. 13-14.

ethnic conflict zones. In April 2016, Azerbaijan was responsible for the armed violence in Nagorno Karabakh which was indeed a limited-scale demonstration of its growing military capabilities vis-à-vis Armenia. The ceasefire was requested by Baku but the agreement between Azerbaijan and Armenia was brokered again by Russia. To quote Buzan and Weaver again unipolarity might be in its extreme form “*when both sides of a local conflict are dependent on the same power, it is possible for that power to pressure the conflicting parties into peace processes.*”¹⁶⁴⁶ In Ukraine, the post-Maidan government has used massive force vis-à-vis the pro-Russian separatist conflict in Donbass until the Minsk-II ceasefire agreement signed in 2015 by a group of countries including Russia. The recent presidential elections, however, led to a landslide victory by Volodymyr Zelensky, who had campaigned for establishing direct talks with Russia viewing it as necessary for the peaceful settlement of eastern Ukrainian conflict.

Last but not least, Russia’s power superiority within the post-Soviet area has a decisive effect on regional alignment formation. As we noted earlier, each post-Soviet state’s relationship with Russia appears as strategically more significant than its relations with any other regional state. In the CIS, regional alignment decisions are generally made paying the primary regard to Russia rather than other local states with different capabilities and intentions. Some states view Russia as the primary security patron of the region providing valuable assistance to its clients. Other countries see it as the most threatening power and look for security guarantees from extra-regional actors; but Russia is again the primary factor shaping their alignment preferences. One could consider Azerbaijan as an exception since it maintains an armed conflict and long-term hostility with neighboring Armenia. However, the Russian factor seems to outweigh Armenia’s place in Azerbaijan’s foreign policy, as Baku remains cautious in its external relations, especially in the security realm, and avoids closer cooperation with NATO not to provoke Russia.

Walt’s study on balance of threat theory defines the Middle East as a multipolar subsystem with great power penetration. In this context, regional states have sought alignments with distant great powers against external threats by other local actors instead of seeking ways to reconcile and cooperate with each other. However, this is not the case in the post-Soviet area, given Russia’s high-level leverage on all regional

¹⁶⁴⁶ Buzan and Weaver, **Regions and Powers: The Structure of International Security**, p. 47.

actors and the lack of a counterweight power involving in regional security affairs with the ability to support some regional states vis-a-vis Russia and its allies. As we examined, the CSTO area covers Central Asian countries maintaining interstate disputes over regional energy, water, and border problems which were occasionally accompanied by limited violence and military crises at common border areas. Yet, those states maintain their membership to the same alliance under the Russian leadership, considering that it may assist them in addressing problems with neighboring countries. In this respect, Russia's unbalanced power and leadership over the post-Soviet security space play a stabilizing factor on regional alignment formation, which hinders the processes of fragmentation and polarization among local states. It also renders Russia as the key mediator to settle or at least contain regional disputes and conflicts. That is why Russia opposes the military involvement of extra-regional powerful actors towards the CIS which could result in a more uncontrollable regional situation. Under current conditions, Russia is able to focus on playing a greater role in international security issues in more distant regions, which underpins its great power status.

Russia's sphere of influence over the CIS is ensured by all those structural constraints over regional politics examined above. However, we should note that Russia's hard-power based regional strategy often creates severe problems not only in its relations with local states but also with the US and European countries. In recent years, Russia has been a subject of Western counter-measurements with serious negative implications on its economy. In this respect, Russia faces significant difficulties in sustaining such kind of a geopolitical confrontation with the US and its European allies. This fact induces the Kremlin to seek an alternative ground for its relations with the West on the basis of a concert-like order for the Eurasian security.

Global Implications: Russia and the Future of Great Power Relations

The last two decades witnessed some reciprocal crises between Russia and the West, which damaged not only the relationship between the two sides but also the national security of local states. Could Moscow and Washington reach an agreement that would help to overcome such crises representing a lose-lose situation and promote win-win scenarios for the Eastern European security? In fact, some Western scholars recognize Russia's capabilities and high-level determination to protect its self-defined

security interests in its near abroad. Accordingly, they advise for some changes in Western security policies in order to ensure more stable relations with Russia. For example, Ted Hopf, a leading American constructivist scholar with expertise on the Soviet and Russian foreign policies, criticizes the West for not cooperating with Russia during the early 1990s concerning the latter's initiatives towards the regional conflicts. He suggests that the Western powers could and should have taken Russian requests for OSCE and UN authorization for the CIS peacekeeping more seriously, which would have set consensual standards for legitimate involvement into ethnic conflicts and allowed Western monitoring for Russia's adherence to those standards.¹⁶⁴⁷ The US and European states declined Moscow's offer but could not prevent Russian interventions in response to the ethnic violence in its neighborhood. Therefore they opened more space for Russia's unilateral peacemaking initiatives.

In the following decades, the process of NATO enlargement has become the main hotspot in bilateral tensions, which has reached a deadlock after the Caucasus crisis of 2008 and the Ukrainian conflict. Some noted Western experts from the West on Eurasian politics underline that there is no consensus for NATO's expansion towards Georgia and Ukraine among the Alliance members and especially major European states. In this regard, those scholars advise for the reduction of tensions between these local states and Russia, which would be beneficial for their security and national wellbeing.¹⁶⁴⁸ In the face of the Ukraine crisis, Henry Kissinger, an experienced American diplomat, noted that Ukraine should not join NATO, and has to avoid any 'institutional hostility' toward Russia -if it wishes to survive. About the US policy towards the crisis, he advocated that Washington should avoid treating Moscow as an 'aberrant' to be taught rules of political conduct established by the US and noted that "*Putin is a serious strategist on the premises of Russian history.*"¹⁶⁴⁹ During the days of Yanukovych's fall, Zbigniew Brzezinski, a former security advisor to the US presidency, warned that Russia was able to drag Ukraine into a destructive and

¹⁶⁴⁷ Hopf, "Identity, Legitimacy, and the Use of Military Force: Russia's Great Power Identities and Military Intervention in Abkhazia," p. 239.

¹⁶⁴⁸ See Allison, "Russian 'Deniable' Intervention in Ukraine: How and Why Russia Broke the Rules," p. 1296; Larrabee, "Russia, Ukraine, and Central Europe: The Return of Geopolitics," p. 51; and Andrew C. Kuchins, Jeffrey Mankoff, and Oliver Backes, "Georgia in a Reconnecting Eurasia: Foreign Economic and Security Interests," CSIS Report, June 2016, p. 7. Retrieved from: https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/160429_Kuchins_GeorgiaReconnectingEurasia_Web.pdf (02.11.2019).

¹⁶⁴⁹ Kissinger, "How the Ukraine Crisis Ends".

internationally dangerous civil conflict. He also anticipated that the Kremlin could prompt the secession of Crimea and some other industrial eastern regions of the country. Like Kissinger, Brzezinski advocated that the US needed to work towards a 'Finnish Model' of neutrality for Ukraine through which Kiev could enjoy wide-ranging economic relations with both the EU and Russia and build a mutually respectful relationship with its powerful neighbor.¹⁶⁵⁰

Later in 2016, Brzezinski wrote an essay about the future of great power relations and the American role in the newly emerging world order, which touched upon the US declining primacy and influence in international politics. He indicated violence and conflicts spreading outward from the Middle East (as well as other parts of the Third World) as the main challenge to global peace and security. According to Brzezinski, Washington could only effectively deal with this global threat if it establishes a coalition, including also Russia and China, as other significant international players. Establishing such a grand coalition differing from more traditional political alignments would be possible only on the basis of an increased international accommodation.¹⁶⁵¹ When asked about a concert-like international order, William Wohlforth suggests that there could be such a transformation in great power politics, especially between the United States and Russia. He points out that the US has a long-term strategic interest to prevent Russia and China from getting too close, which led to numerous attempts by different administrations to improve relations with Russians. Those initiatives were all failed since the West fell short of making the necessary concessions to satisfy Russia. Now NATO and Russia reached a status quo at Ukraine's borders, as the Alliance has no power for further expansion. Under these conditions, Wohlforth suggests, there is a possibility to reach an agreement over the current status quo in Eastern Europe, but such an initiative has never been tested yet.¹⁶⁵²

These assessments all emphasize that further attempts to enlarge NATO after the Ukraine crisis will promote even more serious crises with Russia, which would

¹⁶⁵⁰ Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Russia Needs to be Offered a 'Finland option' for Ukraine," *Financial Times*, <https://www.ft.com/content/e855408c-9bf6-11e3-afe3-00144feab7de> (02.11.2019).

¹⁶⁵¹ See Zbigniew Brzezinski, "Toward a Global Realignment," *The American Interest*, <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2016/04/17/toward-a-global-realignment/> (02.11.2019).

¹⁶⁵² Author's short interview with William Wohlforth following his visiting lecture at Moscow State Institute of International Relations.

possibly end up with new lose-lose situations for Eastern European security. Actually, Kissinger, Brzezinski, Wohlforth, etc are all American scholars close to a realist world view that constructs the main parameters of this study. However, the dominant discourse in the US foreign policy tends to view such kind of thinking as ‘old-fashioned,’ which holds little relevance to international politics of the 21st century. Rather than *realpolitik* considerations, the NATO enlargement is advocated as a process driven by the expansion of democratic norms that would unite Europe as a single civilization and identity. By definition, NATO membership is viewed as a matter of free choice of all states, including Russia’s neighbors; therefore, Moscow’s resistance is taken as a normative challenge against this process. In this regard, Mearsheimer concludes that two sides operate with different playbooks, while the Putin administration acts with respect to realist dictates, their Western counterparts adhere to liberal ideas about international relations.¹⁶⁵³ This consequently led to the Ukraine crisis and the Western interpretation of Russia’s behavior as unpredictable and aggressive. Such ontological and ideological differences between the US and Russian views towards international politics remain as a formidable obstacle to reach an agreement on a consensual status quo for the European security and about their joint interests considering the global stability.

As we examined, the United States’ continuous geopolitical challenge towards Russia’s neighborhood only consolidated the Sino-Russian entente. Russia and China solved most of their bilateral disputes and tensions, while they further represented their partnership as a new quality of great power relationship and a stabilizing factor for international security. The institutional setting of the SCO embraced all main norms and principles promoted by the Sino-Russian partnership, while the enlargement towards India and Pakistan increased the global weight of the organization. Our analysis emphasized two different factors which led to the development of security cooperation in the SCO, namely common threat perceptions from the US unilateral policies towards the region and non-traditional threats and challenges to regional stability. The neorealist perspective tends to emphasize the former as the main driver of the SCO. For example, Barry Posen explicitly argues that the US involvement towards Afghanistan and its neighborhood after 9/11 have driven regional competitors

¹⁶⁵³ See Mearsheimer, "Why the Ukraine Crisis is the West’s Fault: The Liberal Delusions That Provoked Putin," pp. 83-84.

towards each other and solved some significant security problems for them. He suggests that the US withdrawal from Afghanistan would likely reveal their disagreements about regional security, as it would force them to solve those problems by themselves. It would consequently drive the proximate powers apart, as Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran would compete for influence over the future of Afghanistan, finding themselves in opposing camps of such a strategic rivalry. This situation would even induce some of them to seek better a relationship with Washington, and accordingly, create a more manageable world for the US leadership.¹⁶⁵⁴

However, it remains questionable whether a complete US withdrawal from the Afghanistan region could dramatically change the character of security interactions between these actors, given their common threat perceptions from non-traditional security threats. Islamist extremism and terrorism represent prevalent challenges throughout the region, which also underpin the separatist movements in Russia's North Caucasus, China's Xinjiang region, and Indian-controlled Kashmir. Those non-state challenges also undermine the stability of the whole region together with economic development and energy transportation projects in the SCO area. Since the beginning of the 21st Century, the SCO members have shown a growing interest in multilateral cooperation against non-traditional threats, and the organization provided valuable experience in this respect.¹⁶⁵⁵

An explanation based on institutionalized practices and experience would be close to the liberal institutionalist thinking, while neorealism indeed falls short of capturing the logic of anti-terrorist security cooperation without reference to external threats due to its state-centric approach. One could offer a realist variant of explanation

¹⁶⁵⁴ See Barry R. Posen, "It's Time to Make Afghanistan Someone Else's Problem," *The Atlantic*, August 18, 2017, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2017/08/solution-afghanistan-withdrawal-iran-russia-pakistan-trump/537252/> (02.11.2019).

¹⁶⁵⁵ Noted Russian scholars whom the Author interviewed with also deny the possibility that US withdrawal from Afghanistan could substantially change the character of relations among these powers in Asia. The US withdrawal would likely create further security problems but it would also increase the need for cooperation to resolve these issues. Author's interview with Igor Istomin. Under these conditions, especially Russia and China would continue to combine their policies on joint interests. Author's interview with Sergei Karaganov. Trenin evaluates that the SCO members can well manage their relationships concerning their common interests on regional stability without an external balancer. For him, the period of human history when the US was the dominant power managing all the balances of the world is coming to an end. Therefore, the countries in the region will have to find ways to deal with regional problems among themselves. Author's interview with Dmitri Trenin.

that states would not like to compete with rival asymmetrical actors in the international arena but tend to eliminate those dangerous non-state actors that have no territoriality and government-like rationality. When those threats begin to undermine the national security of a number of states, it could give way to security cooperation between those countries driven primarily by its own dynamics. As we examined, the security cooperation against non-traditional challenges between Russia, China and Central Asian states (i.e., the members of Shanghai group) traces back to the early and mid-1990s when there was no serious geopolitical challenge by the US towards the region.

In rational strategic terms, however, some terrorist groups can be used as an asymmetric weapon by state actors against their rivals when they consider that those organizations could be manipulated against definite states in a controllable fashion and at a bearable risk. This applies to China's toleration of some anti-Indian terrorist groups operating in the Kashmir region, which partly undermines the SCO's counter-terrorism cooperation. Nonetheless, the participation of Russia, China, India, and Pakistan into the same platform for security dialogue on the non-traditional threats towards the region can be considered a successful development that was supported by Russian diplomacy. Russia's approach towards 'multipolarity' includes the building of a grand major power coalition to effectively struggling against transnational threats of the 21st Century. Furthermore, as we noted earlier, the multilateral security cooperation in the SCO put Russia into a much favorable position in the region compared to the Cold War period when China collaborated with Pakistan to support Islamist forces against Russia in the Afghan civil war.

In fact, the most formidable obstacle to the development of an Asian major power concert appears as the long term security dilemmas involving China, India, and Pakistan, rather than disagreements about terrorism or the future of Afghanistan. Furthermore, the disputes and tensions and between China and India provide an opportunity for the US to exploit those security problems and to increase its involvement in the Asia Pacific region through aligning with the latter. Despite all those problems between China and India, Russia managed to develop favorable relations with both states thanks to its balanced policy vis-à-vis all regional players. Russia does not maintain any serious dispute and conflict with other SCO members, which could be manipulated by the United States. Rather Moscow jointly pursues its convergent interests with each actor and cooperates with them against common threats

and challenges. Russia's alignment with China is mainly driven by their common perceptions about the US unilateral policies and its containment strategy towards themselves. At the same time, Russia helps India to increase its defense capabilities vis-à-vis rising China, while New Delhi supports Russia's influence in Central Asia against Chinese political and economic ambitions. In addition to that, Russia takes advantage of Pakistan's growing interests in regional stability and its disappointment with the US policies towards the region in order to further its security dialogue and cooperation with Islamabad.

In short, there is a long and winding road to building a concert-like order even within the confines of the SCO area. However, Russia currently enjoys an exceptional position in the SCO as a major power maintaining friendly relations with other significant players. Russia's alignments with China and India, which are driven by their own dynamics, ensure that there would be no hostile geopolitical challenge towards CIS by any of these two powers in the foreseeable future. As we examined in the dissertation, both major powers respect Russia's red lines in the post-Soviet region concerning military security issues. They also recognize Russia's great power role and special interests in the post-Soviet region, which represents the primary motivation of Moscow in transforming the international order towards a more multilateral and polycentric one. As long as Russia receives such a recognition from the East, it could more effectively confront Western geopolitical challenges towards its neighborhood.

The current situation in the Asian security environment requires Russia to maintain its balanced approach towards everyone and to avoid directly involving in regional disputes unless it enjoys considerable leverage on all sides of a given conflict. Russia would likely maintain its dynamic diplomacy towards its regional partners, which may sometimes require tilting towards one state or another. By this way, Russia would be able to preserve its freedom of action between different power centers. The Kremlin could also undertake a mediator role concerning political and military disputes in the region when there appears an opportunity since it contributes its great power status at the international level. In this respect, Russia's flexible alignment strategy vis-à-vis other major powers and regional states beyond the CIS appears as the best strategy to serve Russia's aim at becoming one of the most influential centers of the world order which is going through a continuous transformation.

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Academic Meetings/Interviews Conducted in Moscow

- Aleksandrov Oleg B., Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy of Russia, MGIMO, May 2018.
- Istomin Igor A., Associate Professor at the Department of Applied Analysis of International Problems, MGIMO, November 2017-May 2018.
- Karaganov Sergei A., Dean of the Faculty of World Economy and International Affairs of the National Research University Higher School of Economics, 7 December 2017.

Nikitina Yulia A., Associate Professor at the Department of World Political Processes, MGIMO, November 2017-December 2017.

Shakleina Tatiana A., Professor at the Department of Applied Analysis of International Problems, MGIMO, December 2017.

Trenin Dmitri V., Director of the Carnegie Moscow Center, 27 December 2017.

Troitskiy Mikhail A., Dean of the School of Government and International Affairs, MGIMO; Associate Professor at the Department of International Relations and Foreign Policy of Russia, MGIMO, October 2017-June 2018.

Wohlforth William C., Professor at the Department of Government, Dartmouth College. A short interview was conducted after his visiting lecture at MGIMO, 21 March 2018.



BIOGRAPHY

Murat Güneylioğlu was born in 1985 in İzmir. He graduated from İzmir Atatürk High School in 2003. In 2008, he graduated from the Department of International Relations at Akdeniz University, Antalya. He completed his Master's degree in International Relations at Dokuz Eylül University, İzmir, in 2011. In Fall 2012, he enrolled in the International Relations Ph.D. Program at Galatasaray University. In the context of his doctoral research, he conducted a field study during eight months (October 2017-June 2018) at Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Russia. Since 2011, he works as a research assistant at the Department of International Relations, Kırklareli University.

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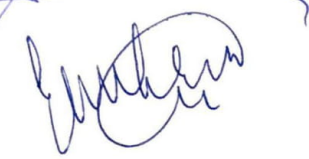
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