

POWER RELATIONS BETWEEN RUSSIA, CHINA AND THE UNITED STATES IN CENTRAL ASIA. AN OFFENSIVE REALIST PERSPECTIVE

Eugen LUNGU*

Received: July 29, 2020

Accepted for publication: October 20, 2020

Abstract: Central Asia is a region of great strategic interest to Russia and China, the great powers bordering the states of this geopolitical area, but also to the United States, especially after 2001, with the beginning of the war in Afghanistan. Being an area with important natural resources, but also one of strategic interest due to the intersection of trade routes between Europe and Asia, the Central Asian region is a geopolitical area where the major economic and security interests of Russia, China and the United States currently intersect. In this study, we aim to highlight a series of power relations between these three great powers of Central Asia in the post-Soviet era through a framework based in the theory of offensive realism. The conclusion we have reached is that due to the relations that have formed between the five republics of Central Asia, no major regional or extraregional power has managed to become a dominant power in the region.

Keywords: Central Asia, power relations, offensive realism, great powers, hegemonic power



Rezumat: Asia Centrală este o regiune de mare interes strategic pentru Rusia și China, mari puteri care se învecinează cu statele acestei arii geopolitice, dar și pentru Statele Unite, mai ales după anul 2001, odată cu începutul războiului din Afganistan. Fiind o zonă cu importante bogății naturale, dar și un spațiu de interes strategic ca urmare a intersecției drumurilor comerciale dintre Europa și Asia, regiunea Asiei Centrale este o arie geopolitică în care se intersectează, în prezent, interesele de natură economică și de securitate ale Rusiei, Chinei și Statelor Unite. Ne propunem în cadrul acestui studiu să scoatem în evidență o serie de raporturi de putere stabilite între aceste trei mari puteri în spațiul Asiei Centrale în epoca post-sovietică, din perspectiva teoriei realismului ofensiv. Concluzia la care am ajuns este ca datorită relațiilor care s-au format între cele cinci republici ale Asiei Centrale, nicio mare putere regională sau extraregională nu a reușit să se impună ca putere dominantă a regiunii.

Cuvinte cheie: Asia Centrală, marile puteri, putere hegemonică, raporturi de putere, realism ofensiv

* Eugen Lungu, Lecturer, Titu Maiorescu University, e-mail: eugenbuc2004@yahoo.com.

I. Introduction

The system of international relations of the last three decades has evolved in an unpredictable way, witnessing, on the one hand, the end of America's hegemony, and on the other hand, the reassertion of Russia as a great power, due to its huge military potential, as well as the very fast growth of China's economy, turning it into one of the top two economies of the planet. These spectacular transformations in world politics, especially in recent years, have been closely watched by political leaders and foreign policy practitioners, but they have equally attracted the interest of renowned researchers in the study of power relations especially as concerns the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China, which are seen as revisionist powers, and the United States, the superpower that has ceased to be the global hegemon.

The the (re)establishment of Russia and China as great powers in today's international system occurred in the context of the decline of the United States, which, as the sole superpower after the end of the Cold War, failed to integrate these two powers into the post-Cold War world order while Washington's extremely costly global commitments during the unipolar moment led to the erosion of the American power and the transition towards a multipolar system in world politics. The transition to multipolarity came about peacefully, without a war between the major global powers, despite the presence of strategic dissensions and of recurrent clashes between the political, economic and military interests of the great powers which we analyse in this study: Russia and China and the United States.

The study of the history of international relations shows very clearly that in the centuries that have passed since the Peace of Westphalia, the great powers were those that played the decisive role in building a certain type of order, be it at the continental or global level. The great powers were those states that always shaped the international system, though the study of history highlights the sinuous process of the great powers' evolution and involution, a process that makes the researchers of international realities approach with caution any kind of long-term predictions about the way in which the great powers may rise or fall.

II. The power relations between the three major actors of international politics. A conceptual framework

Our theoretical approach addresses the power relations between Russia, China and the United States in the Central Asian region, in the post-Soviet era with regards to the strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing, but also in relation to Washington's increased influence in this region after 2001. The present analysis is based on the theoretical principles of the realist school in the field of international relations (IR). In IR, as can be easily seen from the literature¹, the great powers are examined, with predilection, by realist thinkers, a strong argument that determines us to place our entire research in the space of realism. Unlike the other IR traditions, “[r]ealists focus especially on the great powers, as these States dominate and shape international politics and cause the most terrible wars”². In other words, by studying, from the perspective of realist logic, the power relations between Russia, China and the United States in Central Asia over the past three decades, we can point out the extent to which the cooperation / competition rapports between Moscow and Beijing, but also the power games of the United States at regional level, influenced the balance of power and the geopolitics of this region.

Given the diversity of traditions that can be found inside the realist school of IR, it is necessary to specify from the beginning in which realist current we place this research study. Our approach is based on the principles of offensive realism, and we start from the assumption that realism contains a web of theoretical principles easy to verify in relation to the political realities of today's world. The important events that have taken place in the last three quarters of a century have not been able to change the perception according to which realism is the dominant school of thought in the analysis and interpretation of world politics.

Part of structural realism, the theoretical principles of offensive realism developed by the American professor of IR John J. Mearsheimer in 2001, constitute the main elements that shaped the theoretical framework for our analysis. They help us interpret the various strategies, decisions and actions that characterised the great state actors analysed in this study: the Russian

¹ The literature in the field of international relations contains numerous realist authors who have analyzed the importance of the great powers in world politics. One of the most relevant, which we want to mention in this context, is the diplomat and realist Henry Kissinger. One of his important books in which he expressed various aspects on the great powers in different historical epochs is the *World Order. Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History* (New York: Penguin Books, 2014).

² John J. Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță. Realismul ofensiv și lupta pentru putere* (Filipeșii de Târg: Editura Antet XX Press, 2001), 18.

Federation, People’s Republic of China and the United States of America. Therefore, we will apply Mearsheimer’s theory to explain the power relations between the three in the geopolitical space of Central Asia, using the specific theoretical tools of offensive realism. At the same time, we will also address the impact these power relations have had and continue to have on regional geopolitics. While this study is based on offensive realism, it does not preclude the use of other tools that we may find in the theoretical toolbox of the realist school, which are in harmony with Mearsheimer’s thinking, and consistent with Stephen M. Walt’s words: “Realism attempts to explain world politics as it is, rather than to describe it as it should be”³.

At the end of this research, we aim to provide answers to the following questions:

- How is power distributed in Central Asia in the context of the competition between Russia, China and the United States?
- Which of the two great powers, Russia or China, can establish itself as a regional hegemon in Central Asia in the next two to three decades?

To answer these questions, I will first briefly present the general principles underlying Mearsheimer’s offensive realism, and then, based on the principles identified, analyse some aspects of the power dynamic between Russia, China and the United States in Central Asia.

In conducting this research, we have used open sources, scholarly papers that have dealt with the power relations of the three states in the post-Cold War era, but also a series of conference papers. Of great importance for the documentation and elaboration of this paper was the study of official documents (treaties, memoranda, communiqués of various public bodies and institutions etc.), published by the press agencies of the Russian Federation, China and the United States, documentary sources that have greatly contributed to the understanding and deciphering of the various nuances colouring the power relations of the three states in the geopolitical space of Central Asia.

III. Brief Theoretical Considerations on the Offensive Realism of John J. Mearsheimer

The presentation of power relations between Russia, China and the United States in the Central Asian region, viewed through the lens of offensive realism, covers the international context created by the end of the hegemonic era of the United States and the beginning of a new multipolar one in which Russia and China try to secure optimal geopolitical positions in order to achieve

³ Stephen M. Walt, “The World Wants You to Think Like a Realist”, *Foreign Policy*, May 30, 2020, accessed June 10, 2020, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/30/the-world-wants-you-to-think-like-a-realist/>.

their political, economic and security interests. Here is how Henry Kissinger, statesman, diplomat and one of the most important thinkers of the realist school, saw the post-Cold War world a quarter of a century ago, a view that opens a well-defined angle of analysis for our study:

“The international system of the 21st century will be marked by an apparent contradiction: on the one hand, fragmentation; on the other hand, increasing globalisation. At the level of the relations between States, the new order will resemble more to the European State system of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries than to the rigid patterns of the Cold War. It will contain at least six major powers – the United States, Europe, China, Japan, Russia and probably India – as well as a multitude of medium and smaller countries”⁴.

A careful and objective analysis of the nearly three decades since the collapse of the Soviet Union shows that most of the major decisions and foreign policy actions of the Russian Federation and China are based on the principles of political realism, and especially on those of offensive realism. Unlike the course of action set by Moscow and Beijing, American leaders analyse and interpret international reality from the perspective of liberalism, dividing the world into virtuous allies (usually the democrats) and bad opponents (usually dictatorial regimes)⁵, yet it is noteworthy that, despite this view of the world, many of the foreign and security policy actions of the recent years have been based on realist principles. Therefore, if the speeches of American presidents are generally circumscribed to idealist thinking, as we will see in this study, realist principles are part of the foreign policy and security decisions adopted by the United States.

In this study, we intend to underline the impact of offensive realism on Russia’s and China’s strategies through which these powers promote their economic and security interests in Central Asia, but also where it concerns a series of US actions that seek to maintain a stable balance of power at regional level. If we consider China’s huge performances in terms of wealth accumulation in the recent decades, in particular, but also the increase of Russia’s power, it can be said that the promotion of offensive realism principles is seen as a trump card in both Moscow and Beijing. As we will see, the United States is no stranger to the practical application of offensive realism in Central Asia, especially when it comes to its relations with various regional state actors, establish in order to enhance its security interests and economic power.

Given that Mearsheimer’s theory targets the great powers in the international system, it can help us better understand the system of world politics, a system shaped by the power games between the most powerful state actors at regional and global level. Mearsheimer, alongside other representatives

⁴ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomația* (București: Editura All, 2013), 21.

⁵ Walt, *The World Wants You to Think Like a Realist*.

of the theory of offensive realism, has sought to explain the strong influence that great powers exert on the functionality of the international system, basing his argumentation on the thesis that the configuration of the international system, regardless of the historical period we are referring to, is the result of the great powers' rivalry and competition for hegemony.

Although in the centre of the theoretical fabric created by Mearsheimer we find only the great powers as major actors of world politics, the other small and medium powers being located in the peripheral area of his theoretical approaches, the importance of the theoretical system conceived by the American thinker for international relations cannot be questioned. Thus, the American professor created a set of realist principles, related to the concept of great power, explaining the behaviour of these actors in the international arena in various historical periods, after the French Revolution, over an interval of more than two centuries. Moreover, Mearsheimer has provided researchers in international relations a series of novel theoretical tools to analyse and interpret the strategic profile (from the perspective of the concept of potential hegemon) of the accumulated power and the behaviour of the great powers on the world stage. From the latter perspective, but also from the ideas previously expressed, we will further briefly present the defining theoretical elements of the offensive realism promoted by Mearsheimer, as a necessary step in conducting this scientific study on the power relations between Russia, China and the United States in Central Asia, given that the theoretical principles, concepts and paradigms created by the American professor of international relations form the theoretical basis of the elaboration of this scientific approach.

The theoretical framework developed by Mearsheimer is based on five hypotheses, each reflecting an important aspect of the functionality of the international system:

- the international system is anarchic (it does not contain a central authority over the State);
- the great powers have an offensive capacity which enables them to cause damage to each other, or to destroy each other;
- the intentions of States can never be known;
- d. the ultimate goal of the great powers is survival;
- the great powers are rational actors who forge a strategy on how to act in the international environment⁶.

If taken separately, none of these hypotheses states that the great powers are acting aggressively in the international system, but, taken as a whole, we cannot but agree with Mearsheimer, who claims that all five together “create strong incentives for the great powers to think and act offensively, one in relation to the others”⁷. This extremely important conclusion that resulted from analysing

⁶ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 27.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 28.

the behaviour of great powers in a span of two centuries underlines a theoretical principle of great significance for this research in which we analyse the power relations between the three mentioned states.

Mearsheimer has put forward a set of principles that make this “branch” of realism an area ripe for debate, mirroring the clashes of ideas between other schools of thought preoccupied with world politics. In order to delve into and understand the essence of Mearsheimer’s theory, we need to highlight the theoretical principles developed by the American professor two decades ago, principles that will help us meet the objectives of our research.

The theoretical principles presented below will be used to analyse the Russian-Chinese power relations in the context of the strategic partnership between the two. The principles of offensive realism, as conceived by Mearsheimer are:

- a) the great powers are constantly looking for opportunities to gain power to the detriment of rival States, with the ultimate goal of obtaining hegemony;
- b) states that achieve regional hegemony seek to prevent the great powers of other regions from imitating them;
- c) great powers always seek to maximise their strength as world powers;
- d) survival is the fundamental goal of great powers;
- e) the power configuration that generates the greatest fear is a multipolar system that contains a potential hegemon (“unbalanced multipolarity”);
- f) bipolarity is the configuration of power that produces the least fear;
- g) great powers fear each other and see themselves as potential enemies;
- h) in international politics, states can form alliances, but alliances are temporary, and the alliance partner can be tomorrow’s enemy, and today’s enemy can be tomorrow’s ally;
- i) states are aware that in order to survive they must become the strongest element in the system;
- j) states are always looking for opportunities in the international system to tip the balance of power, adding an extra amount of power to the detriment of potential rivals;
- k) to tip the balance of power in their favour, states use a variety of diplomatic, economic and military means;
- l) the race of great powers to obtain as much power as possible ceases only when hegemony is reached;
- m) great powers are aware that the best way to ensure their security is to acquire hegemony;
- n) great powers think of conquests and seek to stop aggressor states from gaining power over them;
- o) the measures taken by one state to increase its security lead to the diminished security of other States (the security dilemma);
- p) the best defence is a good offense;
- q) great powers do not always materialise their offensive intentions;

- r) the great powers which have very strong rivals will be more reserved to take offensive action and will seek primarily to preserve the existing balance of power;
- s) great powers feel sometimes insecure about the decisions taken by opposing states, but also about the members of the alliance⁸.

Based on these theoretical principles, we intend to analyse the power relations between Russia, China and the United States in Central Asia, in the context of the strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing and of the existence of divergent strategic interests in this region between these great powers.

IV. Power Relations between Russia, China and the United States in Central Asia from the Perspective of Offensive Realism

Now that two decades of the 21st century have passed, the geopolitical configuration of Central Asia⁹ highlights the fact that this region is an area of strategic interest for several actors in today's world politics. Although in this competition for the best possible geostrategic position there are multiple powerful states present, in this study we will consider only the three great powers we already mentioned, whose interests in Central Asia are examined in various scholarly studies. Since “the great powers are always looking for opportunities to gain power at the expense of their rivals”¹⁰, as one of the principles of offensive realism points out, whoever studies international relations today can easily observe that major strategic interests of Russia, China and the United States currently intersect in Central Asia, be they of political, military or economic nature, and each of these three great powers tries to maximise its benefits in relation to other rival powers, but also as regards the five states of the region.

Given the geographical positioning of Russia and China, located in the immediate vicinity of the states in the Central Asian region – Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan – , but also the fact that the United States is an extra-regional actor, a brief analysis of the geopolitical relations between the three powers and the five Central Asian states already leads to a first conclusion in terms of the advantages that geography offers to Moscow and Beijing compared to Washington. But, as we will see, over the past

⁸ Ibid., 26-33.

⁹ In most geography treaties, the Central Asia region includes the five states that emerged from the former USSR – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, but also Mongolia and the Chinese regions of Tibet, Qinghai and Xinjiang. In this study, all references to Central Asia refer only to the five republics that belonged to the former USSR.

¹⁰ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 26.

two decades, the United States has developed various strategies in Central Asia in order to achieve its strategic goals and limit as much as possible the Chinese and Russian influence in the region, since, according to Mearsheimer, the great powers are rarely satisfied with the distribution of power and will do everything they can to change the balance of power at regional or global level¹¹. But in order to have an overview of the regional power distribution process, we have to highlight a series of economic and military issues that have shaped the power relations between Moscow, Beijing and Washington in this region in the last two decades, relations that aim, according to the offensive realism advanced by Mearsheimer, to maximise the amount of power belonging to each of these States¹².

IV.1. The Russian Position

To begin with, we will focus on Moscow's power games in Central Asia, given that important economic and security relations have been developed between the five Central Asian states and the Russian Federation. They are based on their common legacy of statehood, traced back to the Soviet regime, but also on their cultural relations rooted in a common cultural heritage, with the Russian language as a central element. Thus, Russia is the great power for which the geopolitical space of Central Asia with its five republics that belonged to the former USSR represents an area of strategic interest, a geopolitical area that created a terrible strategic discomfort for Moscow after the secession of these republics from the Soviet Union. Considering that all the fourteen independent states which used to belong to the Soviet Union are part of what Russian strategists refer to as the “Close Neighbourhood”, then the five Central Asian republics of interest to us also fall under this strategic concept. The “Close Neighbourhood” reflects Kremlin's policy for this geopolitical space and it is obviously an attempt to keep it in its area of influence. Janusz Bugajski and Margarita Assenova, experts in international relations, have analysed Russia's vision on the Central Asian region after the dissolution of USSR and noted that: “Central Asia is a vital part of the Heartland that Russia lost after the dissolution of the Soviet Union, but has relentlessly tried to retain control of since then, claiming it as a zone of privileged interests”¹³.

According to the theses of offensive realism promoted by Mearsheimer, “in international politics the actual power of a State depends fundamentally on its military forces and their level compared to the military forces of other States”¹⁴. In analysing Russia's, China's and the USA's military power relations,

¹¹ Ibid., 8.

¹² Ibid., 4.

¹³ Janusz Bugajski and Margarita Assenova, *Eurasian Disunion. Russia's Venerable Flanks* (Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2016), 371.

¹⁴ Ibid., 44.

in Central Asia, it can be argued that the military power of the Russian state, taking into account its military potential and geographical position, produces the strongest regional impact, compared to the other two. Grounding many of their foreign policy strategies on the principles of offensive realism, the leaders of the Russian state aimed to permanently establish their influence in the Central Asian region. To do so they promoted the image of the Kremlin's military prowess, starting from the principle that “in international politics, power is essentially the product of the military forces that a State possesses”¹⁵. But the so-called “imperial restoration”, as a general strategy of the Kremlin in Vladimir Putin's era, mentioned by a number of experts of contemporary Russian geopolitics, could not be achieved using soft power tools, since, as French specialist in Russian history, Hélène Carrère d'Encausse noted, “military resources are needed to rebuild an empire”¹⁶.

Aware that the strongest states possess the most important armies¹⁷, Kremlin's strategy to increase Russia's military presence in Central Asia has been to maintain the existing military bases dating back to the Soviet period and set up new military bases in the region, a mandatory condition, in the vision of the Russian strategists, for Russia to acquire in the future the status of regional hegemon. In the spirit of offensive realism, Russia has the potential to become the hegemon of Central Asia and actively seeks to achieve this strategic goal, since hegemony is seen as the optimal form of security for any great power¹⁸. Thus, Russia has seven military bases in Kazakhstan and thousands of soldiers deployed since it is seen as the most important state for Moscow in the region in terms of military presence; in Kyrgyzstan, it has four military bases; while in Tajikistan, there are two Russian bases. The last two countries are the least economically developed in Central Asia.

As mentioned earlier, most of these Russian military bases date back to the Soviet period, but, although the population of the five republics is accustomed to Russian soldiers stationed in the region for decades, the military power of these bases is now being perceived as a threat by the states of this region given the level of endowment on display in these bases – both in terms of the modern military techniques used and of the equipment present there. For Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, the existence of the Russian bases on their territory is linked to the high level of economic dependence that these states have on Russia. Meanwhile, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have no Russian military presence on their territory, both countries pursuing an isolationist foreign policy

¹⁵ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 64.

¹⁶ Hélène Carrère d'Encausse, *URSS a murit, trăiască Rusia!* (București: Editura Artemis, 2010), 98.

¹⁷ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 64.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 246.

in relation to Moscow¹⁹. Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula in 2014, but especially the motivation behind the Russian military intervention in the Ukrainian territory – namely that it was there for the protection of the rights and interests of the Russian-speaking population in Crimea – raised concerns in the five Central Asian republics, because each of them has a considerable Russian minority which, as in eastern Ukraine, could at any time be a reason for the Kremlin's military intervention in any of these countries.

If the Russian military bases in Central Asia reflect Moscow's considerable influence in this region, we believe that this favourable position from a geopolitical standpoint as regards the regional state actors was facilitated among others by the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a structure created in 2001, which currently includes alongside Russia, China, India, Pakistan, as well as four Central Asian republics – Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan²⁰. Since the creation of this organisation, its overall strategy has been to enhance the political, economic and military cooperation between its Member States, but given the general security situation in Central Asia and the neighbouring regions, the organisation aims now to combat separatism and fight terrorism of any kind. Taking into account the massive expansion of American power in Central Asia since the fall of 2001, with the outbreak of the war in Afghanistan, a series of security experts believe that both Moscow and Beijing have set as major strategic goal for SCO to counter the influence of the United States in Central Asia.

The strategic partnership between Russia and China, signed in 1996, has created a broad framework for cooperation between these two major powers in various fields, and at the same time led to opportunities to expand the cooperation with other states in different regions of Asia. Moscow's and Beijing's official statements convey that the Russian-Chinese partnership is not aimed at counteracting the global influence of the US or of the European Union. Yet, given the developments in the strategic environment in the first decade of this century which have been dominated by the expansion of the American power worldwide, and especially by the application of the doctrine of preventive warfare launched by the Bush administration, Russia and China have constantly increased their cooperative relations in various fields, and, particularly, in the economic and security ones.

Although the strategic partnership between Moscow and Beijing is a quarter of a century old, and although the cooperation between the two

¹⁹ Ali Emre Sucu, "The Importance of Russian Military Presence in Central Asia for Russia's Regional Security", *Akademik Hassasiyetler* (2017), accessed May, 20, 2020, <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/394579>.

²⁰ SCO was established in 2001 and included six states: Russia, China, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. A group of states – Mongolia, Iran, India and Pakistan – gained observer status in the following years. In June 2017, India and Pakistan joined SCOs and acquired full membership.

countries has reached a high level, the two states have a number of divergent interests in Central Asia, which explains why any attempt made by Russia to become the hegemon in this region is strongly opposed by Beijing. Bugajski and Assenova characterise the power relations between Moscow and Beijing in Central Asia as follows:

“While Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan seem to be firmly in Moscow’s grip (although Beijing is competing for influence in Kyrgyzstan), Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan are increasing their cooperation with China on a bilateral basis and through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)”²¹.

Looking back over the past two decades, we can argue that 2003, when the war in Iraq was launched, was an important milestone for the Russian Federation in re-establishing its power relations with the Central Asian states, given that Moscow geopolitical interests were in direct competition with those pursued by the United States in the region. If until 2003, Moscow’s geopolitical interests in Central Asia had not been hindered by Washington, a situation enabled by Russia’s support for the global war on terrorism, subsequently, due to America’s foreign and security policy that was difficult to predict and hyper-focused on the military power, the Kremlin adopted a foreign policy strategy that sought to distance itself from the United States.

The causes behind the obvious cooling in Russian-American relations are many, but three of them are especially relevant in this context:

- a) the hegemonic policy of the United States, that disregarded Moscow’s interests;
- b) the continued enlargement of NATO towards Russia’s eastern border;
- c) the promotion of the doctrine of preventive war as a tool of Washington’s foreign and security policy.

Thus, in view of the developments in world politics, but above all, in view of Washington’s hegemonic behaviour, Russia abandoned the strategic option of approaching the United States, especially after 2003, and pursued a policy where China was seen as a more likely security partner of the Kremlin.

IV.2. The Chinese Position

China, the second largest power analysed in this study, reached a high level of political, economic and military cooperation with the five Central Asian states during the post-Soviet era, when it became a redoubtable player in an Asian region that had been entirely under the control of Moscow until three decades ago. The geographical position (China shares a common border with three Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – spanning

²¹ Bugajski and Assenova, *Eurasian Disunion*, 378.

2,800 kilometres) as well as the pace of economic development are two of the main elements that stimulated the opening of China's foreign policy to this region. In the field of offensive realism, cooperation between states is regarded with a certain restraint: one of the principles of offensive realism stipulates that states do not know the intentions of other states, but when cooperation is accepted, it is an opportunity to maximise power to the detriment of competitors. Thus, according to Mearsheimer, “this cooperation takes place in a fundamentally competitive world, in which States are strongly motivated to take advantage of other states”²². And as we will see, Beijing acted in Central Asia guided by the principles of cooperation specific to offensive realism.

During the past twenty years, China has shown that it is a great power with a strong influence in various Asian regions, including Central Asia. The author Vladimir Paramonov, following the spectacular growth of the Chinese economy at the beginning of this century, remarked how China's role in world politics in the 21st century was taking shape: “Whereas in the 1990s, globalisation was called *Americanisation*, it is now to a large extent *Chinification*”²³. Although Beijing has currently less military power than Russia and the United States, especially in the field of strategic nuclear weapons, Chinese political leaders understood very well from the first years after the dissolution of the USSR, that China can and should be a strong player in Central Asia, mainly by exercising a substantial economic influence in the entire region. For China, Central Asia was seen as:

“a gateway to Europe, offering land transportation corridors to deliver Chinese goods to European markets much faster than maritime transportation routes. With current trade volumes between China and the EU worth over one billion euros a day, Beijing is interested in rapidly building alternative railways and highways throughout Central Asia”²⁴.

The secession of the five Central Asian states from the former USSR offered China a favourable strategic situation. Amidst their antipathy towards Moscow, Beijing was able to capitalise on the geopolitical context of the post-Soviet period by using economic tools. The Chinese state has initiated and developed well-calibrated strategies for the political and economic rapprochement with the Central Asian republics during the earlier decades. At present, China is perceived by these states as a great power wielding a strong geopolitical influence, but also as the country which is developing economic projects on a large scale, thus increasing the economic dependence of the five republics on Beijing.

²² Ibid., 42.

²³ Vladimir Paramonov, “China & Central Asia: Present & Future of Economic Relations”, *Central Asian series, Conflict Studies Research Centre*, May 2005, 05/25(E), 1.

²⁴ Bugajski and Assenova, *Eurasian Disunion*, 371.

In seeking to transform China into a major world economic power, Beijing saw Central Asia as a geopolitical and economic space with a high capacity to meet the enormous needs for raw materials and energy resources necessary to sustain the Chinese economy. Thus, the communist authorities have acted in a spirit of offensive realism during the past two decades in order to make the most of the economic cooperation with the Central Asian states. This was done in order to increase its latent power, since “greater economic prosperity means greater wealth, and this has important implications with respect to security”²⁵.

The emergence of the five Central Asian republics in the wake of the collapse of the USSR in the early 1990s did not automatically lead to the development of these states’ economic relations with China, as the pace of political and economic reform was rather slow and did not foster the rapid development of their external relations. Especially after the first decade since the republics gained their independence, the Chinese state and many Chinese private companies have developed extremely ambitious investments in the region. China sought to best position itself from a geopolitical point of view, and achieve its economic interests in Central Asia. Establishing a connection with these countries was possible thanks to the development of a vast network of roads, railways, communications, flights and pipelines for the shipment of oil and gas.

While, today, the economic relations between China and the Central Asian states have reached an extremely high level of cooperation, with Beijing becoming the main trading partner of the Central Asian republics, this was not the case nearly two decades ago. According to the official data, in 2003 the trade between China and the Central Asian countries was modest, the total volume of foreign trade with the Chinese State amounting to 8.9%. Thus, out of the total foreign trade of each Central Asian country, the share of trade with China was of 13.6% for Kazakhstan, 3.2% for Uzbekistan, 2.1% for Turkmenistan, 8.3% for Kyrgyzstan and 0.8% for Tajikistan. This was at a time when China had just begun to make the most of the opportunities offered by Central Asia’s rich raw material and energy resources. Meanwhile, the Central Asian states’ share of China’s total foreign trade represented only 0.4%²⁶.

In the years since, China’s economic relations with these states witnessed a significant growth given the sustained increase in the needs of the Chinese economy for raw materials and energy resources and the desire of the Chinese authorities for Beijing to become the main trading partner of the region. In 2013, the value of trade between China and the Central Asian republics reached around 50 billion dollars, with Beijing becoming the largest investor in the region, outperforming Russia. Striving to become a regional

²⁵ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 38.

²⁶ Paramonov, “China & Central Asia”, 1-2.

leader in the development of energy industry, Beijing has developed a strong economic relationship with Kazakhstan, a country with huge hydrocarbon resources. At the beginning of the second decade of this century, it managed to control the production of oil from Kazakhstan through China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) surpassing all Western companies operating in the oil industry.

Over the past two decades, Beijing has gradually transformed Uzbekistan into an important economic partner in Central Asia, with the volume of Chinese trade and investment in the state reflecting the interest of the country and of the Chinese enterprises in developing the economic cooperation with this republic. The cooperation between these two states in the field of energy is worth noting: not only was the Uzbekistan-China gas pipeline completed during this period, but joint oil and uranium mining projects have also been elements of a common cooperation agenda in recent years. Through this cooperation, China did not hesitate to emphasise the principles of offensive realism in order to increase its latent power in this region. Considering that by 2017, the volume of trade between China and Uzbekistan had already reached \$3.8 billion and that China has currently more than 30 investment projects in this state that exceed \$4 billion, it can be estimated that the relations between the two neighbours are developing at a very rapid pace.

Furthermore, in the same context of economic cooperation, Beijing has paid close attention to the economic relations with Kyrgyzstan, with China becoming one of the country's most important trading partners. Although the entire potential for cooperation between China and Kyrgyzstan is not currently being fully exploited, the Chinese authorities will certainly identify investment projects that will be beneficial to both states in the coming years²⁷.

Beijing's ambitious strategy, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (a veritable new Silk Road), launched in Kazakhstan in 2013, is a major project by which China exports its economic power to dozens of countries in Asia, Africa and Europe, an initiative by which the Chinese state aims to achieve significant economic and infrastructure goals in Central Asia well. The region is thought of as an essential component of this project through which Beijing aims to increase interconnectivity and economic cooperation not only throughout Eurasia, but also as a springboard to the African continent. Through the BRI, China has undertaken massive investments in infrastructure, including the construction and modernisation of roads, bridges, airports, seaports and railways that will play an important role in the economic integration of the less developed regions of western China in the economy of Eurasia.

A number of important economic projects included in the BRI are to be implemented in the Central Asian states, bringing significant economic benefits

²⁷ Mihaela Trăistar, „Actori noi în vechiul Mare Joc din Asia Centrală”, *RISAP*, September 9, 2018, accessed April 15, 2020, <http://risap.ro/actori-noi-in-vechiul-mare-joc-din-asia-centrala/>.

in the coming years to both sides. China's strong influence in this region is not based on military power, compared to Russia, which has a considerable military presence in Central Asia. The way in which the communist state uses its latent power²⁸ in the context of the power games involving the competing Russian and American powers proves that the Chinese state, by relying on its economic strength, has found the optimal strategies that have enabled it to maintain the balance of power in Central Asia.

Given China's annual military expenditure (the Chinese state had the second largest military budget in the world in 2019 (\$181 billion), after the United States²⁹), over the next decade, China's power and influence in Central Asia will not be limited only to the economic side, but will also likely involve a military presence as well. China is at present a major economic power, and as Mearsheimer puts it, "greater economic prosperity will always mean greater wealth, which has important security implications, inasmuch as wealth is the foundation of military power"³⁰. In other words, with the substantial growth of its military power in the coming decades, China will act in the spirit of offensive realism with the aim of becoming the dominant power in Central Asia. This principle applies to any great power and it is born out of the desire to dominate the other rival great powers. To become the regional hegemon in Central Asia would mean, at the same time, to meet Beijing's main economic interests in this geopolitical space, to reach an appropriate level of security at China's border regions, which would reduce the probability of extremism and secessionist movements. But achieving hegemony in Central Asia in the decades to come is not an easy. Why is this strategic goal so difficult to fulfil? Because at least one other major power namely Russia, also seeks to become the supreme authority in Central Asia. As we have shown previously, Moscow's foreign policy is often guided by the principles of offensive realism.

Bearing in mind the growing needs of the Chinese economy for energy resources and raw materials and the enormous potential that Central Asia offers in this respect, it seems inevitable that China's geopolitical and geo-economic interests will collide with those of Russia and the United States. The new arms race launched in recent years, in which, according to Western intelligence reports that contradict the public information released by Beijing regarding its

²⁸ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 44.

²⁹ Raluca Anghel, „Cheltuielile militare globale au atins în 2019 cel mai ridicat nivel de la terminarea Războiului Rece”, *Agerpres*, April 27, 2020, accessed May 10, 2020, https://www.agerpres.ro/politica-externa/2020/04/27/cheltuielile-militare-globale-au-atins-in-2019-cel-mai-ridicat-nivel-de-la-sfarsitul-razboiului-rece-raport--493686?fbclid=IwAR38JPXbOaOG1pdLQxkhzWOqvlSFwzww_xfAq7gGKgRzITTFgyVVgAQVI_c. According to information released by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) at the Security Conference, in Munich, Germany (February 2020), in 2019 the first two states in the world in terms of military budgets were the US \$ 685 billion and China \$ \$ 181 billion.

³⁰ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 38.

arms policy, China is becoming extremely active, will also have an effect on the Central Asian space. Certainly, within the framework of the Russian-Chinese strategic partnership, the two of them will continue to work together in the field of security, given the number of common interests that they share in Central Asia especially as concerns the rise of religious extremism, separatism and terrorism. Both States are aware that the development of a security hotbed in one of the states of the region due to one of these causes may also extend to them. Thus, in the years to come, beyond the power relations between the two great powers, a manifestation which is in keeping with the logic of offensive realism, the dimension of cooperation in the field of security will likely be maintained, though this will not exclude any of them from continuing to accumulate power in order to acquire regional hegemony.

IV.3. The American Position

The United States of America is the third major power which we analyse in this study, a state which, although an extra-regional power relative to the Central Asian republics, has a strong geopolitical influence in this region, asserting itself as an important competitor in the context of the regional power agreements concluded between Moscow and Beijing. Thus, the United States, the state which after the end of the Cold War was the world's only superpower, became increasingly interested in the Central Asian region after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 and the start of the war in Afghanistan in the fall of that year.

A preliminary analysis of the geopolitical relations between the United States and the five Central Asian countries over the last three decades leads us to conclude that, although the United States was among the first western states to recognise the independence of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and establish diplomatic relations with these countries, the pragmatic foreign policy pursued in Washington at that time did not consider Central Asia to be a strategic priority for the US. Where the US policy-makers were concerned, Central Asia was perceived in the early 1990s as a remote region outside Washington's strategic interests, which resulted in a limited US involvement when it came to resolving the problems of this region, such as the border conflicts that arose shortly after the disintegration of the USSR, even though the US administration possessed the full range of political and military means to settle the conflicts that could have erupted in any part of the world.

The inclusion of the North Atlantic Alliance of Central Asian states in the Partnership for Peace has strengthened this region's relations with the West, leading to a new stage in the political evolution of those countries. After all, their foreign policy did not only have to reconsider the relation with the United States, but also with the other states of the western family as well. The

ratification by the United States Congress of the “Silk Road Act”, in 1999, represented an important stepping stone in the development of cooperative relations between Washington and the five republics. The “Silk Road Act” was expected to provide support to the economic and political independence of these countries, which were still struggling with the after-effects left by the Soviet regime. This is how Uzbekistan’s international relations expert Mirzokhid Rakhimov assesses the importance of this law for Central Asia:

“This initiative aimed at providing assistance in border protection, maintaining the ban on drugs trade, strengthening non-proliferation, and suppressing transnational criminals, as well as providing humanitarian assistance and supporting the development of free markets and a regional infrastructure. Security and anti-terrorism have become important aspects of the relations of the Central Asian countries and the United States”³¹.

Amidst the critical attitudes expressed by various political figures in Moscow and Beijing with regards to Washington’s unipolarism in the international system and the new trends emerging in world politics, the beginning of the 21st century brought about a change in the United States’ strategy towards Central Asia. In the spring of 2000, the United States announced the “Central Asian Border Security Initiative” (CABSI), a project designed by Washington to define the cooperation and coordination of various international actors in the field of border security by establishing regular dialogue sessions at the regional level with the interested state actors in Central Asia. This was followed in September 2000 by the US State Department’s inclusion of the Islamist movement in Uzbekistan on the list of terrorist organisations, which, from a different perspective, reinforced Washington’s growing interest in the Central Asian region.

The terrorist attacks against the United States from September 11 were an important moment for the relation with the Central Asian states which expressed their support to Washington in the fight against terrorism. Three of them – Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan – even put elements of their military infrastructure, at the disposal of the US, as part of their support for the coalition forces that took part in the Afghanistan war that started on October 7, 2001. The events of September 11 produced unexpected geopolitical effects, giving Russian President Vladimir Putin the opportunity to initiate a political project dating from the time of Boris Yeltsin, respectively a Russia-US-China partnership, a formula through which Moscow hoped that Washington would be compelled to recognise Russia as a world power³². In this respect, the rapprochement between Moscow and Washington in the aftermath of the

³¹ Mirzokhid Rakhimov, “Central Asia in the Context of Western and Russian Interests”, *L’Europe en formation*, no. 375 (Printemps 2015 - Spring 2015): 145.

³² Carrère d’Encausse, *URSS a murit, trăiască Rusia!*, 120.

September 11 terrorist attacks, where the two put aside their geopolitical rivalries for a brief moment, is one of the reference episodes in the history of contemporary international relations, even if this Russian-American cooperation was not going to last too long. In the autumn of 2001, Russia offered strategic support to the United States and a “green light” for actions to be taken in the geopolitical space of Central Asia, without consulting with China first, despite their strategic partnership. This was a warning sign for the leadership in Beijing, which viewed with suspicion Moscow’s and Washington’s geopolitical game in Central Asia.

The massive increase in American military and economic presence in the Central Asian region, witnessed since 2001, was optimistically viewed by some local political leaders as an alternative to the regional hegemony tendencies manifested by Russia, but also by China, a country which as we have seen had already embarked on its economic expansion in the region. The fact that the political leaders of the Central Asian states had the political opportunity to move even closer to Washington was an uncomfortable foreign policy issue for Moscow and Beijing to which both states had to find appropriate responses.

The presence of the United States in Central Asia since October 2001, with its impressive contingent of troops deployed to Afghanistan, created strategic unrest for Beijing, but did not deter the Chinese from continuing to implement their economic projects in the Central Asian states.

In the Russian case, following 2001, a series of events initiated by the United States that had a great geopolitical and geostrategic impact (NATO expansion to Eastern Europe and the incorporation of the Baltic states; the outbreak of the war in Iraq, etc.) – led Moscow to reconsider its rapprochement to Washington and regard its strategic partnership with Beijing with increasing confidence. However, even though Moscow decided to distance itself from Washington, the situation in Central Asia had changed significantly by that point:

“In 2003-2004, when the Russian-American relationship had deteriorated, the strategic situation in Central Asia would not return to the previous stage. Three major states – Russia, China and the United States – were firmly established in the region, determined to defend the positions they had acquired”³³.

The “New Silk Road”, a strategic, political and economic initiative launched by Robert Hormats, former US Secretary of State for Growth, Energy and the Environment, in 2011³⁴, envisages the development of investment, infrastructure and trade along a corridor that includes several Asian regions with

³³ Carrère d’Encausse, *URSS a murit, trăiască Rusia!*, 129.

³⁴ Mircea Geoană, „România la 100 de ani și Noul Drum al Mătăsii”, *Sinteza. Revistă de cultură și gândire. strategică*, October 27, 2014, accessed March 11, 2020, <https://www.revistasinteza.ro/romania-la-100-de-ani-si-noul-drum-al-matasii>.

Central Asia in particular playing an extremely important role. We believe that the most important moment that has shaped the future cooperative relations between the United States and the Central Asian states during this period, has been the launching of the “New Silk Road” against the backdrop of Washington’s fierce competition with Moscow and Beijing for maximising their power in this region.

The construction of highways for the transport of natural gas and oil in the Caspian Sea region and Central Asia, one of the main objectives of the New Silk Road, intensified the rivalries between the three great powers, while also attracting other Asian states interested in the economic returns of this large-scale project, namely Japan, India and South Korea. At present, a number of geopolitical experts believe that Washington’s interest in the New Silk Road has increased, in light of the United States’ growing strategic rivalry with Beijing. They argue that this type of strategy could undermine China’s major project, the Belt and Road Initiative, launched two years previously. Thus, the American leaders want to allocate large sums of money for investment projects connected to the New Silk Road, but also encourage their Asian allies to boost their investments in this project, in order to reduce the odds that the states in the region would participate in the initiative launched by the Chinese state.

In the geopolitical context created by the war in Afghanistan, it can be said that Russia and China, aside from their competing interests in certain parts of Asia, also have certain geostrategic interests that bring them together, for instance, the opposition to the United States as a superpower and its dealings in world politics. Another commonality would be to prevent the configuration of a balance of power that favours Washington in certain regions of the Asian continent, such as Central Asia. This shared interest in the security balance in Central Asia must be seen from at least two perspectives. Firstly, both Russia and China want an adequate level of security in the Central Asian region as a way of eliminating the danger of exporting insecurity to their states, thus they encourage the presence of foreign investment. Secondly, Moscow’s and Beijing’s geopolitical interests in Central Asia are in contradiction with those of the United States, because the two of them desire as little American influence as possible in the central part of the Asian continent.

The existing strategic partnership between Beijing and Moscow, even though regarded by many Western specialists in Chinese foreign and security policy as a “marriage of interests” that will not endure, raises concerns among those who fear that this partnership could become a solid alliance, thus creating a thorny problem for Washington. A quarter of a century ago, Henry Kissinger, trying to imagine what the evolution of world politics might look like in the coming decades, asked a question that reflected the depth of his analysis:

“Can the United States afford to try to isolate Russia and China simultaneously and in the name of its domestic preferences, to bring the Sino-Soviet alliance back to life?”³⁵

The right answer to this question can only be that, on the long term, Washington cannot afford a simultaneous confrontational relationship with the two Eurasian powers. Even during the Cold War, the United States had thawed its relations with Beijing beginning with 1972, and managed to draw the Asian state on its side of the barricade with respect to the USSR, which created, in turn, a great strategic problem for Moscow. In other words, regardless of the strategic rivalries which exist between the three great powers in Central Asia, Washington, per Kissinger’s realist thinking, will have to find bridges of cooperation so that, in the long run, Moscow and Beijing would be forced to transform their strategic partnership into an alliance against the United States. Moreover, we believe that the diplomats in Washington, just like their predecessors in the beginning of the 1970s, will have to find the right solutions which will unfreeze the relations with one of the two rivals, and this course of action will be dictated by the fundamental interests of the American government.

V. Conclusions

Both China and Russia, as we have seen in Central Asia, take a united stand against the reluctance of the United States to include them in the new post-Cold War world order. This attitude can also be seen in their shared political attitude at the UN and in other world forums, where Washington tries to impose certain rules and regulations that are contrary to the national interests of Beijing and Moscow. Furthermore, the political attitude that China adopts in international relations when global problems are debated in international institutions is based on certain truths that are hard to refute: “The world order, as it is now constituted, was built without China’s participation. Consequently, China feels less bound by regulations in which it did not participate”³⁶.

Although China and Russia are trying to work together to achieve certain economic goals in Central Asia, China in particular, through its major industrial and commercial arms, has positioned itself very well in this region, seeking to win all the market segments in the region, notwithstanding the fierce competition. Official statistics show that Beijing’s economic relations with Central Asia have reached a high level of development, higher than that

³⁵ Henry Kissinger, *Diplomația* (București: Editura All, 2013), 712.

³⁶ Henry Kissinger, *Despre China* (București: Editura Comunicare.ro, 2018), 512.

achieved by Moscow and Washington, reflecting the great interest not only on the part of the Chinese state as an economic player, but also of the Chinese companies in this market.

The preservation of the balance of power in Central Asia will depend largely on the geopolitical position of each state in the region, but also on the future relations between the five Central Asian republics. Up to now, the Central Asian states, through the cooperative relations they have developed with Russia, China and the United States, but also due to the fabric of relations formed between them, have not offered the possibility for a major regional or extra-regional power to become the dominant power in the region and therefore emerge as a future hegemon. We believe that the existing equilibrium in the Central Asian region today, in terms of the power relations between the three major state actors analysed, represents an ideal geopolitical situation that allows the five countries to progress along the path of economic and social modernisation. Despite the desire for hegemony of Russia and China alike, in accordance with the principles of offensive realism, we believe that the United States and undoubtedly India, due its rapidly growing power, have the strength to influence the regional geopolitical environment so that in the next two or three decades, no great power will become the dominant actor in Central Asia.

In the coming years, the rivalry between the major powers in Central Asia and throughout the geopolitical space of the New Silk Road will increase, and each major power will try to exert as much control as possible in order to be able to dominate the region, but also “to prevent rivals coming from other areas from acquiring hegemony”³⁷. It is possible that in the context of the rapid growth in power of one of the key actors operating in Central Asia, one state may reach the point where it perceives that it is threatened by another and, in the logic of offensive realism, it will seek to create an alliance to balance its adversary. Though it is difficult to predict which of the three major powers analysed is likely to reach such a strategic position, we believe that the great “geopolitical battles” of the 21st century for global hegemony will take place between the great powers in the Asian space as defined by the New Silk Road, both on land and at sea, a “battlefield” in which Central Asia will play a pivotal role.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This paper was financially supported by the Human Capital Operational Program 2014-2020, co-financed by the European Social Fund, under the project POCU/380/6/13/124708, no. 37141/23.05.2019, with the title “Researcher-Entrepreneur on the Labour Market in the Fields of Intelligent Specialization (CERT-ANTREP)”, coordinated by the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration.

³⁷ Mearsheimer, *Tragedia politicii de forță*, 103.

REFERENCES

- Anghel, Raluca. „Cheltuielile militare globale au atins în 2019 cel mai ridicat nivel de la terminarea Războiului Rece”. *Agerpress*, April 27, 2020. Accessed May 10, 2020. https://www.agerpres.ro/politica-externa/2020/04/27/cheltuielile-militare-globale-au-atins-in-2019-cel-mai-ridicat-nivel-de-la-sfarsitul-razboiului-rece-raport--493686?fbclid=IwAR38JpXbOaOG1pdLQxkhzWOqvlSFWzwv_xfAq7gGKgRzITfgyVVgAQVI_c.
- Bugajski, Janusz, and Margarita Assenova. *Eurasian Disunion. Russia's Venerable Flanks*. Washington DC: The Jamestown Foundation, 2016.
- Carrerère d'Encausse, Hélène. *URSS a murit, trăiască Rusia!* București: Editura Artemis, 2010.
- Geoană, Mircea. „România la 100 de ani și Noul Drum al Mătăsi”. *Sinteza. Revistă de cultură și gândire. strategică*, October 27, 2014. Accessed March 11, 2020. <https://www.revistasinteza.ro/romania-la-100-de-ani-si-noul-drum-al-matasii>.
- Kissinger, Henry. *Despre China*. București: Editura Comunicare.ro, 2018.
- Kissinger, Henry. *World Order. Reflections on the Character of Nations and the Course of History*. New York: Penguin Books, 2014.
- Kissinger, Henry, *Diplomația*. București: Editura All, 2013.
- Mearsheimer, John J. *Tragedia politicii de forță. Realismul ofensiv și lupta pentru putere*. Filipeștii de Târg, Prahova: Editura Antet XX Press, 2001.
- Paramonov, Vladimir. “China & Central Asia: Present & Future of Economic Relations”. *Conflict Studies Research Centre, Central Asian series*, May 2005, 05/25(E).
- Rakhimov, Mirzokhid. “Central Asia in the Context of Western and Russian Interests”. *L'Europe en formation*, no. 375 (Printemps 2015 - Spring 2015): 140-154.
- Sucu, Ali Emre. “The Importance of Russian Military Presence in Central Asia for Russia's Regional Security”. *Akademik Hassasiyetler*, (2017): 125-138. Accessed May, 20, 2020. <https://dergipark.org.tr/tr/download/article-file/394579>.
- Trăistar, Mihaela. „Actori noi în vechiul Mare Joc din Asia Centrală”. *RISAP*, September 9, 2018. Accessed April 15, 2020. <http://risap.ro/actori-noi-in-vechiul-mare-joc-din-asia-centrala/>.
- Walt, Stephen M. “The World Wants You to Think Like a Realist”. *Foreign Policy*, May 30, 2020. Accessed June 10, 2020. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/05/30/the-world-wants-you-to-think-like-a-realist/>.