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## The Increase in Geopolitical Competition as a Challenge (threat) to Russia's National Security

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**Abstract:**

*This article attempts to make a comprehensive analysis of the impact of "geopolitical competition" policy on the state and future development of national security of the Russian Federation. We believe that geopolitical competition is caused not only by the need to protect national interests, but also acts as the condition that generates threats (challenges) to national security.*

*The article deals with external factors, such as the transformation of geopolitical competition, changes in the post-Soviet space, and the development of the Arctic, as well as two internal factors, which concern the attainment of national identity and the militarization of public life, because we believe that these factors have the most negative impact on the state of national security in the Russian Federation.*

*Geopolitical competition is currently increasing because of the aggravation of relations between states because of the distribution of spheres of influence.*

**Keywords.** *National security, geopolitics, geopolitical competition, geopolitical status, challenges, threats, Arctic, post-Soviet space, colonialism, national identity, militarization.*

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## **1. Introduction**

The collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 gave the world a hope that the termination of the ideological and military rivalry between the two superpowers will make world unipolar. This hope was associated with expectations for the establishment of a lasting peace, the strengthening of integration processes, and formation of single all-planetary space, built based on universal human values. Now we know that all this turned out to be futile. We live in a reality of shattered hopes and unfulfilled expectations. The world, as it was multipolar, remained so. More specifically, its outlines have acquired great stochasticity, blurriness, and diversity. The world became less predictable and more dangerous. Peoples of different countries are currently feeling greater vulnerability to threats. This happens, at least, because the number of threats themselves has increased, while vectors, from where the threats are originated, have gained most unexpected trajectory. Such a situation leads to a sharp increase in geopolitical competition between states that, in turn leads inevitably to production of variety of challenges to the national security of a state.

All the above fully applies to the Russian Federation. Though Russia is the legal successor of the Soviet Union on the international arena, the latter has not become the prototype for Russia. And as such, Russia inherited a dual set of problems, actualized in the above quality. First, Russia has the sharp contradictions in terms of foreign policy with former Soviet republics. Some of these contradictions, such as those about Ukraine and Georgia, are associated with unregulated territorial disputes. Other contradictions (about Baltic States and Moldavia) are generated by the complicated history of the relationships that gives rise to old complexes and fears. The conflict nature of relationship with the neighbors becomes one of the reasons, which creates geopolitical vacuum in the system of the friendly relations of Russia on neighboring territories, exacerbating intercountry communication at different levels. Second, the collapse of the USSR has set to the Russian Federation the problem of finding a new civilizational identity. In Russia, it is just beginning to emerge, though even at the initial stage it detects significant contradiction regarding the expectations of our American and European partners in respect of the values of the new Russia. This circumstance gradually turns our former partners to geopolitical rivals.

Strengthening of the above-mentioned trends will result in strengthening of the geopolitical competition that potentially, if the processes will continue occurring in the noted direction, is able to produce multiple threats to Russia's national security. In connection with the foregoing, the purpose of our article can be determined as conduction of a comprehensive analysis of geopolitical threats that infringe on the national security of the Russian Federation. The research tasks consist in study of two problems 1) considering external and internal implications of increasing geopolitical competition for Russia; 2) associating the identified effects of geopolitical competition with threats to national security.

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## 2. Methodology

The proposed study was performed based on the general scientific principles of historicism, comparative and historical analysis, comparative analysis, and typological method. The examination of relevant Internet sites that host materials devoted to problems of international relations (around the countries (regions) such as Syria, Ukraine, Georgia, the Southeast of Ukraine, etc.) was carried out with the use of specifically applied empirical methods. In addition, we have considered in detail the relevant laws and regulations related to the national security of the Russian Federation. They include the Federal Law "On Security" No. 390-FZ dated December 10, 2010 (On Security, 2010), "The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020", approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No.683 dated December 31, 2015 (The National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation until 2020, 2015), and "The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation" approved by the Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. PR-2976 dated December 25, 2014 (The Military Doctrine of the Russian Federation, 2014).

## 3. Results

Geopolitical competition is a reality of modern life, which is characterized by rivalry between states competing for leadership in global, regional, or at least local scale (Brzezinsky, 2007). The objectives that are faced by the countries entering a phase of interaction between each other in terms of competition, have many semantic components, through which quite often come to the surface completely secondary declarations, having no real value to national security of a particular country, though acting as a certain integrative factor that allows creating regulatory space for the organization of intra-bloc cooperation (Brzezinsky, 1983). As a rule, the created interstate blocs have a latent orientation against the policy of another cross-country bloc or any other state having a significant impact in the world. Nowadays, Russia is often becoming such a state experiencing currently severe pressure from the EU and some individual countries.

Russia has a favorable geopolitical position. For one thing, Russia is the largest territorial power in the world that has the longest land and sea borders. The Russian Federation occupies the territory rich in mineral resources, fishery resources, and continental shelf is practically unused economically. In addition, the country has managed to maintain the status of nuclear weapon state, whose strategic reserves of missile weapons are capable to fight back any potential enemy. All the above potentially gives rise or is able to produce high level of aspirations and ambitions. But it's not just that. The objective geopolitical position of Russia eliminates the possibility to position itself as a neutral state, distancing itself from world conflicts. To protect national interests, Russia is forced to engage in geopolitical rivalry, because ignoring it will entail a whole range of threats to national security. On the other hand, the adoption of the rules of the "geopolitical infighting" game is

becoming a contributing factor to the challenges and threats (Huntington, 2004; Huntington, 1996), because in any game there are winners and losers, while the losers almost always nourish revanchist ideas that are potentially dangerous for opponents.

Thus, geopolitical competition is not only invoked by the need to protect national interests, but also acts as an independent factor generating threat to national security. Consider several external factors, which in terms of geopolitical competition adversely affect the national security of Russia.

As the first of these, let's call the transformation of geopolitical competition taking place at the present stage. As known, until the mid-twentieth century Western countries and some of Asian states (e.g., Japan) professed principles of the struggle for the possession of territories. Large colonial empires were created, whose metropolises were focused on exploitation of the resources of their outskirts. However, since the middle of last century, geopolitics has undergone significant changes. From now on the competition is focused not on direct control over the territories, but towards informational influence, which allows holding the desired territory in the framework of a single value-normative space (Global Trends, 2025: A transformed world, 2008).

Meanwhile, the Russian Federation, in some degree remained in the grip of the old paradigm of thinking, based on the colonial rivalry policy. This is partly due to the legacy of the extremely arbitrary treatment of territories in the times of Soviet past. This resulted in the fact that absolutely all the former republics were "offended" by the former Soviet leadership. This also applies to Russia (RSFSR), which has lost Crimea because of arbitrary decision made by N.S. Khrushchev, and got train wreck waiting to happen in practice of future international relations. Though, mostly the causes of modern Russian colonialism are generated by a recourse dominant of Russia's economy that dramatically reduces the geopolitical potential of the Russian foreign policy. Russia produces just 2% of world GDP. Nevertheless, the concern is caused not only by this indicator itself, but rather the fact that the Russian economy is hopelessly behind the advanced countries in development of high technologies. Another point is that Russian business is dependent on the state policy, and is not able to independently claim its demands in the global economic space. At the same time, major global companies are quite willing to carry out actions aimed at creation of appropriate preparatory ground for the implementation of geopolitical impact without purposeful political and especially military actions. In science this has got the title of geoeconomics, which largely replaces the geopolitics of the standard type (Guschin, 2013). The problem is that implementation of geoeconomic strategies by the Russian state is associated with great difficulty. In this regard certain hopes can be associated with the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) and BRICS countries (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa), though the final valuation of these unions about their real benefit can be done later, after a longer period of time that will allow determining their sustainability and viability.

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We call the changes in the former Soviet Union the next factor contributing to threats to national security within the framework of geopolitical competition. Currently, the post-Soviet space represents a huge territory, where a broad variety of global, regional, and bilateral interests are concentrated, and which attracts attention of the most powerful centers of the modern world such as the EU, the USA, and China. We will not consider the policy of the latter state because of its distinctiveness and ambiguity. It requires a separate assessment. As for the EU and the USA, the geopolitical competition, caused by their actions, can be appreciated quite definitely. Here we should consider that the creators of Western geopolitics in the post-Soviet space do not make secrets neither out of the goals, nor concerning their content and methods of implementation.

The content can be reduced to four main items. 1. Promoting democracy and civil society. 2. Aiding in conducting reforms aimed at privatization and the development of market economy in general. 3. Resolving conflicts potentially able to shake the social stability in the region. 4. Promoting the interests of "small states" in their integration into the world community, for example, the adoption of the former socialist countries into the European Union.

Implementation methods of this policy in terms of geopolitical competition, as a rule, are reduced to the "color revolutions", though this implies the involvement of broad public masses. All the other aspects are standard: bribery, blackmail, embargoes, sanctions, bombing, and occupation – depending on what is required by the situation, prevailing in a place and time. As for goals, they are not advertised by sitting politicians, while in scientific and pseudoscientific discourse are formulated quite simply: to isolate Russia as a geopolitical player. In fact, if Russia will be excluded from the system allowing for interest's comparison in the post-Soviet space, then it will turn, in terms of foreign policy, into an ordinary state subject, not able to defend, if necessary, its national security. In fact, this problem is complex in nature, and cannot be reduced to the postulation of some simple thesis. It is sufficient to indicate just a few trends, such as the encirclement of the Russian territory with the US military bases, promoting Russophobic sentiments, the loss of significant part of national sovereignty by the countries trapped in the sphere of influence of the US and the EU, etc.

If Russia will become a part of all these processes, it would have to pay for it with loss of political and cultural authenticity and perhaps the loss of territorial integrity. There is therefore nothing surprising in the fact that the official Russian government tries to be actively involved in geopolitical competition, attracting all possible resources. Countermeasures against these processes occur in three main areas: 1) creation of military-political alliances; 2) economic cooperation; and 3) the institutionalization of regional unions. We should note with regret that this policy can be considered successful only partly, because many members of the ruling elite of post-Soviet states are trying to use the contradictions between Russia and the Western bloc for the pursuit of their domestic interests. Besides, we can speak about

successful policy, if not consider complete failures in the relationships with the states, strategically important to Russia, such as Ukraine and Georgia. In this context, we should especially mention Ukraine. In the future, the positioning of the two strong Slavic centers could lead to a sharp increase in geopolitical competition associated with attempts to privatize in their own interest the history, which is common in many respects. In small, these future challenges have reflected recently in the conflict around the personality of Anna Yaroslavna (*the youngest of three daughters of the Prince of Kiev Yaroslav the Wise*), whom the Russian and Ukrainian officials tried to dress up in Russian or Ukrainian clothes.

The development of the Arctic is a factor having direct importance for national security of Russia, also significantly influencing the escalation of geopolitical competition.

The authors of the first assessment studies of combustible mineral reserves in Arctic region, whose results were published in the journal of Science, believe that Arctic oil and gas reserves constitute 13 and 30%, respectively, out of all yet not explored reserves of hydrocarbons on Earth. Most of these reserves underlie in the coastal regions at depths up to 500 meters that makes them available for drilling (Westwood, 2016). The interest in this region appeared in the context of several factors. First, world reserves of mineral raw materials are being depleted that makes it necessary to find fundamentally new areas for mining, which, figuratively speaking, are yet untouched by a man. In this respect the Arctic is ideal region. Second, global warming, taking place in the modern world, makes it possible to develop resources. And third, these opportunities are expanded by improving the extraction technology (Nye, 2004). In the quest to develop the Arctic reserves, Russia is entering a geopolitical competition with countries such as the USA, Canada, Norway, and Denmark. The situation is compounded by the fact that these states are traditionally not friendly to Russia during the past few decades. Also, besides the hydrocarbon issue, we pay attention to one more important point. The Russian Federation has the longest Arctic coast line. The prospects for its use as a navigable sea route to strengthen ties with Asia bypassing Africa, and now, the Suez Canal, were started to be discussed a few centuries ago (Kjellen, 1916). So, the Brits began to make reconnaissance trips to the region since the XVIth century. However, developed port infrastructure was created only in the Soviet years. In the 90-ies of the last century the whole infrastructure fell into disrepair due to the lack at that time of need to invest large sums of money to maintain it, though now it is starting to recover. Technological progress forges ahead, and maybe in a few decades the Arctic region will become the same busy navigable sea route like for example Malacca strait. However, for this, Russia should get opportunity to develop Arctic reserves, since at the present stage only vital economic feasibility can attract people and investments into the region. There is still one circumstance, which is not commonly discussed, though it is no less important than the previous two. The point is that development of the Arctic is important in terms of military-strategic needs of Russia. Today, when the world is entering a new round of the cold war, Russia

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becomes surrounded by unfriendly military NATO bases, while nuclear missiles are located within close reach of the Russian border. Arctic space is the closest to the maritime borders of Canada and the United States. Therefore, the solution of national security issues requires not only economic, but also military-strategic development of the Arctic.

"Battle for the Arctic" is actively discussed in the context of current war caused by sanctions. It is this region that is most painfully hit by sanctions. Our country is not yet ready to start production of hydrocarbons in the region without the financial and technological assistance from abroad. In consequence of this, Russia is forced to appeal to the countries of South-East Asia, especially China, which have the necessary financial and partly the technological potential to provide the required assistance. An exit from the existing situation can be found in either the termination of sanctions, or the intensive development of in-house technologies. Though, both options can be realized in uncertain future that only aggravates geopolitical competition for the conquest of the Arctic space.

Next, briefly consider the internal factors that in the context of geopolitical competition under certain circumstances may adversely affect the national security of Russia. We do not set ourselves the task to analyze all possible factors. We pay attention only to the most significant factors such as 1) the acquisition of national identity, and 2) the militarization of public life. Not to appeal further to special explanation, we need to notice that both selected factors themselves do not play any negative role. The negative effect may happen only under the condition that geopolitical competition will create a feverish-emergency background for reforms. Because of this, militarization will begin to take wrong forms, while national identity will serve the needs of the conceptualization of the image of the enemy and regime propaganda.

The process of attainment of national identity in Russia in recent years is becoming of relevance exactly in the context of geopolitical competition. The post-Soviet space has slipped into the EU and NATO. Former Soviet republics such as Moldova, Georgia, and Ukraine are bent to the West as well. Russia needs to define its geopolitical status whether approaching to Europe and stay with Europe, or developing along its own path. We believe that Russia has received too hastily the national idea in the form of patriotism. Under the hastiness we mean lack of forethought. Patriotism cannot be an idea. It is, rather, an instrument of attaining identity, though not the identity itself. And this mistake was made under the influence of geopolitical competition. The country embarked on the path of confrontation with the world too suddenly. So there arose a need for quick actions toward nation-building that would give almost immediate results. Inflating patriotic sentiments is not a problem. This is what the government is doing in many respects, instead of encouraging research and development of ways and means of acquiring a new effective identity built on a long-term basis.

We consider the same perspective when evaluating the factor of the public life militarization. By creating multiple affectively painted images of the enemy (EU, USA, etc.), the Russian government uses it to revive in general right things, such as respect for army, defense industry, military training and patriotic upbringing, high-tech production, etc. However, this is carried out somewhat one-sidedly and, most importantly, to the detriment of the social functions of the state. Expenditures on health, education, culture are reduced, however cost of maintaining the army increases. Society is forced to pay too high price for the growth of geopolitical competition. The result is a latent growth of public discontent that in the future can lead to loss of social stability.

#### **4. Discussion**

In academic community there is no uniform understanding of the terms "geopolitical competition" and "national security". Consider some of the terms and approaches most productive for understanding the nature of the analyzed concepts.

The founders of the traditional interpretation of geopolitics, as a conflict of interests for influence over certain territories, are R. Challen, who coined the term "geopolitics" (Haushofer, 1979), K. Haushofer, who used the geopolitics as the official doctrine of Nazi Germany (Mackinder, 1904), and H. Mackinder, who put forth the ideas of mastering Central Eurasia as a necessary condition of domination in the world (Mackinder, 1919).

Aliiev (2012) considers the geopolitical competition as the clash of interests between states (state blocs), based on the positioning of their own status opportunities in international relations. Yudin (2014) sees geopolitical competition to be a result of the collision of sociocultural dominants of different types of state systems as well as others (Napalkova *et al.*, 2017; Fedorenko *et al.*, 2017). Zalyvsky (2014) proceed from the premise that geopolitical competition is the result of clashes between states for economic leadership, which is most often expressed in the desire to control resources and provide informational influence.

The discourse on the concept of national security is based on three main approaches. In the frameworks of the first approach, safety is specified as a building of mechanism, which determines the possibility of protection of interests of the subject against the obvious and hidden threats (Burkin *et al.*, 2008; Kuznetsov *et al.*, 2016; Kuznetsov *et al.*, 2017). This approach should be justifiably called ideological, because ideology acts as a scientific justification of the interests of the social agents (individual or collective social actors). Scientists, who adhere to the second approach, focus attention on the need to preserve the integrity, stability, sustainability, and the normal functioning of the social system under influences of a destructive nature. This approach can be called a systemic-philosophical approach (Topical socio-political problems of national security, 2007). As for the third approach, we define it as axiological one, since in its framework security is defined

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as the protectability of material and the spiritual values of the subject, at that under the subject one must bear in mind the most varied levels of generalization such as country, state, society, and personality (Pozdnyakov, 2013).

## 5. Conclusion

The conducted analysis of the major national security issues of Russia, related to geopolitical competition, allows us to draw several conclusions having both practical and theoretical significance.

Geopolitical competition is primarily the result of interests' collision of several states (the state blocs, supranational organizations, etc.) due to the unwillingness or inability to resolve contradictions based on cooperation and partnership. Geopolitical competition results in growing tension in world politics, the use of illegitimate means and forms of a latent nature to influence other states, open confrontation in the form of information, cold, hybrid, and open military clashes. Geopolitical competition leads to the adoption of the principles of a multipolar world order, formation of regional blocs, economic warfare, expansion of armaments, and ideological confrontation.

Geopolitical competition raises several external and internal factors that negatively affect the national security of the Russian Federation. As external, we have considered three factors: 1) transformation of the geopolitical competition taking place at the current stage; 2) the changes in the post-Soviet space; and 3) the development of the Arctic, which at the present stage became a bone of contention for Arctic states, as well as those states, who intend to start competing for their share in developing the resources of this region. As for internal factors, we have paid attention on two of them: 1) the attainment of national identity, and 2) the militarization of public life, because we believe that exactly these factors have the most negative impact on the state of national security processes in the Russian Federation.

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