

Araştırma Makalesi

A STRATEGIC ACTOR IN THE ENERGY CORRIDOR: AN ANALYSIS OF TÜRKİYE'S GEOPOLITICAL POSITION IN THE CONTEXT OF GEOPOLITICAL THEORIES

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Abstract: Located at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and the Middle East, Türkiye holds a strategic position in the transportation of energy resources from supplier regions such as the Caspian, the Middle East, and Russia to major consumer markets in Europe. This study analyzes Türkiye's geopolitical role in global energy politics within the framework of classical and contemporary geopolitical theories. Drawing on theoretical frameworks such as Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Spykman's Rimland Theory, Mahan's Sea Power Doctrine, Seversky's Air Power Theory, Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, Fukuyama's End of History, and Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard Strategy, the study argues that Türkiye's energy policy is shaped by a multidimensional geopolitical structure. The study employs a qualitative content analysis based on classical and contemporary geopolitical theories to examine Türkiye's energy strategy in a theoretical-historical context. While classical geopolitical theories emphasize geographic determinism and military capabilities, contemporary approaches highlight ideological orientations, civilizational identities, and soft power instruments. Within this theoretical framework, Türkiye's involvement in projects such as TANAP, BTC, and TurkStream reflects its strategic ambition not only to act as a transit country but also to become a regional energy hub. The study concludes that Türkiye's geopolitical importance in energy security arises from a combination of multilayered factors including its geographic location, infrastructural investments, regional diplomacy, and military modernization. Therefore, understanding Türkiye's strategic position in the context of energy politics requires an interdisciplinary perspective that integrates geography, international relations, and energy economics.

Keywords: Geopolitics, Geopolitical Theories, Energy Security, Strategic Energy Corridors

ENERJİ KORİDORUNDA STRATEJİK BİR AKTÖR: JEOPOLİTİK TEORİLER BAĞLAMINDA TÜRKİYE'NİN JEOPOLİTİK KONUMUNUN ANALİZİ

Öz: Avrupa, Asya ve Orta Doğu'nun kesişim noktasında yer alan Türkiye, Hazar, Orta Doğu ve Rusya gibi tedarikçi bölgelerden Avrupa'daki büyük tüketici pazarlara enerji kaynaklarının taşınmasında stratejik bir konuma sahiptir. Bu çalışma, Türkiye'nin küresel enerji siyasetindeki jeopolitik rolünü klasik ve çağdaş jeopolitik teoriler çerçevesinde analiz etmektedir. Mackinder'in Kalpgâh Teorisi, Spykman'ın Kıyı Kuşak Teorisi, Mahan'ın Deniz Hakimiyeti Doktrini, Seversky'nin Hava Hakimiyeti Teorisi, Huntington'ın Medeniyetler Çatışması, Fukuyama'nın Tarihın Sonu ve Brzezinski'nin Büyük Satranç Tahtası stratejisi gibi kuramsal çerçevelerden yararlanarak, Türkiye'nin enerji politikasının çok boyutlu bir jeopolitik yapı tarafından şekillendirildiğini öne sürmektedir. Çalışma, Türkiye'nin enerji stratejisini kuramsal-tarihsel bir bağlamda incelemek için klasik ve çağdaş jeopolitik teorilere dayanan nitel bir içerik analizi yöntemi kullanmaktadır. Klasik jeopolitik teoriler, coğrafi determinizm ve askerî kapasitelere odaklanırken; çağdaş yaklaşımlar ideolojik eğilimler, medeniyet temelli kimlikler ve yumuşak güç unsurlarına dikkat çekmektedir. Bu kuramsal perspektifler çerçevesinde değerlendirildiğinde, Türkiye'nin TANAP, BTC ve TurkStream gibi projelere katılımı, ülkenin yalnızca bir enerji geçiş ülkesi olmadığını, aynı zamanda bölgesel düzeyde bir enerji merkezi olma yönündeki artan stratejik hedeflerini yansıtmaktadır. Araştırma, Türkiye'nin enerji güvenliğindeki jeopolitik öneminin; coğrafi konumu, altyapı yatırımları, bölgesel diplomasisi ve askerî modernizasyonu gibi çok katmanlı faktörlerin birleşiminden kaynaklandığı sonucuna varmaktadır. Dolayısıyla, Türkiye'nin enerji siyaseti bağlamındaki stratejik pozisyonunu anlamak, yalnızca mekânsal avantajlarla sınırlı olmayan; coğrafya, uluslararası ilişkiler ve enerji ekonomisini bütünleştiren disiplinlerarası bir bakış açısını gerekli kılmaktadır.

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Anahtar Kelimeler: Enerji Güvenliği, Jeopolitik, Jeopolitik Teoriler, Stratejik Enerji Koridorları

1. INTRODUCTION

The growing global demand for energy has transformed access to energy resources and their secure transportation from merely technical and economic issues into strategic and geopolitical matters. In this context, energy has become one of the central elements in 21st-century geopolitical competition. The scarcity of energy resources has led to new areas of cooperation and conflict between consumer and producer countries, while transit countries have found an opportunity to redefine their geopolitical value through energy. At precisely this point, Türkiye assumes a critical position as a bridge between the energy-rich regions of the Middle East, the Caspian Basin and Russia, and the energy-consuming markets of Europe.

Türkiye's geopolitical location renders it not only a significant transit route but also a potential energy hub that could enhance its regional power projection. When this potential is evaluated considering both classical geopolitical theories and contemporary approaches, it necessitates a more in-depth analysis of the relationship between energy and politics. Classical theories such as Mackinder's Heartland, Spykman's Rimland, and Mahan's theory of sea power offer a fundamental framework for explaining Türkiye's energy geopolitics, while modern energy security perspectives emphasize the fragility of energy supply chains and the need for new diplomatic initiatives. This study aims to analyze Türkiye's energy geopolitics within the axis of geopolitical theories and opens for discussion Türkiye's regional and global position through energy transit routes, pipeline projects, and the implications of foreign policy. In doing so, it seeks to provide both a theoretical contribution and a more systematic evaluation of current energy-politics relations.

In recent years, the growing complexity of global energy politics has underscored the need to reevaluate how countries like Türkiye navigate their geopolitical environments. Although Türkiye is frequently portrayed as a natural energy bridge due to its location, such descriptions often remain at a descriptive level and fail to provide a theoretically grounded understanding of its strategic agency. Most existing studies either emphasize the technical infrastructure of energy transit or analyze bilateral relations without incorporating a coherent theoretical framework. This study addresses this gap by integrating classical and contemporary geopolitical theories with empirical observations to offer a more nuanced analysis of Türkiye's energy diplomacy. In doing so, it critically interrogates the assumptions underlying traditional geopolitical thinking while proposing a multidimensional approach to understand Türkiye's evolving role in the global energy landscape.

The primary reason for incorporating theoretical frameworks into this study is to evaluate Türkiye's strategic position in energy geopolitics not only through empirical observations, but also through more conceptually grounded and analytically consistent framework. Although classical geopolitical theories are reductionist and historically

contested, they nonetheless offer certain analytical insights. In the case of Türkiye, these theories can be employed to conceptualize elements such as energy transit corridors and its position as a continental bridge. Rather than being treated as absolute truths, these theories are used as analytical frameworks whose limitations are fully acknowledged. Classical theories help explain Türkiye's geopolitical relevance through its control of key land and maritime routes. Meanwhile, contemporary perspectives highlight the multidimensional nature of energy politics by drawing attention to cultural identities, ideological orientations, and soft power instruments. The integration of these theories serves to demonstrate that Türkiye is not simply a passive transit country, but an active and dynamic actor that constructs and navigates its energy diplomacy strategically. By engaging with these theoretical lenses, the study underscores that geopolitical processes are not solely the product of practical reflexes, but are shaped by historical legacies, spatial positioning, and normative strategies. To guide the analytical trajectory of this study and ensure a structured theoretical evaluation, several working hypotheses are proposed. These hypotheses aim to assess Türkiye's position within the global energy landscape not merely through geographic determinism but by incorporating diplomatic agency, infrastructural strategy, and normative orientations. The study posits that Türkiye's geographical location and transit infrastructure are essential, yet insufficient, for its emergence as a strategic energy actor; that classical geopolitical theories remain relevant but require revision in light of contemporary complexities; that Türkiye actively constructs its geopolitical role through multilateral diplomacy and regional balancing; and finally, that cultural and ideological frameworks such as Huntington's and Fukuyama's offer useful, albeit partial, lenses for interpreting Türkiye's energy diplomacy. These hypotheses will be evaluated throughout the analysis and reflected upon in the concluding section.

2. CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Energy

Energy has always held significant importance for states due to its role in economic development, national defense, and security. Especially in the post-war era, for many policymakers, the importance of energy grew in proportion to the belief that governments must exert control over its production and distribution. As a result, energy has evolved from being a mere necessity of life into a strategic asset that states must secure. Developments centered around energy typically stem from basic needs and derive meaning through the processes of production, consumption, and distribution (Yücel, 1994, p. 3). In general, energy resources are classified into two categories: non-renewable and renewable. Renewable energy sources are defined as those that allow the continuous utilization of naturally replenished energy without altering its qualitative and quantitative characteristics, and that can persist in the same form through nature's cyclical processes (Özkaya, 2004, p. 3). The essential role of energy in enhancing and sustaining quality of life across various sectors, combined with the relative scarcity of renewable resources, brings forth the issue of sharing limited energy supplies. During the Cold War,

in a bipolar international system, which became evident that states sought to consolidate power through the control of oil—an indispensable component of industrialization—and even resorted to colonizing underdeveloped regions for this purpose (Yılmaz & Kalkan, 2017, p. 170).

Despite the growing popularity of renewable resources in recent years due to the depletion of non-renewable ones, the absence of viable substitutes for natural gas and petroleum in numerous sectors has resulted in continued reliance on these energy sources to meet demand (Karagöl & Kaya, 2014, p. 9). While energy offers significant advantages, increasing reliance on natural gas has elevated it to a central issue on global policy agendas. Energy, long used as a political tool, became explicitly inseparable from politics after the 1973 oil crisis. Fossil fuels such as oil and natural gas may not provide direct military superiority, but they confer considerable economic leverage as strategic commodities. On a global scale, there is no clear correlation between a country's energy wealth and its overall development. For example, countries rich in energy resources—such as Venezuela and many in the Middle East—have generally lagged Western powers in terms of military capability and broader development indicators. Moreover, the potential of energy to influence military advantage, the economic and political instability caused by disruptions in supply, and the need for political intervention in response to price volatility are among the key reasons why energy cannot be disentangled from political considerations (Yücel, 1994, p. 9).

2.2. Energy Security

Energy security refers to the capacity to satisfy energy needs from uninterrupted and reliable sources at affordable prices. Numerous studies have examined the origins of this concept. According to Yergin, energy security emerged as a political concern in the early 20th century, primarily due to the challenge of ensuring oil supplies for military operations (Yergin, 2009). He attributes this transformation to Winston Churchill's decision on the eve of World War I to switch the British navy's fuel from coal to oil. This shift, favoring oil from then-Persia over domestic coal from Wales, underscored the strategic importance of fuel diversity in ensuring secure and predictable energy supplies (Yergin, 2006, p. 70).

Although it has been implicitly addressed in classical works, energy security has re-emerged as a prominent topic of research in recent decades (Cherp & Jewell, 2014, p. 416). Following the oil crises of the 1970s, the concept evolved to encompass a broad range of energy sectors and policy dimensions. The Asia Pacific Energy Research Centre defines energy security as the ability of an economy to maintain a stable and timely energy supply at prices that do not hinder economic performance. To evaluate energy security, APERC outlines four dimensions: availability, accessibility, affordability, and acceptability (APERC, 2007). Building on this framework, Cherp and Jewell argue that the various interpretations of energy security do not indicate the presence of multiple concepts but rather reflect how a single concept adapts to different circumstances. In essence, energy security embodies multiple contextual meanings rather than distinct definitions, leading to varied national strategies and priorities. As a result, establishing a universally precise

definition suitable for international comparisons is neither feasible nor necessary (Cherp & Jewell, 2014, p. 416).

One contributing factor to this conceptual ambiguity is the broad range of risks identified across different categories in the literature. The International Energy Agency broadly defines energy security as the ability to access uninterrupted energy sources at affordable prices (IEA, 2020). Under this definition, supply, demand, geopolitical tensions, and market dynamics emerge as the fundamental components of energy security (World Economic Forum & CERA, 2006). A more nuanced analysis—one that considers the questions “Security for whom?”, “Security of what values?”, and “Security against which threats?”—offers a more comprehensive view, often lacking in classical energy security studies (Cherp & Jewell, 2014, p. 420). The World Bank Group, for example, categorizes countries by their economic development levels, domestic energy resources, and their role in global energy demand when assessing their energy security profiles (World Bank Group, 2005, p. 3). While major wars and Cold War dynamics have shaped the historical trajectory of energy security, the modern conceptualization of the term crystallized during the oil embargoes that followed the Arab-Israeli conflicts. In the 1970s and 1980s, energy security was largely defined by the principles of supply diversification and continuity, particularly concerning oil for OECD and oil-importing countries (Çelikpala, 2014, p. 81). In 1975, U.S. Secretary of State Henry Kissinger famously declared his willingness to go to war to protect critical oil resources and prevent disruptions in Persian Gulf energy flows (Klare, 2001, p. 33).

By the 1990s, a series of geopolitical and economic developments—including the Gulf Wars, the Arab Spring, revolutionary movements in the Middle East, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict—broadened the scope of energy security to include resources beyond oil (Yılmaz & Kalkan, 2017, p. 176). Other major turning points—such as globalization-driven industrialization, the formation of OPEC and IEA, the Soviet collapse and end of bipolarity, the 9/11 attacks, the Iraq War, and China’s rise as a global economic actor—have all contributed to evolving understandings of energy security (Hatipoğlu, 2019, p. 3). Unlike in the 1970s, contemporary energy concerns are no longer limited to oil but now prominently include natural gas. Larsson identified 40 incidents involving Russia’s de facto gas cutoffs to CIS countries between 1991 and 2008 (Larsson, 2008). Cherp and Jewell highlight that these concerns are particularly acute in the Eurasian context, where gas is distributed through long-term pipeline contracts. The 2009 Russia-Ukraine gas crisis remains one of the last major examples of large-scale supply disruption with tangible effects on the EU (Cherp & Jewell, 2011, p. 2). As Russia—home to the world’s largest gas reserves—remains the dominant supplier to both the EU and the global market, natural gas has gained increased geopolitical salience in energy security discussions, representing a growing strategic vulnerability (Çelikpala, 2014, p. 81). At this point, supply-side energy security refers to the technical feasibility, economic affordability, operational reliability, and environmental safety of energy delivery systems (Sovacool & Mukherjee, 2011, pp. 5343–5355).

2.3. Geopolitics

The term geopolitics originates from the ancient Greek words *geo* (earth) and *politika* (governance), and it has generally been used to describe political actions shaped by geography (Ulaş, 2011, p. 21). First introduced in the late 19th century by Kjellén, the meaning and implications of the term have shifted over time and across regions. As inferred from academic literature, geopolitics refers to the interaction between geography and power, often manifesting in political struggles (Defay, 2005, p. 7). It is also considered a subfield of political geography concerned with region-based ideologies (Montbrial, 2013). In contemporary international relations, understanding how geopolitical theory interprets transformations in global politics has become increasingly challenging, as the theory's explanatory power has diminished over time. According to the ancient Greek geographer Strabo, much of geography exists to serve the interests of the state (Deudney, 1997, p. 91).

The historical evolution of geopolitics can be divided into three main phases: the Classical Period, which remained influential until the end of World War II and anticipated the Cold War; the Cold War Period, during which the concept was largely sidelined; and the Contemporary Phase, shaped by the dynamics of globalization (Ulaş, 2011, p. 26). While global geopolitical thinking began with Mahan—whose theory reflected the political and economic realities of his era—it influenced both globalist theorists like Mackinder and Spykman, as well as German organic-state geopoliticians such as Ratzel and Haushofer (Yıldızoğlu, 2017, p. 87). In contrast to early theorists, Henry Kissinger reframed geopolitics in terms of power relations rather than the geographical determinants of politics (Howard, 1994, pp. 132–140). When Kissinger revived the term in 1979, which had largely fallen out of use during the Cold War, he described it as a model designed to maintain strategic balance. Although the immediate post-World War II period saw a departure from geographical determinism, the resurgence of critical thinking reversed this trend. Yves Lacoste attributed the revival of geopolitics in 1979 to a series of political developments—discussed in detail below—that convinced the public that regional rivalries between nation-states remained just as significant as ideological conflicts (Defay, 2005, p. 36). Several transformative events in the 1970s—including China's ascent, Sino-Soviet tensions, the U.S. decision to abandon dollar convertibility in 1971, oil crises in 1973 and 1979, Germany's Ostpolitik efforts to assert independence from U.S. influence, the Iranian Revolution, France's military withdrawal from NATO, and the Third Indochina War—could not be adequately explained through Cold War ideological frameworks. These developments spurred both political and academic communities to explore alternative geopolitical paradigms (Ulaş, 2011, p. 70). Understanding post-Cold War geopolitics, particularly in the aftermath of defining events like 9/11, requires recognizing the broader global shifts and patterns. In this regard, Russia's reemergence as a major actor in Eurasian geopolitics—driven by its geographical imperatives and energy resources—marks a significant realignment in global power dynamics (Çakmak & Öztürk, 2011, p. 216).

The concept of geopolitics, which had fallen into disfavor following the defeat of Hitler's geopolitics-centered ambitions, began to regain popularity toward the end of the

20th century. The renewed interest in geopolitics reflected various world order transformations, which can be broadly categorized under two main themes: first, the effects of the Great Depression and the broader impacts of capitalism; and second, the rise of new global powers such as the United States, Germany, China, and Japan as British hegemony waned (Yıldızoğlu, 2017, p. 76). During this period, with a few exceptions, geopolitical thought was presented in a methodologically inconsistent and unstable manner. As a result, the term “geopolitics” gained renewed traction but at the cost of acquiring a wide array of meanings, often leading to conceptual ambiguity (Ulaş, 2011, p. 71). Deudney underscores this ambiguity by stating (1997, p. 93): *“The term geopolitics has been used in so many different contexts that its meaning is neither clear nor precise. It could mean almost anything—and perhaps nothing at all.”*

3. ENERGY GEOPOLITICS: STRATEGIC THEORIES AND TÜRKİYE’S ROLE IN THE GLOBAL ENERGY

Energy geopolitics refers to the strategic intersection of resource distribution, geographic constraints, and power relations in shaping global and regional energy dynamics. Energy and geopolitics are not simply overlapping domains; they are mutually constitutive forces that shape and reinforce one another in both theoretical and practical terms. While energy constitutes a material asset required for industrial growth, domestic development, and technological advancement, it also serves as an instrument of geopolitical leverage. States that control energy supply routes, storage infrastructure, or pricing mechanisms often wield disproportionate influence in international affairs, regardless of their military or economic size (Cherp & Jewell, 2014, p. 417; Klare, 2001, pp. 29–30). This intrinsic link is visible in every phase of the energy cycle: from resource extraction and transit to consumption and security. Pipeline routes are never determined solely by geology or engineering logic—they are designed with strategic foresight, often to bypass adversarial states or to solidify alliances. The BTC pipeline, which links Azerbaijan to the Mediterranean via Georgia and Türkiye, bypasses Russian territory deliberately—an energy project with geopolitical intent (Bilgin, 2009, p. 4487). Likewise, TurkStream and TANAP exemplify how Türkiye uses energy infrastructure to diversify its supply sources while increasing its own strategic indispensability to Europe and neighboring regions. This reflects Mackinder’s logic that geographical control over pivotal transit routes equates to geopolitical leverage—reaffirming Türkiye’s attempt to convert its location into strategic influence.

Geopolitics, in turn, is increasingly defined by energy dynamics. In the post–Cold War era, traditional security concerns have been expanded to include access to critical resources, energy supply security, and infrastructure resilience. The 1973 oil embargo, the Gulf War, the Russia-Ukraine gas disputes, and current competition in the Eastern Mediterranean all reflect this transformation. Consequently, energy is no longer a background condition—it is a foreground driver of foreign policy choices, alliance configurations, and even conflict scenarios (Yergin, 2006, pp. 70–72; Sovacool & Mukherjee, 2011, pp. 5343–5345). Türkiye, as an energy corridor and emerging hub, occupies a central role in this interplay, where energy flows are inseparable from

questions of security, alliance formation, and strategic autonomy (Bilgin, 2010, p. 82; Yergin, 2006, p. 74). Despite lacking significant domestic oil or gas reserves, Türkiye's geographic location enables it to accumulate geopolitical capital by serving as a convergence point for East–West and North–South energy corridors. This allows Türkiye to project influence beyond its immediate borders—not through coercive means, but through infrastructural and diplomatic connectivity. In other words, Türkiye's energy geopolitics is not resource-driven, but route-driven and strategy-driven.

Türkiye's geographical significance in energy geopolitics is best understood through the application of classical and contemporary geopolitical theories, which will be systematically elaborated in Section 4. However, even at this stage, a preliminary synthesis shows that Türkiye's positioning corresponds to several key theoretical constructs. For instance, as suggested by Mackinder's Heartland thesis, Türkiye lies on the southwestern edge of the Eurasian pivot area and serves as a terrestrial bridge connecting Eurasia to the Mediterranean world. Its land-based energy infrastructure—such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP)—reinforces Türkiye's role in the overland energy flows envisioned by Heartland theorists (Mackinder, 1904, pp. 432–434; Bilgin, 2009, p. 4485). Simultaneously, Türkiye's littoral access to the Black Sea, Aegean, and Mediterranean positions it within the maritime belt described by Spykman's Rimland theory. As projects like TurkStream and the Ceyhan terminal demonstrate, Türkiye's maritime capacities are not only economic assets but also tools of strategic leverage, particularly in the Eastern Mediterranean (Spykman & Nicholl, 1944, p. 43; Oral & Özdemir, 2017, p. 952). Mahan's emphasis on sea power further supports this interpretation: naval control over critical chokepoints and ports enhances Türkiye's ability to influence regional energy flows (Mahan, 1890, p. 61). The evolving role of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and airspace control in Türkiye's energy infrastructure security—especially in high-risk areas—also reflects the continuing relevance of Seversky's Air Power theory in a 21st-century context (Seversky, 1942, p. 49).

Moreover, Türkiye's diplomatic balancing between Western institutions (such as the EU and NATO) and non-Western energy partners (such as Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan) highlights the duality at the core of its geopolitical identity. This duality is consistent with Huntington's classification of Türkiye as a torn country, situated at the intersection of Western and Islamic civilizations, and is mirrored in Türkiye's energy alliances and conflicts (Huntington, 1996, p. 138). Brzezinski's concept of Türkiye as a geopolitical pivot—a state whose location grants it outsized strategic significance—also aptly captures Türkiye's role in the global energy matrix (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 53). Energy enables Türkiye to exercise what may be termed “strategic ambiguity”—the capacity to navigate between Western and non-Western actors without full alignment with either. Energy cooperation with both Russia and NATO countries, engagement in the Southern Gas Corridor while participating in China's Belt and Road Initiative, and its naval posture in the Eastern Mediterranean all illustrate Türkiye's attempt to transform structural geography into diplomatic flexibility. In sum, energy and geopolitics are best understood not as parallel

tracks but as an intertwined system. Türkiye exemplifies how infrastructural positioning, diplomatic agility, and regional security concerns converge in energy policy formulation. The ability to convert geographical transit potential into durable strategic influence is not automatic; it depends on regulatory frameworks, military deterrence, economic investment, and international legitimacy. Türkiye's evolving approach to energy geopolitics will thus not only determine its economic resilience, but also its strategic identity in an increasingly fragmented global order. A comprehensive elaboration of the geopolitical theories referenced here is provided in Section 4, where each framework is analyzed in its historical and conceptual depth.

4. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This section outlines the theoretical foundation on which the study is built, combining both classical and contemporary geopolitical approaches. Rather than treating these theories as timeless truths, the study uses them as heuristic devices to interpret Türkiye's strategic positioning in energy geopolitics. Classical geopolitical theories—despite their imperial legacies and deterministic assumptions—offer useful tools for conceptualizing spatial dynamics and infrastructural strategies. Contemporary theories, on the other hand, bring attention to ideational, cultural, and institutional dimensions of geopolitics. Together, these frameworks help move beyond purely descriptive accounts and allow for a more systematic and critically informed analysis of Türkiye's foreign policy behavior in the energy domain.

In the mid-19th century, schools of geopolitical thought began to emerge in the world's leading countries. These groups analyzed the geographical conditions, population structures, energy resources, and physical, economic, and social frameworks of various states, developing geopolitical theories and scenarios aligned with their own national interests. At the same time, they formulated geopolitical strategies and objectives based on international economic and political developments, again in pursuit of national advantage. Although differing by region, it can be argued that these policies were generally shaped by the goals of sustaining capitalism—whose influence intensified through globalization—securing access to energy resources and seeking regional power status. Classical geopolitical theories, which emphasized the drive to control the resource-rich regions of Eurasia and the Middle East, began with thinkers such as Kjellén and Ratzel and were further developed through Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Spykman's Rimland Theory, Mahan's Sea Power Doctrine, Seversky's Air Power Theory, and Haushofer's concept of Lebensraum (Living Space). During the same period, alternative theories shaped by scholars such as Bowman and Kennan—and later synthesized in the works of Kissinger—defined much of the Cold War geopolitical landscape. In the post-Cold War era, contemporary geopolitical thinking evolved with contributions such as Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard, Huntington's Clash of Civilizations, and Fukuyama's End of History theses. The inclusion of classical and contemporary geopolitical theories serves more than a descriptive function in this study and goes beyond providing historical context; it provides an analytical framework through which Türkiye's energy position can be

strategically situated. These theories allow us to understand not only where Türkiye is located geographically, but why that location matters in the evolving global energy order.

4.1. Classical Geopolitical Theories: Space, Power and Strategy

4.1.1. Mackinder's Heartland Theory

John Mackinder proposed a model of global and political order. He defined the entire Eurasian continent, which he called the "pivot area," as a natural sphere of power (Flint & Taylor, 2011, p. 4). Following later developments, he introduced his famous Heartland thesis in his 1904 article. The pivot region refers to a landmass that is geographically enclosed and rich in resources, making it a key area for establishing global domination (Mackinder, 1904, pp. 421–437). With this presentation, Mackinder emphasized the importance of land power and possessing vast territories. He divided the world into three zones: the pivot area (later known as the Heartland), the inner crescent (inner rimland), and the outer crescent (outer rimland). In his later works, he referred to the pivot area as the Heartland—a region that, due to its geographical characteristics, deserves to be considered the center. According to the Heartland Theory, there are two major geographical regions that must be controlled by those who seek to dominate the world: the Heartland and the World Island. He stated that the World Island consists of Asia, Europe and Africa; Eurasia consists of Asia and Europe; and the Heartland, located at the center of this continent, is the region that must be conquered to control the World Island (İşcan, 2004, p. 60). He introduced to the academic community the pivot area theory—a definition of the core region of Eurasia that is protected from sea power. He believed that the development of this region's potential power could enable the continental power that controls it to dominate the world. The reason Mackinder attributed such importance to the pivot area was that, with the railways laid across Eurasia, the region contributed to economic, social, and military power elements, elevating land power above sea power. Thus, he argued that by expanding from the pivot area toward the inner crescent, the state situated in this region—thanks to its rich resources and geographical advantages—could establish a major naval force and thereby achieve global dominance (Ulaş, 2011, p. 35). Expanding on this concept and drawing from the recent experience of World War I, he revised the pivot area as the Heartland and expressed the Heartland thesis with the following words (Mackinder, 1942, p. 50):

Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland;

Who rules the Heartland commands the World Island;

Who rules the World Island commands the World.

Heartland, which stretches from the Baltic-Black Sea line to the east of the Yenisei and from the Arctic Ocean down to the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea (Ulaş, 2011, p. 37), possesses ideal security and defense potential thanks to its fertile lands, which ensure agricultural continuity, and its inaccessibility by sea. Since this region is only vulnerable to land attacks through the Eastern European plains, the control of Eastern Europe signifies the dominance over the pivot area and, ultimately, global domination through control of the World Island, which includes Eurasia and Africa, where most of the world's population resides (Mackinder, 1943, pp. 595–605).



Figure 1. Mackinder's Heartland

Source: https://www.reddit.com/r/MapPorn/comments/14v23ty/the_heartland_theory_of_geopolitics_and_wars_for/

The main objective of Mackinder's work on the pivot area was to identify potential threats that could undermine Britain's power and dominance within the global system and to demonstrate the foundations of these threats (Venier, 2004, p. 332). According to him, the first of these threats was the rise of new powers entering into competition with Britain due to shifting balances; the second was the exertion of pressure over the inner crescent by a strengthening Russia; and the third was the potential alliance between Germany—emerging as a rising power in Europe—and Russia (Taşkesen, 2009, p. 73). Mackinder's Heartland Theory enables us to frame Türkiye's overland energy transit function, particularly its connections to the Caspian and Central Asia, as part of a broader struggle for influence over the Eurasian core.

Türkiye's facilitation of East-West energy flows via TANAP and BTC enhances its importance in this context, aligning with Mackinder's view that control over strategic land corridors equates to control over regional dynamics. It conceptualizes geopolitical power as originating from control over the central landmass of Eurasia. In the context of this study, the theory is instrumental in highlighting Türkiye's overland connections to the Caspian Basin, Central Asia, and Europe—especially through pipeline projects such as TANAP and BTC. It frames Türkiye as a critical bridge between the energy-rich zones of the East and the consuming markets of the West. However, Mackinder's model reflects the geopolitical conditions of its time, emphasizing territorial conquest and rail-based mobility. It tends to overlook the complexities introduced by contemporary technological advancements, non-state actors, and transnational energy governance mechanisms that shape today's energy geopolitics beyond mere land control.

4.1.2. Spykman's Rimland Theory

Spykman did not use geopolitics as a discipline rooted in geographical determinism but rather as a practical tool to shape American foreign policy. He believed that

understanding geography was essential for assessing a nation's power and, therefore, proposed viewing the world from a polar-centered perspective, with the Northern Hemisphere offering strategic advantages. According to him, the United States—surrounded by Eurasia—could avoid the threat of any single Eurasian hegemon by preserving the continent's internal balance and fragmentation during potential overseas engagements (Ulaş, 2011, p. 55). Spykman criticized Mackinder for placing excessive emphasis on land power and the Heartland, overlooking the strategic potential of the surrounding maritime belt. He identified the Rimland, comprising regions such as Eastern Siberia, Türkiye, Iran, Afghanistan, India, China, and Pakistan, as the true pivot of global power (Karabulut, 2005, p. 21)

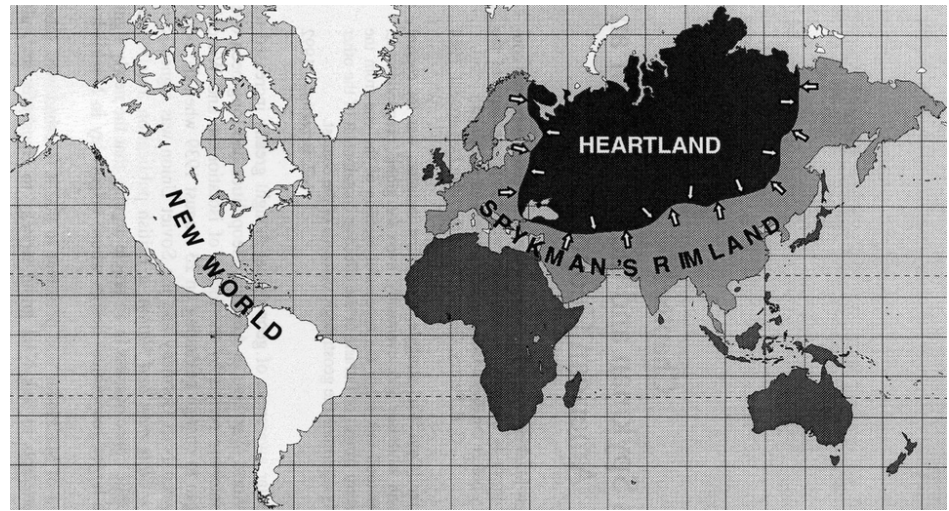


Figure 2. Spykman's Rimland

Source: (Mayborn, 2014, p. 85).

For this reason, Spykman asserted that the critical area to dominate was not Mackinder's central region, but the surrounding belt—the Rimland stretching from the Balkans to China—and that the issue was about who would control the rimland states in Europe and Asia. Accordingly, he claimed that if a power other than the United States were to dominate this area, the West-centric plan led by America would be placed at risk (İşcan, 2004, p. 63). Contrary to Mackinder's discourse, he argued that with the advancement of technology, this region was losing its defensive power and failing to become the most economically developed part of the world. Spykman, who insisted on linking the causes of both world wars not to the Heartland but the Rimland region, concluded that global hegemony did not depend on control over Eastern Europe. (Spykman & Nicholl, 1944, p. 43):

If there is to be a slogan for the power politics of the past world, it should be:

"Who controls the Rimland rules Eurasia;

Who rules Eurasia controls the destinies of the world."

The Rimland thesis reflects America's geopolitical priorities and highlights the strategic role of the Middle East and maritime peripheries in global power dynamics (Ari, 2004, p. 188). Spykman advocated for American influence over the Rimland not only to maintain maritime supremacy but also to secure control over Eurasia. His ideas

significantly influenced the formation of NATO during the Cold War (İlhan, 1985, p. 615). Unlike Mackinder, Spykman emphasized projecting power from the periphery inward, not the reverse. In his view, modern civilizations could only sustain their dominance if they implemented their political agendas globally. This confirms that security strategies cannot be decoupled from geopolitical calculations. As an American strategist, Spykman developed a theory that served to institutionalize and extend U.S. hegemony after World War II.

Spykman's Rimland Theory places strategic value on the coastal peripheries encircling the Heartland, emphasizing the importance of maritime boundaries and littoral influence. Türkiye's access to the Aegean, Black Sea, and Eastern Mediterranean situates it squarely within the Rimland zone. This access allows Türkiye to shape maritime energy routes, assert its presence in contested regions like the Eastern Mediterranean, and engage in naval diplomacy that reinforces its regional energy ambitions. The Rimland framework underscores Türkiye's leverage not just over pipelines, but over sea-based energy corridors. While Spykman's model is highly functional in conceptualizing the geopolitical significance of Türkiye's energy diplomacy conducted through maritime routes, pipeline corridors, port infrastructure, and transportation initiatives, the theory may underestimate the influence of regional cooperation mechanisms, multinational corporations, and international regimes—factors that increasingly shape energy security in a world where financial, environmental, and technological considerations are gaining prominence.

4.1.3. Mahan's Sea Power Theory

To complete the classical geopolitical framework, Alfred Mahan's theory—emphasizing the critical importance of sea power—must be considered. This theory remains highly relevant in today's increasingly globalized world, particularly due to the maritime configuration of the Rimland, which contains key trade routes and critical chokepoints. Alfred Mahan argued that, in addition to diplomatic influence, a nation requires naval military power to ensure its development. He maintained that sea power facilitates overseas and intercontinental trade, and that sustaining foreign relations for access to resources and markets—as well as maintaining trade networks and projecting power—necessitates merchant fleets, naval forces, and military ports.

The coastal belt of the Rimland and surrounding maritime regions occupy a highly strategic position, serving both as supply routes for goods that support economic growth and as global trade arteries extending from Europe to Asia and beyond. Control over these sea routes grants substantial power and strategic leverage to the actors who possess them. Advocating that sea power was more significant than land-based dominance, Mahan asserted that the United States could achieve global hegemony by establishing continental bases around Eurasia. He envisioned an alliance comprising the United States, the United Kingdom, Germany, and Japan to counterbalance Russia and China, claiming that only through such a coalition could China be contained and Russia encircled. He argued that maritime nations, more so than landlocked ones, possess a greater ability to allocate national resources toward naval development. He also emphasized that geographic

features influence maritime policy, with location providing distinct strategic advantages. Mahan considered physical geography to be among the most critical elements determining state power. If stability could be achieved through naval strength, then long coastlines, numerous ports, and proximity to key trade routes would not only facilitate maritime commerce but also support land-based logistics—acting as a force multiplier in global trade (Gülmez, 2009, p. 29).

In summary, Alfred Thayer Mahan played a pivotal role in shaping naval strategies prior to World War I. With his famous assertion, “Whoever rules the seas rules the world,” Mahan revolutionized traditional doctrines and paved the way for the United States to become a dominant maritime power. Summarizing Mahan’s geopolitical vision, he stressed the role of not only geography but also leadership in establishing sea power. He believed that a strategic partnership between the UK and the US would ensure maritime dominance, as both possessed the material capacity to sustain large naval fleets and had vital interests along global sea lanes. He also envisioned a global, peace-oriented free-market economy as an economic structure that would complement the logic of sea power (Ulaş, 2011, p. 30). In light of these interpretations, it can be argued that Mahan’s Sea Power Theory was designed primarily to advance U.S. interests, particularly in strategic rivalry with the United Kingdom.

Mahan’s Sea Power Doctrine complements Spykman’s approach by asserting that naval strength and control of chokepoints determine a state’s geopolitical influence. In Türkiye’s case, this doctrine offers valuable insights into its geostrategic control over key maritime chokepoints such as the Bosphorus and the Dardanelles, as well as its growing port infrastructure in the Mediterranean and the Black Sea. Furthermore, the development of port infrastructure in Ceyhan and Filyos, and the growing capabilities of the Turkish navy, reflect a deliberate policy of maritime empowerment consistent with Mahan’s principles. Türkiye’s ability to influence regional maritime energy dynamics thus stems from both geography and deliberate naval strategy. It emphasizes the strategic importance of maritime dominance for global influence. However, like Mackinder’s theory, Mahan’s framework is anchored in a state-centric and military-based understanding of power, which may underrepresent softer forms of influence such as diplomatic energy initiatives, multinational consortia, or regulatory authority over energy markets.

4.1.4. Seversky’s Air Power Theory

This theory, which emerged to emphasize the importance and demonstrate the impact of air superiority in the implementation of Mackinder’s Heartland Theory—the foundation of all geopolitical theories—was pioneered by Giulio Douhet, William Mitchell, and Colonel Harry A. Schaklian. Alexander de Seversky later developed the theory and underscored the significance of air dominance in military conflicts. With the outbreak of World War II, Seversky drew public attention to the growing importance of aviation, an issue that had previously been overlooked. He argued that the rapidly increasing range and striking power of military aviation could render the United States as vulnerable to aerial destruction as the British Isles. Although Britain was the world’s

dominant naval power, Seversky contended that the United States should become the preeminent air power (Seversky, 1942, p. 45). According to the theory, the geographic factors that once guaranteed a country's territorial security lost their strategic value as air power began reaching previously inaccessible regions, thereby reinforcing the role of aerial dominance in geopolitical thought. The advancement of air power triggered not only tactical but also strategic shifts in defense mechanisms. For instance, one could argue that what ultimately prevented Soviet Russia—superior in both land and sea power—from dominating the World Island after the war was the potential deterrent posed by opposing air forces (İşcan, 2004, p. 67). At this point, theorists who contributed to the development of the Air Power Theory revised Mackinder's famous dictum as follows (Mütercimler, 2000, p. 103):

Who controls Eastern Europe rules the Heartland. If not stopped by air forces, he rules the World Island. But for that, air power superiority is also required.

According to Seversky, the United States was unprepared to confront the revolutionary nature of aerial warfare, and American aircraft lagged behind those of its potential adversaries in terms of speed, range, altitude, and firepower—contrary to official government claims. Seversky examined the world from a polar perspective, identifying the coastal zone spanning Europe, North Africa, and the Middle East—situated between North America and Soviet Russia—as the “decision zone.” He argued that dominance over this region required subordinating land and sea forces to air power (Özey, 2000, p. 29). Seversky's Air Power Theory gains renewed relevance in light of Türkiye's increasing reliance on UAVs and aerial surveillance systems to safeguard its energy infrastructure. This perspective adds a 21st-century layer to energy geopolitics, wherein infrastructure protection and strategic depth are contingent on technological control of the airspace. The theory is significant in that it emphasizes the strategic value of airspace dominance in geopolitical power projection, suggesting that geographic superiority extends beyond land and sea to include the aerial domain. However, like other classical geopolitical models, Seversky's theory adopts a state-centric and militarized conception of power. As such, it tends to overlook the rising importance of softer instruments of influence, including energy diplomacy, economic interdependence, and international legal norms. These dimensions play an increasingly vital role in shaping contemporary energy geopolitics, where control and influence are exercised not solely through military projection but also through negotiation, regulation, and cooperative governance.

While classical geopolitical theories interpret Türkiye's role in energy geopolitics largely through geographic positioning, military capability, and infrastructure control, they fall short in explaining the ideological orientations and civilizational interactions that influence a state's foreign policy. Yet energy diplomacy is shaped not only by pipelines and security strategies, but also by a country's identity alignments, regime preferences, and civilizational affiliations. At this juncture, the study turns to contemporary theoretical approaches—particularly Fukuyama's End of History, Huntington's Clash of

Civilizations and Brzezinski's The Grand Chessboard—to provide a more comprehensive framework that incorporates ideological and cultural dimensions into the analysis.

4.2. Contemporary Theories: Civilizations, Ideology and Global Order

4.2.1. The End of History Thesis

Finding most analyses of the post-Cold War era lacking the broad conceptual framework necessary to distinguish what is essential in world history from what is accidental or coincidental, Fukuyama introduced his *End of History* thesis. In his famous 1989 article titled *The End of History*, Fukuyama proclaimed the definitive triumph of liberal democracy, arguing that humanity had reached the culmination of its ideological evolution and that this form of government could represent the final stage of human governance—thus marking the end of history itself (Fukuyama, 1989, p. 3). The article was written during a period marked by unpredictable and profound changes in world history. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, communism—liberalism's principal rival and alternative—was defeated, and Fukuyama interpreted this process as the victory of liberal democratic values. According to him, humanity had finally discovered the ideal political order it had long been seeking, and as such, history had come to an end.

In his thesis, Fukuyama attempted to outline the framework of this newly emerging order, asserting that societies would now focus more on economic matters than on ideology. He predicted that ideological disputes in international relations would be replaced by economic concerns and that the legitimacy of using military force would eventually diminish (Barkut, 2009, p. 212). According to Fukuyama, a peaceful and dynamic system based on modern Western civilization would be established, whose most important components would be Western thought, the free market, and the ideology of liberal democracy. He described this as the threshold of the final, contented state that humanity had been striving to reach throughout its historical journey (İşcan, 2004, p. 73). However, Fukuyama's views were criticized on several grounds: that the notion of the end of history is inherently flawed; that human nature inevitably seeks novelty; that ideologies cannot be eradicated as long as humanity exists; and that development is by nature a continuous process. Moreover, the political events that unfolded after the introduction of Fukuyama's thesis have demonstrated that history, in fact, did not end (Ulaş, 2011, p. 170). Fukuyama's thesis, though controversial, contributes by illustrating the ideological dimensions of Türkiye's energy diplomacy. Türkiye's energy relations straddle both liberal-democratic Western institutions and more authoritarian Eastern regimes. This positioning allows Türkiye to operate within what could be seen as a post-ideological pragmatism, transcending the binary of Fukuyama's framework while also reflecting the competitive coexistence of different governance models in energy partnerships. This theoretical reference adds a normative layer to the discussion but also risks overstating the idea of ideological closure. The theory, based on the assumption that liberal democracy represents the final form of human governance after the Cold War, does not fully align with the empirical reality of Türkiye's energy diplomacy. Türkiye's strategic engagement with both democratic and authoritarian regimes challenges

Fukuyama's premise and suggests that ideological competition and ambiguity remain central features of international politics, especially in the energy domain.

4.2.2. The Clash of Civilizations Thesis

Amid the geopolitical uncertainty following the dissolution of the USSR, the most popular geopolitical thesis addressing the debates of the era was put forward in Huntington's 1993 article, *"The Clash of Civilizations?"* Expanding on these ideas, Huntington's book *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* proposed a redefined global structure for the post-Cold War era. He argued that before the conclusion of the Cold War, societal divisions were primarily shaped by ideological conflicts, particularly the opposition between democracy and communism. However, henceforth, the primary divisions among people would not be ideological, political, or economic, but cultural. According to Huntington, new models of conflict would emerge along cultural boundaries, and patterns of harmony would be found within those same cultural lines (Huntington, 1996). The core argument here is that culture and cultural identity shape models of conflict in the post-Cold War world, indicating a shift away from ideological identification toward cultural self-definition. Through this assertion, Huntington emphasized the cultural dimension of geopolitics, highlighting its geocultural aspect (İşcan, 2004, p. 74). Summarizing the key features of civilizations that matter geopolitically, Huntington argued that civilizations are dynamic: they may divide, merge, or even disappear. Civilization boundaries are not fixed—they are real but mutable. Civilizations may consist of a single nation-state or multiple ones and may overlap or intersect (Akkaya, 2009, p. 184). In his book, Huntington developed a "civilizational paradigm" to offer a fresh perspective for the post-Cold War order and to address the conceptual shortcomings of earlier models. As a starting point, he divided the world into eight major civilizations (Huntington, 1996, p. 25).

- **Sinic Civilization (Confucian):** Includes Chinese communities in Southeast Asia, China, Vietnam, and Korea.
- **Japanese Civilization:** Defined by a culture distinct from the rest of Asia.
- **Hindu Civilization:** Core Indian civilization.
- **Islamic Civilization:** Originating in the Arabian Peninsula and extending across North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula, and Central Asia, encompassing various sub-regions like Arab, Turkish, and Persian zones.
- **Slavic-Orthodox Civilization:** Centered on Russia and distinct from the Western Christian world.
- **Western Civilization:** Centered on Europe and North America.
- **Latin American Civilization:** Includes Central and South American countries with a legacy of authoritarian culture and predominantly Catholic populations.
- **African Civilization:** Although Africa lacks a strong pan-African identity, Huntington claimed a sense of civilizational belonging is steadily emerging among African populations.

In a later revision, he added a ninth, the Buddhist Civilization, encompassing Tibet, Mongolia, and Cambodia (Ulaş, 2011, p. 172). Huntington (1996) foresaw major clashes

between civilizations and suggested that Islamic and Sinic cultures might align or collaborate in opposition to a shared rival—the West (p. 9). He identified five main types of countries (pp. 207–220). A member state is fully integrated into a single civilization—for example, Egypt in the Arab-Islamic world or Italy in the Western context. Core states are the strongest and most culturally essential within their civilizations. The West, according to Huntington, has two core states: the United States and the United Kingdom. In contrast, Islam, Latin America, and Africa lack core states due to the delaying effects of imperialism on their development. A lone country, such as Ethiopia or Japan, shares no strong cultural commonality with its neighbors and exists in relative isolation. A cleft country, such as Sudan, contains populations belonging to different civilizations (e.g., the Muslim north and largely Christian south) and may face internal divisions and separatist movements. Torn countries possess a dominant culture that aligns with one civilization but are governed by political elites seeking alignment with another. Examples include Mexico, Türkiye, Australia, and Russia. Russia, for instance, has been a torn country since its Westernization efforts in the 17th century. Türkiye, caught between Islam and the West, has been considered both a torn and cleft country due to its failure to complete its transition to the West—despite its potential to become a core state of the Islamic world (Ulaş, 2011, p. 176).

4.2.3. The Grand Chessboard Theory

In 1997, Zbigniew Brzezinski discussed post-Cold War geostrategy and emphasized that the U.S. must remain the global leader and continue to act as the mediator of Eurasian geopolitics. His theory is essentially based on maintaining American hegemony and minimizing the risk of other potential superpowers from Eurasia rising to global prominence, thereby ensuring that the U.S. dominates both economic and political spheres. Brzezinski divided Eurasia into four distinct regions and discussed how the U.S. should formulate its foreign policy to maintain global supremacy. Brzezinski (1997) claimed that after the decline of the Soviets, the U.S. had become the only comprehensive superpower and was now the arbiter of Eurasia. He stated that the Eurasian issue could not be resolved without U.S. involvement or in ways that contradict American interests (p. 194). According to him, although Russia and China possess nuclear arsenals that could threaten U.S. hegemony and interests, they could not win a nuclear war. Because they lack the capacity to use their power to impose their political will and are technologically far behind the U.S., it is not possible for them to exert sustainable political influence globally (1997, pp. 21–24).

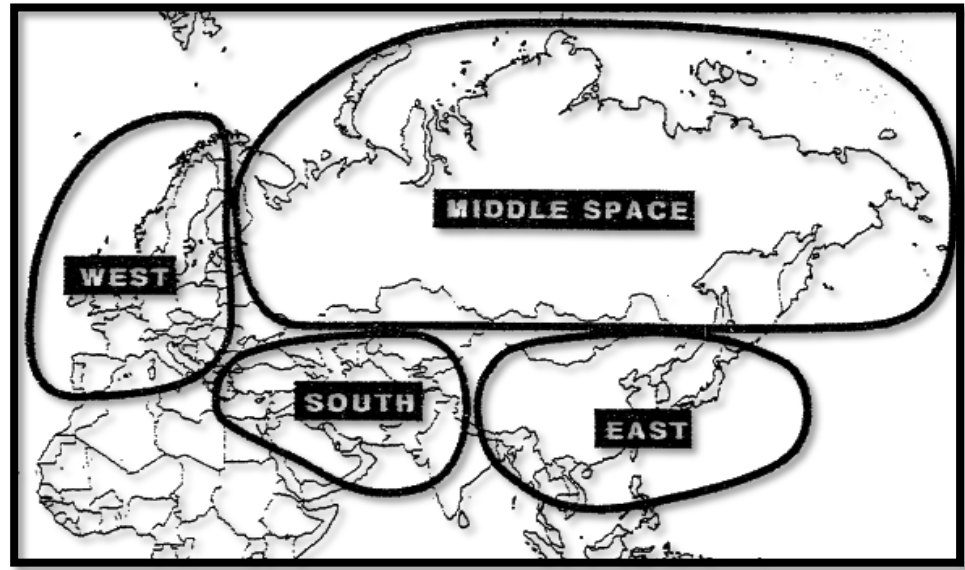


Figure 3. The Eurasian Chessboard

Source: (Brzezinski, 1997).

Brzezinski referred to Eurasia as the main geographical setting of modern geopolitics, highlighting that until now, the struggle to dominate Eurasia was fought by regional countries themselves, but for the first time, an actor from outside Eurasia had joined the contest. He likened Eurasia to a chessboard where these struggles continue (Sandıklı, 2011, p. 352), and asserted that America's ability to maintain global power entirely depends on the policies it pursues in Eurasia. In this context, Brzezinski argued that how the U.S. manages Eurasia is of critical importance. This is because Eurasia is the world's largest continent and is home to the most politically ambitious and dynamic states. Most of the world's nuclear powers are located in Eurasia. Therefore, Brzezinski (1997) characterized Eurasia as the chessboard where the contest for global dominance persists (p. 30). Brzezinski classified countries that directly influence the game on the chessboard as geostrategic players (France, Russia, China, Germany, and India), and countries that are important to the game solely because of their location as geopolitical pivots (Azerbaijan, Ukraine, Iran, Türkiye, and South Korea). He defined the area including Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Armenia, Uzbekistan, and Afghanistan—regions that are the subject of ethnic conflicts and regional rivalries among powerful states in Eurasia—as the Eurasian Balkans, and noted that Russia, Türkiye, and Iran all have influence in the region (Sandıklı, 2011, p. 353).

Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard enhances the study by portraying Türkiye as a geopolitical pivot—a state whose location makes it indispensable for the projection of power in Eurasia. Türkiye's involvement in energy projects that link the West to the East, and its balancing act between Russia, the EU, and China, exemplify the kind of strategic flexibility Brzezinski attributes to pivot states. While Brzezinski's concept of the "geopolitical pivot" strikingly highlights Türkiye's structural significance, it also tends to frame countries like Türkiye primarily as strategic instruments in the service of great

powers. This perspective does not sufficiently acknowledge their autonomous strategic capacities.

In sum, these theories do not merely function as illustrative references. They shape the analytical foundation of this study and demonstrate that Türkiye's role in global energy politics cannot be understood solely through infrastructure or trade figures. Rather, it must be situated within a strategic cartography of power, where geography, ideology, infrastructure, and diplomacy converge. The theoretical insights offered by these models collectively strengthen the argument that Türkiye is not just a transit country, but a transformative actor in the energy geopolitics of the 21st century. Even though the classical and contemporary geopolitical theories employed in this study offer valuable conceptual tools for understanding Türkiye's strategic position within global energy dynamics, they also present certain limitations as mentioned above.

4.3. Critical Geopolitics and Ideological Reflection

While classical geopolitical theories such as those of Mackinder, Spykman, and Mahan emphasize geographic determinism, territorial control, and state-centric paradigms, they often lack critical reflection on their ideological underpinnings. As scholars of critical geopolitics argue, these classical models are not ideologically neutral but are historically situated discourses that reflect specific Western-centric, often imperial worldviews. Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) laid the groundwork for critical geopolitics by showing how geopolitical knowledge is not discovered but constructed through discourse. He demonstrated that geopolitical narratives—especially those originating from dominant powers—function as ideological tools that shape foreign policy through spatialized imaginaries of threat, power, and order. Similarly, Simon Dalby (1998) argued that security discourses and geopolitical practices are deeply embedded in cultural representations and identity politics. His work emphasizes that geopolitical reasoning often relies on simplified binaries (us/them, civilized/uncivilized) that justify interventionist policies. In the context of Türkiye, which seeks to navigate a hybrid geopolitical identity between East and West, Dalby's perspective enables a more nuanced understanding of Türkiye's foreign policy that avoids replicating these binaries.

John Agnew's (2003) critique of the "territorial trap" further refines this perspective by cautioning against the assumption that states are the only relevant actors in geopolitics and that sovereignty is spatially fixed. Türkiye's multi-vector energy diplomacy—with actors ranging from international corporations to regional blocs—confirms the importance of moving beyond state-centric assumptions and embracing a relational view of power and space. In recent years, Jean-François Drolet and Michael C. Williams (2021) have highlighted how classical geopolitical narratives are being reappropriated by ideological movements such as the European New Right to construct exclusionary visions of global order. This insight is crucial in preventing the uncritical application of geopolitical models in non-Western contexts like Türkiye, where national strategy must be framed in a way that avoids reinforcing divisive civilizational logics. Likewise, Joseph MacKay and Nick LaRoche (2017) offer a meta-theoretical reflection on how historical narratives in international relations shape the very assumptions we make about global

order. They argue that geopolitical theories often present themselves as objective models while encoding specific normative and ideological commitments. Integrating their insights encourages scholars to treat geopolitical knowledge not as neutral cartography but as contested and contingent narratives. Incorporating these critical perspectives allows this study to avoid the pitfalls of geographic determinism and engage in a more reflexive geopolitical analysis. By doing so, Türkiye's energy diplomacy can be framed not just as a reaction to structural constraints but as an active, discursive, and ideational practice shaped by history, identity, and normative preferences. This reflexivity is essential for understanding Türkiye's strategy of balancing between Western institutions and Eastern partners, not as an ambivalence, but as a deliberate geopolitical agency in a multipolar world.

While Mackinder's Heartland Theory remains influential in discussions of Eurasian geopolitics, it is important to recognize its ideological origins and historical context. The theory was developed in the early 20th century as Britain faced strategic anxieties about the rise of rival continental powers. As such, it reflects the imperial worldview of the time, prioritizing territorial control and power projection in line with Western hegemonic interests. The spatial determinism embedded in the theory—suggesting that geography alone dictates political power—ignores the agency of smaller states and non-state actors, as well as the role of economic interdependence, diplomacy, and environmental constraints. Applying this model uncritically to Türkiye's current energy strategy risks reducing the country's foreign policy to a binary logic of domination and containment. Moreover, it may inadvertently legitimize expansionist or militaristic postures under the guise of strategic necessity. To avoid these pitfalls, the theory should be contextualized with insights from critical geopolitics (see Ó Tuathail, 1997; Dalby, 2002) and recent scholarship that interrogates the ideological functions of classical geopolitical thought (Drolet & Williams, 2021; MacKay & LaRoche, 2017). These critical perspectives reveal that classical geopolitical theories are not ideologically neutral frameworks, but rather discursive constructs historically embedded in imperial power politics. For instance, Mackinder's Heartland theory functioned not merely as academic models but as strategic narratives that legitimized the expansionist policies of Western empires. As MacKay and LaRoche (2017) argue, such theories often serve to naturalize geopolitical hierarchies by portraying the global order as a competitive arena where dominance and territorial control are preordained imperatives. Similarly, Drolet and Williams (2021) emphasize how these frameworks have been repurposed in contemporary policy discourse to support right-leaning geopolitical imaginaries that frame global politics through civilizational antagonisms and security dilemmas. By uncritically adopting these theories, scholars risk reproducing the ideological assumptions they embed—such as the valorization of territorial conquest, the marginalization of non-Western agency, and the normalization of militarized statecraft. Hence, integrating critical geopolitical insights allows for a more reflexive and historically conscious engagement with geopolitical theory, particularly when applying these models to non-Western contexts such as Türkiye.

Spykman's Rimland theory, though influential in Cold War-era strategic thinking, is deeply embedded in the geopolitical anxieties of mid-20th century U.S. foreign policy. Formulated during the rise of American global ambition, the theory reflects a historical moment characterized by bipolar rivalry and the institutionalization of U.S. hegemony, particularly through NATO. Its emphasis on controlling the coastal peripheries surrounding Eurasia to contain rival powers illustrates a classical form of strategic containment rooted in military logic. Ideologically, the theory aligns with a Western-centric worldview that reduces global dynamics to zero-sum competitions between great powers, marginalizing regional voices and non-state actors. It also reflects an underlying belief in determinism—where geography rigidly defines strategic outcomes—and reinforces a militarized understanding of international relations. In today's multipolar and interdependent global landscape, the Rimland model faces significant limitations: it underestimates the role of economic interdependence, multilateral diplomacy, and the rising importance of soft power. In the context of Türkiye, applying Spykman's logic too literally risks promoting a narrow vision of foreign policy centered on rivalry and confrontation. It obscures Türkiye's potential for cooperative regional diplomacy, multivector engagement, and energy diplomacy that transcends binary alignments. Moreover, it ignores Türkiye's growing interaction with non-Western actors and may inadvertently legitimize policies favoring military posturing over civilian and sustainable energy development (see Bilgin, 2004; Dodds, 2019; MacKay & LaRoche, 2018).

Alfred Thayer Mahan's theory of sea power was conceived during the height of American and British imperial expansion in the late 19th century, reflecting the geopolitical logic of maritime empire-building. Developed in a period when naval supremacy was equated with global power, the theory sought to justify colonial expansion through the control of key maritime chokepoints and oceanic trade routes. Its historical context is deeply tied to industrial capitalism's demand for overseas markets and raw materials—rendering the theory a strategic blueprint for imperialist domination through naval projection. Ideologically, Mahan's work exhibits a strong belief in hierarchical power structures and civilizational superiority, presenting maritime dominance as both a strategic necessity and a moral imperative for Anglo-American powers. Unlike Mackinder or Spykman, whose theories focused more on land-based control and containment, Mahan places commerce, capital, and conquest within a singular naval paradigm that prioritizes militarized seaborne infrastructure. In today's world, however, Mahan's framework proves increasingly anachronistic. While control over maritime trade routes remains relevant, the dynamics of global energy flows and supply chains have evolved—now influenced by cyber networks, multinational corporations, and international regulatory bodies. Mahan's narrow focus on naval force overlooks the ecological costs of militarized sea control and the growing centrality of maritime environmental governance, such as Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs), pollution agreements, and climate-driven migration routes. In Türkiye's context, uncritical adoption of Mahanian logic may legitimize an overemphasis on naval militarization in regions such as the Eastern Mediterranean or Black Sea. These risks sidelining Türkiye's diplomatic capacity in

multilateral maritime platforms like the Montreux Convention or the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum. Moreover, it may reinforce a securitized view of maritime policy that marginalizes cooperation-based energy strategies and escalates regional tensions—particularly in contested waters shared with NATO allies and regional rivals alike (see Öniş & Yılmaz, 2009; Dalby, 2002; Brömmelhörster & Paes, 2004).

Alexander de Seversky's Air Power Theory emerged in the interwar and World War II period, when the rapid advancement of aviation technology dramatically reshaped military thinking. Rooted in the technological optimism of early 20th-century American military-industrial ideology, Seversky's vision reflected the strategic concerns of a newly rising global hegemon. His emphasis on air superiority as the primary determinant of geopolitical power was not simply a military argument, but an ideological one: it redefined territorial sovereignty through the lens of technological reach, projecting American strategic interests into the global commons. Unlike Mackinder and Mahan, Seversky viewed the airspace as a limitless domain—immune to traditional geographic constraints—thus advocating for a deterrence-based model of security centered on aerial dominance. Historically embedded in Cold War logic, Seversky's air-centric determinism underestimated the resilience of land and sea-based power structures and over-relied on the assumption of perpetual technological superiority. Moreover, it embodies a form of "aerospace essentialism," which prioritizes hard power projection at the expense of socio-political or economic diplomacy. In the contemporary world, such a framework struggles to accommodate the emergence of hybrid threats, non-state actors, drone diplomacy, and cyber vulnerabilities that are not addressable through air dominance alone. While Türkiye's technological progress in drone warfare (e.g., Bayraktar TB2) is strategically significant, interpreting this development purely through Seversky's lens may obscure the broader policy implications: such as the need for international airspace regulation, export controls, and ethical frameworks for AI-enabled warfare. Furthermore, it may create a false dichotomy between aerospace power and multilateral diplomacy, sidelining Türkiye's role in international disarmament forums, regional confidence-building measures, and NATO's evolving strategic concept (see Buzan & Hansen, 2009; Neocleous, 2013; Cooley & Nexon, 2020). In short, Seversky's vision, if applied in isolation, risks reinforcing a techno-nationalist worldview that neglects Türkiye's complex diplomatic and normative engagements in the 21st-century security environment.

Francis Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis, articulated in the post-Cold War moment, exemplifies what Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) defines as a dominant geopolitical discourse that naturalizes liberal modernity as the destination of historical progress. By presenting liberal democracy not only as triumphant but as historically inevitable, Fukuyama's argument obscures the ideological operations of this narrative, which aligns closely with what John Agnew (2003) criticizes as the "territorial trap" of Western-centric teleology in geopolitical thinking. The thesis constructs a linear, unidirectional model of political development, erasing the multiplicity of historical experiences and presenting the Western liberal order as both norm and end point. As Simon Dalby (1998) observes in his critique of post-Cold War security discourse, such theories operate within a culturalist

framework that displaces structural violence and power asymmetries by framing global order as a civilizational achievement. Fukuyama's claim that ideological struggle has ended obscures the continued existence of geopolitical contestations rooted in inequality, marginalization, and postcolonial resistance. Furthermore, as Drolet & Williams (2021) demonstrate, the universalist aspirations of liberalism often mask its entanglements with conservative political projects and disciplinary forms of governance that police ideological deviation under the guise of stability. From the perspective of International Relations historiography, MacKay & LaRoche (2018) argue that narratives like Fukuyama's represent a form of "closure rhetoric" that delegitimizes alternative visions of global order by embedding philosophical assumptions of finality and consensus. This historiographical closure has tangible geopolitical implications. In the context of Türkiye, for example, the application of the End of History thesis would marginalize Türkiye's pursuit of multipolar alignments, regional autonomy, or alternative democratic models that do not strictly emulate the Western liberal template. Thus, Fukuyama's thesis operates less as a descriptive account of global politics and more as a normative vision designed to secure the intellectual hegemony of liberal capitalism at a moment of geopolitical flux. As critical geopolitics scholars contend, such visions demand deconstruction—not because they are analytically irrelevant, but because their ideological foundations must be made visible and contestable.

Huntington's Clash of Civilizations thesis, emerging in the early 1990s, reflects the anxieties of the post-Cold War West and seeks to reframe global conflict not in ideological or economic terms but along cultural and civilizational fault lines. Developed during a time when American unipolar dominance faced uncertainty after the Soviet collapse, the theory can be seen as an attempt to provide a new strategic lens for Western hegemony—one that essentializes cultures and reifies civilizational identities as static, internally coherent, and externally incompatible. Huntington's framework lacks historical nuance and is deeply ideologized: it aligns with a neoconservative worldview that views the "West" as the pinnacle of modernity and positions other civilizations—especially Islamic and Sinic cultures—as potential threats rather than equal participants in shaping global order. From a critical perspective, the civilizational determinism underlying the theory has been widely challenged for reproducing Orientalist binaries and simplifying complex political and socio-economic processes (Said, 2001; Sen, 2006). It overlooks hybrid identities, transnational solidarities, and the internal diversity within so-called civilizations. Moreover, the theory serves a strategic function: it can be used to justify militarized foreign policies, immigration restrictions, and securitization discourses in Western societies under the guise of cultural defense. In Türkiye's case, Huntington's categorization of the country as a "torn" or "cleft" state imposes an artificial binary between Islam and the West, ignoring Türkiye's historical role as a cultural intermediary and diplomatic actor engaging multiple axes simultaneously. This reading marginalizes Türkiye's proactive regional diplomacy, economic outreach to Asia and Africa, and institutional participation in both Western (NATO, Council of Europe) and non-Western (OIC, SCO Dialogue Partner) platforms. Uncritically applying Huntington's lens risks

reducing Türkiye's strategic flexibility and encouraging exclusionary or confrontational narratives about national identity and foreign policy orientation. Recent studies in critical geopolitics and postcolonial international relations strongly caution against adopting civilizational frameworks that foreclose pluralism and agency in global politics (Bilgin, 2004; Inayatullah & Blaney, 2004; Mamdani, 2005).

Zbigniew Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard thesis conceptualizes Eurasia as the central arena of global power politics and posits the United States as the indispensable extra-regional arbiter of its balance. While strategically influential, this framework embodies what Gearóid Ó Tuathail (1996) critiques as "practical geopolitics" rooted in a managerial, top-down view of space and power. Brzezinski's depiction of states as pieces on a chessboard reinforces a deterministic, zero-sum understanding of international politics that privileges hegemonic control over cooperative security arrangements or pluralist regional orders. From a critical perspective, Brzezinski's geostrategic mapmaking is not a neutral exercise but a political act of territorialization, constructing regions and actors in ways that serve specific ideological purposes. As John Agnew (2003) argues, such visions tend to entrench the spatial logic of empire by framing global leadership as a burden or moral imperative of the United States. This aligns with what Drolet and Williams (2021) identify as the enduring influence of Cold War-era strategic rationality within contemporary Western grand strategy, where geopolitical stability becomes a euphemism for liberal imperial maintenance. Brzezinski's emphasis on controlling geopolitical pivots like Türkiye, Ukraine, or Central Asia positions these countries not as autonomous agents but as strategic variables within a unipolar order. This perspective sidelines the agency of regional actors and reduces their foreign policy choices to functions of great power management. As MacKay & LaRoche (2018) note, such linear strategic thinking flattens historical complexity and suppresses alternative trajectories that do not conform to hegemonic expectations. In the case of Türkiye, adopting Brzezinski's framework uncritically risks reinforcing a foreign policy vision overly reliant on its status as a Western-aligned pivot state, thereby downplaying the country's evolving multi-vector diplomacy, its normative ambitions in regional mediation, and its institutional diversification beyond NATO and the EU. As Simon Dalby (1998) warns, this kind of realist mapping often fails to account for the political ecology of global change—where non-state actors, technological transformations, and normative regimes increasingly shape power beyond state-centric balances. Ultimately, Brzezinski's Grand Chessboard offers a compelling strategic metaphor, but as a geopolitical doctrine, it reproduces an outdated imperial gaze that limits the imaginative possibilities of a multipolar and cooperative Eurasian order. A critical geopolitics lens reveals the necessity of challenging its structural assumptions and re-centering regional voices in shaping their own security futures.

These critical assessments reveal the significant theoretical and ideological risks of directly applying classical and contemporary geopolitical theories to Türkiye's energy strategy. From Mackinder's land power thesis to Spykman's containment logic, from Mahan and Seversky's military-centered models to Huntington's and Fukuyama's

cultural and ideological determinism, many of these approaches were shaped under specific historical conditions and aimed to legitimize the strategic agendas of great powers. Most of these theories contain reductionist assumptions that are ill-suited to today's multi-actor, multi-level, and asymmetric international structure. These approaches often fail to account for the multidimensional nature of Türkiye's foreign policy, its emphasis on regional diplomacy, and its flexible role in energy negotiations. Therefore, geopolitical analysis requires a critical distance, especially when classical geopolitical models risk obscuring Türkiye's strategic agency. To this end, classical geopolitical thought must be balanced with the historical, ideological, and theoretical critiques offered by the critical geopolitics literature. Such a framework provides not only analytical depth but also a more accurate reflection of the strategic subjectivity of actors like Türkiye.

While this section critically interrogates the historical context, ideological underpinnings, and analytical limitations of classical geopolitical theories, the broader study does not apply these models in a deterministic or uncritical fashion. Instead, it adopts a critically adaptive approach, acknowledging the partial heuristic value of these theories for analyzing energy geopolitics. Although developed in specific historical and imperial contexts, classical geopolitical frameworks still offer conceptual tools that, when used reflectively, can contribute to understanding Türkiye's geostrategic posture. Accordingly, this study employs these theories not as prescriptive doctrines, but as analytical instruments filtered through the lens of critical geopolitics.

5. TÜRKİYE'S ENERGY GEOPOLITICS

In this study, the concept of geopolitics is used in both classical and expanded senses. In the classical sense, it refers to the spatial and strategic positioning of states in relation to territorial control, as theorized by Mackinder, Spykman, and Mahan. In the expanded sense, it includes ideological, cultural, and normative dimensions that shape the power dynamics of global order, as reflected in Huntington, Fukuyama, and Brzezinski's theories. Furthermore, this article distinguishes between energy transit corridors, which refer to countries that merely allow the passage of energy resources, and energy hubs, which not only transmit but also regulate and influence energy flows. While the term energy diplomacy emphasizes the strategic use of bilateral and multilateral relations to secure energy supply, energy security refers to a state's ability to ensure stable, affordable, and sustainable access to energy. In analyzing Türkiye's role, this study treats these concepts not as fixed categories but as evolving practices shaped by geography, infrastructure, and foreign policy agency. The conceptual clarification of these terms allows for a more rigorous and multidimensional evaluation of Türkiye's position in regional and global energy geopolitics.

The third chapter outlined the conceptual integration of energy and geopolitics and positioned Türkiye within that theoretical framework. Building on this foundation, this section not only shifts the focus toward empirical analysis but also develops an original argument by highlighting Türkiye's proactive role in shaping regional energy dynamics through infrastructure, diplomacy, and strategic positioning. While much of the existing literature emphasizes Türkiye's role as a transit state, this study argues that Türkiye is not

merely a conduit but a geopolitical actor actively constructing its energy strategy through multi-vector diplomacy and infrastructure development. Rather than passively responding to external dynamics, Türkiye employs energy policy as a tool of regional balancing—leveraging its location, regulatory choices, and diplomatic alignments to enhance its autonomy. In doing so, Türkiye seeks to transform spatial advantage into strategic agency, making energy not just an economic but a geopolitical asset. It explores Türkiye's actual engagement in energy geopolitics through major transnational projects such as TANAP, BTC, and TurkStream, as well as through its strategic relations with key actors including Russia, the European Union, Iran, and China. The analysis will examine how Türkiye leverages its geography, infrastructure, and diplomacy to assert influence in regional energy dynamics, while also addressing the challenges it faces in maintaining energy security and strategic autonomy. Türkiye, located partly in Asia and partly in Europe, is a country with a unique geographical position, historically serving as a bridge between the two continents. The Bosphorus and Dardanelles straits are the only maritime routes through which countries bordering the Black Sea can access the world's oceans, making Türkiye critically important in global maritime transportation. Strategically positioned at the crossroads of Europe and Asia, Türkiye plays an undeniably pivotal role in Eurasian energy geopolitics. Eurasia, beyond being the continental expanse covering much of Europe and Asia and home to nearly 70% of the global population, also symbolizes land-based power—a core idea in classical geopolitical theory—rendering it central to global influence.

Despite lacking substantial energy reserves of its own, Türkiye's distinctive location enables it to serve as a regional energy bridge, transit corridor, or hub (Çelikpala & Erşen, 2019, p. 584). Türkiye plays a vital role as an energy transit corridor, serving not only its domestic market but also facilitating the delivery of oil and natural gas to European and Mediterranean markets via multiple pipelines and transport routes originating from Russia, the Caspian Basin, and the Middle East. However, beyond merely describing Türkiye's role as a transit country, it is critical to interrogate the strategic rationale underlying this position. Türkiye's policy choices are not only shaped by geography but also by its diplomatic agency and long-term energy visions. For instance, Türkiye's insistence on hosting infrastructure projects like TANAP, TurkStream and BTC is part of a broader attempt to enhance its strategic autonomy within the regional energy architecture. TANAP project aligns with Brzezinski's conception of Eurasia as a geopolitical chessboard, where Türkiye seeks to position itself as an indispensable geostrategic player within transcontinental energy dynamics. The BTC pipeline can be interpreted through the lens of Mackinder's Heartland theory, reinforcing the idea that control over the inner frontiers of Eurasia contributes to regional stability and influence. The TurkStream project reflects Spykman's emphasis on Rimland control, as Türkiye enhances its strategic leverage by regulating energy flows along the periphery of Eurasia. These decisions reflect Ankara's pursuit of status and influence in energy diplomacy, demonstrating that infrastructure is both a physical and symbolic asset in geopolitical competition. In this capacity, Türkiye earns transit revenues but lacks the authority to

prioritize domestic consumption or re-export a large share of the energy flowing through its territory. In contrast, the energy hub model enhances Türkiye's role by enabling it to influence not just transit conditions but also the re-export of hydrocarbons transported via pipelines and the liquefied natural gas (LNG) trade. The study contends that Türkiye's energy diplomacy reflects a dual logic: while it is constrained by structural asymmetries—such as dependency on Russian gas and limited pricing power—it simultaneously demonstrates strategic innovation in institutionalizing new corridors, engaging with alternative suppliers, and positioning itself as a normative actor in energy governance. This tension between structural dependency and strategic agency defines Türkiye's complex role in Eurasian energy geopolitics and offers a unique lens to examine mid-sized powers navigating a weaponized interdependence environment. Nonetheless, realizing this model requires more than infrastructure; it involves regulatory capacity, pricing power, and the ability to coordinate regional energy flows. Türkiye's aspiration to become a hub necessitates overcoming asymmetries in its energy partnerships, especially its dependency on Russian and Iranian gas. The strategic challenge lies in converting geographic advantage into institutional leverage, enabling Türkiye to shape not only routes but also market dynamics and governance regimes. Realizing this vision requires substantial infrastructure development—including nuclear energy projects, renewable energy initiatives, additional refineries, gas storage facilities, LNG terminals, and transport vessels. Maritime-based projects such as LNG terminals and nuclear energy investments echo Mahan's and Seversky's views on sea and air power, signaling Türkiye's ambition to expand its geopolitical influence beyond terrestrial corridors.

To function effectively as a hub, Türkiye must achieve adequate energy density and maintain a diversified, sustainable energy portfolio. Moreover, Türkiye's aspiration to become a regional energy hub necessitates overcoming structural asymmetries in its energy relationships, particularly its dependency on Russian and Iranian natural gas. These asymmetric ties limit Türkiye's room for maneuver in energy pricing and re-export capacity, constraining its ability to act independently in regional energy diplomacy. While Türkiye has made significant investments in transit infrastructure, the transformation from a corridor to a hub requires not only physical assets but also regulatory autonomy, pricing competence, and governance capabilities. Without the institutional mechanisms to coordinate regional supply, negotiate long-term contracts, or influence spot markets, the ambition to become a hub risk remaining rhetorical. This highlights a broader strategic challenge: converting geographical centrality into geopolitical agency. Achieving this requires Türkiye to assert itself not only as a passageway but also as a rule-maker in regional energy governance structures. Moreover, it must carefully manage the relationship between its international obligations, pipeline networks, domestic energy system, and overall energy composition. Successfully balancing these elements offers Türkiye both strategic leverage and economic gains, reinforcing its position as a key regional actor (Bilgin, 2010, p. 114). Although Türkiye's geographical position is generally regarded as a major advantage in the energy sector, its proximity to the Middle East—a region that has been a petroleum-centered conflict zone since the early 1900s and has

struggled to achieve political stability—along with its proximity to the Caspian Region, the Eastern Mediterranean, and Africa, places Türkiye in a geopolitically sensitive and potentially risky position (Oral & Özdemir, 2017, p. 952). Yet Türkiye's geopolitical risks are not solely the product of its neighborhood. They also stem from its strategic balancing acts between global powers. While Türkiye engages in institutional frameworks with the EU and NATO, it simultaneously deepens energy cooperation with Russia and China. This strategic balancing act also reflects Huntington's classification of Türkiye as a "torn country," oscillating between Western alliances and its civilizational affinities in the Islamic world. This multidirectional strategy presents both opportunities and constraints, particularly in an era of weaponized interdependence where infrastructure and energy security are increasingly politicized.

In the context of Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Türkiye is located on the southwestern border of the Heartland, making it a critical transit point for transporting Eurasia's energy resources to the West. This location supports Türkiye's goals of becoming an energy transit country and a potential energy hub. Mackinder's theory emphasizes the superiority of land power over sea power and underlines the strategic importance of land-based transportation. From this perspective, the energy pipelines passing through Turkish territory increase the country's geopolitical significance. Projects like the BTC pipeline, TANAP, and TurkStream raise Türkiye's importance as an energy transit country. Moreover, Türkiye's effort to be an energy hub goes beyond being a mere transit country, aiming to become a determining actor in energy trade. This objective aligns with Mackinder's thesis that control over the Heartland is essential for world domination. Investments in Türkiye's energy infrastructure and regulations in its energy market are part of this strategic goal. In conclusion, Mackinder's Heartland Theory offers a significant framework for understanding Türkiye's energy geopolitics. Türkiye's geographical location and energy policies enable it to be a key actor in regional and global power dynamics, as anticipated by the theory.

When evaluated within the framework of Spykman's Rimland Theory, Türkiye is located at a central point of the Rimland region and, as a country with coastlines on the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean, it holds a strategic position in terms of maritime trade and energy transportation. Moreover, its location at the intersection of the Balkans, the Caucasus, and the Middle East makes Türkiye a significant transit country for energy corridors. This has led Türkiye to adopt a strategy in its energy policies that balances both maritime and land power. Türkiye's role in energy geopolitics is particularly reinforced by large-scale energy projects such as TANAP, BTC, and TurkStream. These projects support Türkiye's goal of being not only an energy transit country but also a potential energy hub. TANAP is the backbone of the Southern Gas Corridor and transports Caspian gas to Europe through Türkiye. The natural gas carried by this pipeline represents an energy source alternative to Russia for both Türkiye and Europe. As Spykman emphasized, the control of the Rimland serves as a balancing mechanism against land power (Spykman, 1944, p. 51). In this context, TANAP elevates Türkiye to the position of a geopolitical "balancer state" in the transportation of Caspian

resources to Europe (Bilgin, 2009, p. 124). TANAP is also significant in terms of Türkiye's diversification of its energy policies. In this sense, Türkiye's goal of being not only a transit country but also an energy hub is directly related to Spykman's paradigm of the power struggle among littoral (coastal) countries. The BTC Pipeline is a project that transports Azerbaijani oil to the Ceyhan port via Georgia and Türkiye. This route completes the westward flow of energy by sea, bypassing traditional land-based Russian energy routes. In alignment with Spykman's emphasis on maritime power and dominance over coastal regions, BTC transforms Türkiye into a strategic actor that "provides access to the oceans" (Yergin, 2011, p. 394). Moreover, BTC enables Türkiye to conduct energy trade via the Caucasus, thereby strengthening a maritime-oriented energy architecture in the East-West energy equation. This architecture, differing from Mackinder's land power axis, positions Türkiye as a Rimland player.

When evaluated in the context of Mahan's theory, which emphasizes the decisive role of sea power on national and global strength, Türkiye, as a country with coastlines on the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and Mediterranean Sea, possesses the strategic geographical location highlighted by Mahan for sea power. The Bosphorus and Dardanelles Straits are the only routes through which countries bordering the Black Sea can access the world's oceans. This makes Türkiye a critical transit country in terms of maritime trade and energy transportation (Yapp & Dewdney, 2021). Additionally, Türkiye's maritime tradition and its developing maritime transportation sector align with Mahan's elements of sea power. The size of Türkiye's merchant fleet and the advancement of its port infrastructure support the economic dimension of sea power. Türkiye's role in energy geopolitics is also shaped by sea power strategies. For example, the Port of Ceyhan is the exit point of the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) Oil Pipeline to the sea and plays a key role in transporting Caspian oil to global markets via the Mediterranean. This situation aligns with Mahan's approach that emphasizes the economic aspect of sea power (Bilgin, 2010, p. 114). Furthermore, Türkiye's energy exploration activities in the Eastern Mediterranean and its policies regarding maritime jurisdiction zones are indicators of the strategic use of sea power. The Eastern Mediterranean region has recently become central to energy geopolitics due to increasing natural gas discoveries, deepening competition over maritime jurisdiction areas in the region. In this context, the Maritime Boundary Delimitation Memorandum between Türkiye and Libya is a significant turning point both legally and geopolitically (Kanat & Gürdal, 2022, p. 27). This memorandum outlines the intended demarcation of maritime jurisdiction zones between Türkiye and Libya in the central Mediterranean region. In doing so, Türkiye nullifies Greece's attempt to establish an Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in the Eastern Mediterranean based on the island of Meis and redefines its continental shelf rights through the maritime boundary created with Libya (Acer, 2020, p. 15). This move, when evaluated through the lens of Mahan's Sea Power Theory, is a typical example of Türkiye's strategy to establish dominance in maritime areas within energy geopolitics. Türkiye's effort to expand its maritime jurisdiction in the Eastern Mediterranean is, in this regard, a modern reflection of Mahan's formula that links sea supremacy to strategic dominance. Türkiye defends its interests in

the hydrocarbon reserves of the Eastern Mediterranean not only through diplomacy but also by utilizing sea power. With this agreement, Türkiye positions itself not only as a littoral state but also as an actor directing energy geopolitics via maritime routes. This positions Türkiye as a multi-dimensional geopolitical actor, beyond the traditional dichotomy of land power vs. maritime power. The Turkish Navy's NAVTEX declarations, the protection of seismic research vessels by military units, and the exercises conducted within the scope of the Blue Homeland (Mavi Vatan) doctrine directly align with Mahan's perspective that emphasizes the influence of naval capacity on foreign policy (Türkiye Tribune, 2024). Türkiye's Blue Homeland doctrine includes goals such as the expansion of maritime jurisdiction areas and the effective utilization of marine resources (Oral & Özdemir, 2017, p. 952). Naval strength is of critical importance, especially for the exploration and protection of hydrocarbon reserves in the Eastern Mediterranean. Türkiye's seismic survey and drilling vessels—Oruç Reis, Barbaros Hayreddin Paşa, and Abdülhamid Han—operate under the escort of the Turkish Navy. This practice directly corresponds with Mahan's fundamental assumption that maritime trade routes and energy resources must be secured through military control (Mahan, 1890, p. 61). Furthermore, through maritime patrol aircraft, anti-submarine warfare capability, and regional naval bases, Türkiye positions its sea power not only for defense but also as an implementer of energy policies. In this respect, Türkiye is developing a multi-dimensional naval power doctrine capable of securing energy transport routes.

According to Seversky's theory, control of airspace is vital for national security and global influence. In this context, Türkiye, due to its geostrategic position, lies at the intersection of energy transit routes. This necessitates the effective control of its airspace and the use of air power in energy security strategies. Especially, the discovery and security of energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean has increased the need to boost Türkiye's air power capacity. Türkiye's air power capacity is supported by technological developments such as unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and air defense systems. These technologies play a crucial role in protecting energy infrastructure and securing energy transit lines. The domestically produced UAVs, such as Bayraktar TB2 and Akıncı, stand out with their high altitude and long-range capabilities. These platforms are effectively used for reconnaissance, surveillance, and target elimination. Furthermore, the domestic and national production of these systems has reduced Türkiye's dependency on foreign defense industries. Türkiye's energy security strategies encompass the discovery, protection, and transportation of energy resources. In this context, UAV/UCAV systems play a critical role in ensuring the security of energy infrastructure and countering potential threats. Alexander P. de Seversky's Air Power Theory emphasizes the decisive role of air power in modern warfare. According to Seversky, airspace control is vital for a nation's security and global influence. Türkiye's advancements in UAV/UCAV technologies can be considered practical reflections of this theory. Especially in regions with energy resources, control of the airspace enhances Türkiye's regional influence.

Brzezinski initially defined Türkiye as a geopolitical pivot and later noted that the country had become a geostrategic player. Türkiye's location at the intersection of the

Balkans, the Caucasus, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean makes it a critical country for energy corridors. In this context, Türkiye's energy policies align with Brzezinski's strategy of maintaining the balance of power in Eurasia (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 53). Through projects like the BTC oil pipeline and the TANAP, Türkiye functions as a bridge transferring energy resources from the Caspian and the Middle East to Europe. These projects support Türkiye's goal of being an energy hub as a transit country. Brzezinski's emphasis on the influence of control over Eurasian energy resources on global power balances makes Türkiye's role in these projects even more significant (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 145).

Huntington defines Türkiye as a "torn country". This is because, although Türkiye historically and culturally belongs to Islamic civilization, it has tried to integrate into Western civilization through the process of Westernization (Huntington, 1996, p. 138). This dual identity is also reflected in Türkiye's energy policies. For instance, Türkiye's energy cooperation with the European Union and projects such as the TANAP represent efforts toward integration with the West. However, its cooperation in the energy sector with countries like Iran and Russia shows that Türkiye also maintains ties with Islamic and Eurasian civilizations. According to Huntington, the regions where civilizational clashes are most intense are those at the intersections of different civilizations. Türkiye is located at one such intersection, and this reality is felt in its energy geopolitics. The disputes over energy resources in the Eastern Mediterranean and the drilling activities in the region have caused tensions between Türkiye and countries like Greece and Southern Cyprus, which belong to Western civilization. This situation overlaps with Huntington's prediction that civilizational conflicts would intensify in strategic areas like energy resources.

According to Fukuyama's thesis, with the spread of liberal democracy, ideological conflicts in international relations would diminish, and economic cooperation would come to the fore. Türkiye's energy policies can also be evaluated within this framework. Especially, its cooperation in the energy field with the European Union and projects like TANAP can be interpreted as indicators of Türkiye's attempts to integrate into the liberal democratic world order. However, Türkiye's energy policy is not limited to cooperation with the West. It also continues to engage with Iran and Russia in the energy domain. This shows that, contrary to Fukuyama's prediction, a unipolar liberal world order has not emerged, and a multipolar and complex energy geopolitics still exists. Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis has faced various criticisms. Events such as 9/11, the Iraq War, and the Russia-Ukraine War have shown that ideological conflicts have not ended and that liberal democracy has not become a universal system (Ateş, 2024, p. 108). Furthermore, Fukuyama's thesis has been criticized for maintaining a Western-centric perspective and for not sufficiently considering other cultural and political systems (Gürbüz, 2023, p. 180).

6. CONCLUSION

With its geopolitical location at the crossroads of Eurasia, the Middle East, and Europe, Türkiye has historically been at the center of great power rivalries and regional

energy strategies. In this study, Türkiye's energy geopolitics has been addressed within the framework of classical and contemporary geopolitical theories, and an analysis has been made in the light of theories based on land, sea, air, culture, and ideology. In the context of Mackinder's Heartland Theory, Türkiye is of strategic importance due to its proximity to the Heartland region of Eurasia and its position as a transit point for land-based energy routes. Spykman's Rimland Theory emphasizes Türkiye's role as a connector between Europe and the Middle East, as a Rimland country balancing land and sea power. According to Mahan's Sea Power Theory, Türkiye—thanks to its triple maritime access to the Black Sea, Aegean Sea, and the Mediterranean—is one of the few actors that can convert maritime power into energy security. In this regard, the MİLGEM project, TCG Anadolu, seismic research vessels, and naval modernization constitute the infrastructure of Türkiye's maritime strategy centered on energy. Seversky's Air Power Theory is directly related to Türkiye's recent advancements in UAV/SİHA technologies, which have increased surveillance and monitoring capacity over energy infrastructures. Türkiye's advances in air power serve as a deterrent instrument in the protection of energy zones.

In Brzezinski's "Grand Chessboard" thesis, Türkiye is described as a geopolitical pivot on the western edge of Eurasia, with its balancing role between East and West emphasized due to its location at the intersection of energy corridors. Türkiye's critical role in projects transporting energy resources from the Caspian, the Middle East, and the Eastern Mediterranean to Europe is a concrete reflection of this geostrategic position. Huntington's "Clash of Civilizations" thesis defines Türkiye as a "torn country" located at civilizational boundaries, synthesizing different cultural identities. This aligns with Türkiye's energy diplomacy that involves both cooperation with the West and engagement with the Eurasian-Islamic world. The Eastern Mediterranean, with its potential for civilizational conflicts over energy resources, illustrates the resonance of Huntington's thesis in energy policy. According to Fukuyama's "End of History" thesis, the universalization of liberal values should facilitate energy-based cooperation. However, Türkiye's energy policies are built on pragmatic rather than ideological grounds. Energy agreements with Russia, Iran, and Azerbaijan demonstrate the limitations of Fukuyama's thesis in explaining the current state of international energy geopolitics.

The hypotheses formulated in the introduction have been addressed throughout the analysis and can now be assessed considering the empirical and theoretical findings. First, the argument that Türkiye's geographical location and energy transit infrastructure are necessary but not sufficient conditions for strategic agency is confirmed. While geography provides structural advantages, Türkiye's proactive diplomatic initiatives, alliance-building strategies, and infrastructure investments have proven essential in transforming spatial potential into geopolitical leverage. Second, classical geopolitical theories such as Mackinder's and Mahan's remain relevant in framing Türkiye's position but require critical updating. Their state-centric and territorial focus must be complemented by insights from contemporary theories that account for economic interdependence, soft power, and multilateral governance. Third, the study supports the hypothesis that

Türkiye actively constructs its geopolitical role through strategic agency. Its balancing between actors like Russia, the EU, and the US, and its use of multilateral energy platforms demonstrate an intentional and dynamic geopolitical posture. Lastly, the hypothesis that cultural and ideological theories offer partial, yet valuable frameworks is validated. While Huntington's and Fukuyama's perspectives illuminate identity-based tensions and ideological narratives, they fall short in capturing the hybrid and pragmatic nature of Türkiye's energy diplomacy.

In conclusion, Türkiye's energy geopolitics is of such a multi-dimensional nature that it cannot be explained by a single geopolitical theory. In addition to land, sea, and air power, Türkiye's position at the intersection of civilizations and its capacity for ideological flexibility are key factors that could elevate it to the status of a regional energy hub. In this context, the success of energy diplomacy depends not only on pipeline transit but also on the balanced management of military capacity, foreign policy flexibility, regional harmony, technological competence, and legal-international legitimacy. If Türkiye successfully integrates these parameters, it may rise from being merely a transit country to becoming a decision-making energy actor in the energy equation of the 21st century. Building on the theoretical insights and Türkiye's empirical trajectory, a comprehensive set of policy recommendations can be proposed to enhance the country's strategic agency in energy geopolitics. Türkiye should aim to diversify its supply and demand partnerships by deepening cooperation with both traditional energy providers such as Azerbaijan and Iraq, and emerging suppliers in the Eastern Mediterranean, while simultaneously strengthening its ties with consumer markets in Europe and Asia to reduce dependency on any single vector.

In parallel, regional multilateralism must be reinforced by leveraging participation in platforms like the Eastern Mediterranean Gas Forum and the Black Sea Economic Cooperation to institutionalize Türkiye's intermediary role and bolster its regulatory credibility. As global energy systems shift toward decarbonization, it is also critical for Türkiye to invest in renewable energy diplomacy by incorporating green hydrogen, offshore wind, and other sustainable technologies into its strategic energy planning, positioning itself as a forward-looking green energy corridor. Given the strategic importance of maritime chokepoints and national airspace, Türkiye should further enhance its naval and aerial defense capacities to ensure the security of energy transit routes and assert regional stability. Furthermore, adopting a hybrid power strategy that combines classical geopolitical tools with soft power mechanisms—such as technology transfer, regulatory harmonization, and development diplomacy—would allow Türkiye to extend its influence across energy networks more effectively. Finally, aligning energy policy with a coherent foreign policy vision and communicating this alignment with clarity to international partners will be essential to building trust, reinforcing predictability, and consolidating Türkiye's long-term strategic relevance in global energy affairs.

These findings suggest three theoretical conclusions regarding Türkiye's role in energy geopolitics. First, while Türkiye's geographic location offers structural advantages,

these alone do not translate into strategic influence without deliberate diplomatic and regulatory strategy. The case of TANAP and TurkStream illustrates how infrastructure needs to be embedded in broader regional visions to yield geopolitical leverage. Second, although classical geopolitical theories offer useful conceptual tools for understanding spatial dynamics, they fall short of capturing the complexities of the current multi-actor energy landscape. Their state-centric and determinist assumptions must be revisited in light of evolving alliances, non-state actors, and technological transformations in the energy sector. Third, Türkiye's geopolitical projection should not rely solely on Western-centric paradigms; instead, it must be informed by hybrid frameworks that integrate cultural diversity, regional pluralism, and normative agency. In this context, Türkiye emerges not as a passive subject within great power strategies, but as an active constructor of its own energy diplomacy shaped by strategic pragmatism and normative flexibility.

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