

The formation of Russian borders and its impact on Russia's national security

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Abstract: The boundary problem has not only been one of the major international conflicts but one of the most sensitive and difficult issues to deal with. Russia has had or continues to have serious western and southern border problems, which may probably or already lead to many issues, such as the challenges to Russia's national security system posed by the EU's eastward expansion and the resulting Russia-Ukraine conflict. In this paper, the author will sort out the academic research results, focus on analysing the border issues where disputes and conflicts exist in Russia, summarize the potential risks and pitfalls that still exist and discuss the negative impact of these pitfalls on the Russian national security system, as well as predict the possible future research directions. Based on the formation of Russia's borders and border problems, this paper finds that the conflicts arising from Russia's borders are not only historical problems but also the root cause of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. In the context of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, the academic community should conduct an in-depth study on the problems of Russia's borders, which problems will continue to be a potential threat to Russia's national security, and what adjustments have been made to Russia's national security system in response.

Keywords: Russian border, Geopolitics, National security.

1. Introduction

As the largest country in the world undoubtedly in terms of land area, Russia has fourteen land neighbouring countries. From a geopolitical point of view, the geographical situation of multiple neighbouring countries has brought Russia numerous territorial disputes and border conflicts and has also had an ongoing impact on Russia's national security.

As for the studies on Russia's relations with its neighbouring countries, current academic research has tended to focus on Soviet-era border relations, so there is a certain amount of lag. In the last decade, the issue of Russia's land borders has been extensively explored in Russian historiography, and a large number of results, such as monographs, dissertations and journal articles, have emerged. Only after the outbreak of the Russo-Ukrainian conflict, there was a spurt of research on the Russian-Ukrainian border issue; as for the studies on the above impact of border issues on national security, the current studies do not closely integrate Russia's border relations with its national security strategy for targeted analysis.

Studying and attempting to solve Russia's border problems will not only reduce or even eliminate the negative effects of security risks, improve Russia's national security system and implement Russia's national security strategy, but also advance the progress of the resolution of border problems and cooperation between Russia and its neighbouring countries, and maintain peace and stability between Russia and its neighbouring countries and the wider Eurasian region.

Therefore, in this paper author will summarize and study some momentous pairs of neighbouring countries of Russia and analyse the hidden dangers and factors that still exist on Russia's borders and which may still trigger conflicts, as well as the impact on Russia's national security strategy. As the eastern part of Russia is in a relatively secure and stable state, while the western and southern parts of Russia are not only an important part of Russia's national security strategy, they are also a crisis-ridden and potentially dangerous areas, and are more prone to conflict. The impact and adverse effects of the three Transcaucasian states and Kazakhstan on Russia's national security system.

The first part of the main body will general analyse the current situation of Russian borders, the

second and third parts provide an overview of Russia's western and southern borders, discussing the formation of Russia's borders and the problems involved in the formation. In the fourth and also the final part of the paper author will conclude and analyse the impact of border issues on Russia's national security concept, in particular, the classic geopolitical theories of maritime and land power as reflected in Russia's national security strategy, and an analysis of some of the problems and pitfalls that still exist in Russia's national security system, the author will conclude by summarising and discussing what targeted improvements have been made to Russia's national security strategy in response to these problems.

2. Methods

In this thesis, the author used the method of literature review to study material in two main areas of research - the historical development and current description of Russia's border issues, and the impact of border issues on Russia's national security strategy. In the section on border issues, the author mainly reviewed the literature on western and southern Russia, while in the section on national security strategy, the author refers to the official National Security Strategy of the Russian Federation published on the website of the Office of the President of the Russian Federation, as well as to the relevant analysed literature.

3. The current situation of the Russian border

For Russia, the geography of its many neighbouring countries, the length of its borders and the increasingly complex situation in the border areas make border security a significant and notable issue in Russia's national security.

There are three main types of border disputes that Russia has faced: firstly, those arising from the annexation of Soviet territory during and around the Second World War. For example, the territorial dispute between the Soviet Union and Finland ended with the annexation of the entire Isthmus of Karelia, the western and northern shores of Lake Ladnoy and the islands in the lake; secondly, after the October Revolution in the Soviet Union, Russia's borders were subject to numerous changes, including the territorial claims of Estonia, Latvia, Belarus and Ukraine to Russia after independence, which gave rise to very complex and dangerous border problems; thirdly, there were border problems arising from internal wars in the Soviet republics for political reasons, the most prominent of which was the border dispute between Russia and Georgia [1].

From the current state of affairs, Russia's eastern border is among the most stable compared to its southern and western border issues. Both Mongolia and China have reached peace and safe circumstances with Russia and there are almost no border disputes, and although there is still a dispute between Japan and Russia over the South Channa Islands, both countries have chosen to adopt a relatively smooth and restrained attitude. In contrast, the issue of Russia's southern border is very problematic. Both Kazakhstan and the Caucasus have more complex and dangerous border disputes with Russia and will be difficult to resolve and restore calm in the short term. At the same time, the security situation on Russia's western border is not to be taken lightly [2]. The Russian-Ukrainian conflict has caused a new war and has had a very strong impact on Russia, Ukraine and Europe.

The author will then discuss in detail the current state of Russia's western and southern borders.

3.1. Russia's western security environment

There have been many works on Russian national security, both in Russia and in the West, and although there have been fewer works on the security situation in the West, the subject has been covered in other works to a greater or lesser extent.

As far as the author has been able to come across, the following books have been written on the subject of security in the west in Russia: 1. Contemporary Geopolitics and Russia's Geopolitical Strategy, which discusses the security situation that Russia faces in the present and the near future

from a geopolitical point of view and compares Russia's power with that of other countries, such as the United States, and analyses how Russia will adjust its geopolitical strategy in response to changes and developments in the external world [3]; 2. The New Russia in the New Eurasia: Problems of Integrated Security, discusses the importance of Russia's position in Eurasia, its relations with other countries in Eurasia and the security problems facing Russia, based on its geographical position in the continent. It also suggests that Russia can only achieve its goal of complete and solid national security if it guarantees the comprehensive security of all its regions and components [4].

Western academics have also written and written about Russia's national security and foreign policy: Stephen J. Blank, for example, has published several papers on Russia's military security and the comparison of its power with that of the United States [5], Andrew T. Wolff said in his paper that the establishment of good relations between NATO and Russia requires NATO to release the signal that it will no longer expand eastward. If NATO insists on the policy of expanding eastward, the conflict in Ukraine is just a precedent, and a direct conflict may even break out between NATO and Russia, so for the sake of security and stability in Europe, NATO's expansion eastward should be stopped at an appropriate time [6].

The issue of Russia's western border security is therefore mainly reflected in the tensions between Russia and NATO, Europe and the United States, and this is where the academic community has focused its research on the issue of Russia's western border. Both Russian and Western studies of Russia's western borders have focused on the importance of Poland and Ukraine in Russia's western security. The author will then summarise and outline the position of Russia's west in the national security strategy and the extent to which NATO's eastward expansion poses a security threat to Russia's western security.

3.1.1 The importance of security in western Russia

From a geopolitical point of view, Russia's history has been marked by attacks and threats from the West, which have been launched via Finland, Poland, Ukraine, etc. The creation of a security belt and military buffer zone in the west of Russia is therefore crucial for national security. The latest version of the Russian National Security Strategy, published in July 2021, therefore continues the idea of the United States and NATO as the primary security threat in previous editions, and in the second article of the chapter on national defence, it again refers to the military danger and military threat to Russia exacerbated by the pressure on Russia from NATO's eastward expansion [7].

3.1.2 The security situation and potential risks

According to the above, the problems facing Russia's western borders are NATO's eastern expansion and the fact that countries such as Poland and Ukraine, which were originally military buffer zones after the collapse of the Soviet Union, have turned around and become frontiers that NATO wants to absorb to target Russia, which has created considerable security anxiety for Russia.

Then the author will take NATO, which is the most threatening factor for Russian western security, as the example, discussing the impact of NATO's eastern expansion on Russia's western security.

In Russia's national security strategy, the western region has always played a very important role. Due to the nature of the Russian terrain, which is high in the east and low in the west, there is no favourable terrain in the western part of the country that can be used to effectively block the enemy, so to maintain the security of the western border, effectively defend against foreign attacks and expand the depth of the country's defence, Russia attaches great importance to the buffer zone on its western border. This not only threatens Russia's territorial security but also largely undermines Russia's tactical military objective of "space for time".

In the history of Russia, both Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union have always adhered to the strategic policy of westward expansion, trying to seize strategic positions in the west and build their buffer security belt. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, the western part of Russia was left in a dangerous 'vacuum', with many of the countries that had been part of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics declaring independence in the process of disintegration, and with NATO, which has remained active since the end of the Cold War, absorbing and attempting to absorb these newly

independent countries by incorporating them into its membership. On the one hand, NATO, which has been active since the end of the Cold War, has been absorbing and attempting to absorb these newly independent states, and by incorporating them into NATO's membership, has been expanding eastwards on the Eurasian continent. The continuous expansion of NATO to the east has not only seriously threatened the security of Russia's western borders but has also led to a serious imbalance in regional security, which has led to an escalation of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict after five rounds of its expansion to the east.

NATO's eastern expansion not only expands its sphere of influence in Eurasia but also increases its military threat power. The power gap between Russia and NATO is a source of great unease for Russia, but the process of NATO's expansion to the east has not been suspended at Russia's constant request and has instead been extended to a fifth round, thus making NATO the primary threat to Russia's national security continuously.

In addition to the threat posed to Russia by NATO's expansion in a geopolitical sense, it also has serious implications for Russia's national security in terms of practical energy issues. In today's world, non-traditional security issues are coming to the forefront of the international community and are becoming an important consideration for all countries, and energy is a key component of non-traditional national security issues. The expansion of NATO to the east is a threat to Russia's energy security as it hampers the country's energy routes, which are an important part of Russia's economic development, and is, therefore, a blow to Russia's energy exports.

3.2. Russia's western security environment

Russia's southern border instability is mainly due to the small-scale local conflicts among the five Central Asian countries and the three Transcaucasian countries, while Russia is always worried about Georgia, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and other countries joining NATO. In this section, the author will analyse the situation on Russia's southern border and the current security situation.

3.2.1 The importance of security in southern Russia

Russia's southern region occupies an important place in its national security strategy and is one of three strategic directions. Although the creation of strategic buffer zones has been an important strategic task throughout Russia's history, no matter how wide they are, they only temporarily isolate Russia from the spheres of influence of other major powers. The security and stability of Russia's southern border and its strategic deployment are crucial to the maintenance and consolidation of Russia's national security.

3.2.2 The security situation in southern Russia and its potential pitfalls

The ongoing conflicts on Russia's southern borders in Transcaucasia, the North Caucasus and Central Asia, as well as the intense competition for natural and energy resources among the countries to the south, and the frequent armed conflicts on its southern borders are factors of insecurity that hinder regional stability, are challenges that pose a direct threat to Russia's national security.

Among the three Transcaucasian countries, Armenia has always been a staunch ally of Russia due to its serious energy dependence on Russia, while Azerbaijan and Georgia are wavering in their attitude towards Russia, and the relationship between Russia and Georgia and Russia and Azerbaijan has become increasingly tense under the intervention of the European Union, NATO and the United States. In this section, the author will take Georgia as an example and discuss the importance of the three Transcaucasian countries to Russia's southern border security and the security threats.

Georgia is naturally located in the west-central part of the Transcaucasus region, which connects Europe and Asia, with the Black Sea to the west, Turkey to the south-west, Russia to the north, and Azerbaijan and Armenia to the south-east. Georgia is a strategic hub linking the two continents and a land route between the Black Sea and the Caspian Sea [8].

Georgia was one of the objects of the traditional southern geopolitical policy of the Russian Empire. Russia's origins on the plains of Eastern Europe are typical of a land-based state, a characteristic that makes it easy to attack but difficult to defend, and which makes it vulnerable to enemies on all sides.

In this unique situation, Russia has developed a particular concept of security, replacing the defensive with the offensive and expanding its strategic buffer zone. Georgia's geopolitical significance cannot be underestimated as an important part of Russia's strategic buffer zone.

The five Central Asian countries are of great geopolitical importance to Russia, and once this region is drawn in and absorbed by NATO, it will create a semi-encirclement of Russia by NATO. Among the five Central Asian countries, Kazakhstan is of particular geopolitical importance to Russia, mainly because of the long border between Russia and Kazakhstan, and therefore Kazakhstan's relations with Russia largely affect Russia's energy transport and port situation on the Black Sea.

4. Russia's National Security System

Conflicts over borders and instability in neighbouring countries have a considerable impact on Russia's non-traditional security, which threatens Russia's resource security and cultural security from the external environment. Influenced by border conflicts and neighbouring countries, Russia is also constantly refining its national security strategy and actively looking outwards for ways to maintain stability and security, whether it is the foreign expansion under Tsarist Russia, where the offence was used instead of defence, or the attempts to negotiate with NATO under Putin's administration to slow down the process of NATO's eastward expansion, all reflecting its emphasis on homeland security and a national security philosophy profoundly influenced by geopolitics.

In this section, the author will take up the border issue mentioned above and discuss its impact on Russia's national security philosophy, and will further elaborate on the pitfalls that still exist in Russia's national security system and what adjustments have been made to Russia's national security strategy in response to these pitfalls and the use of Russia for border issues and conflicts since the collapse of the Soviet Union.

4.1. The impact of border issues on Russia's national security philosophy

Influenced by the classical theories of geopolitics - the doctrine of sea power and the doctrine of land power - the possession of access to the sea and the enhancement of strategic depth and the creation of military buffer zones are among the core strategic objectives of Russia's national security strategy.

The doctrine of naval power put forward by Mahan emphasises the importance of sea power and proposes that the state should focus on the integration of its maritime economic power, i.e. maritime military power - fleets, bases, ports and maritime non-military power - as an adjunct to overseas trade [9]. This was one of the main reasons for Russia's constant expansion over the centuries, moving closer to the sea: since there was no natural barrier in the form of mountains and rivers, the only way was to go to the sea, to make it a defence line to guarantee the country's security, to turn Russia from a landlocked country into a maritime power. In his book *The Fate of Russia*, Zhirinovskiy writes that Russia can only survive if its borders are by the sea...[10] Russia wants to expand into the warmth of the sea. All of the above is evidence of Russia's determination to "go to the sea" as part of its national security philosophy.

The geopolitical significance of the Asian and European continent, which Mackinder described as the "island of the world" in his land power theory, cannot be underestimated, and Russia, the largest country in Asia and Europe, not only straddles two continents but its western border is closely linked to the "heartland" of Eastern Europe. "This geographical position, coupled with the fact that the western part of the country is an easy to attack and difficult to defend plain, made the Russians conscious of the fact that the only way to distance themselves from danger was to adhere to a policy of territorial expansion and to extend the country's borders as far as possible. As Brzezinski wrote in his book *The Race Program - A Geostrategic Platform for U.S.-Soviet Competition*: "Insecurity gives rise to expansion; expansion breeds insecurity; insecurity, in turn, stimulates further expansion." The above can show that in Russia's concept of security, expansion in Asia and Europe is not only export of the desire to control power but also a legitimate act to guarantee national security.

4.2. The remaining pitfalls in Russia's national security system

Immediately following the previous elaboration of Russia's national security philosophy, Russia, influenced by the doctrines of land and sea power, has made land expansion and the search for access to the sea a crucial tool in its national security strategy, and it's more than 100-year history of expansion and achievements suffered greatly after the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The main threats Russia faces on the Eurasian continent are the severe internalisation of its heartland, the loss of more than 480,000 square kilometres of strategic buffer zone after the collapse of the Soviet Union, the advancement of NATO's frontier positions by more than 600 kilometres, and the frequent conflicts on the periphery, especially on Russia's southern borders during ethnic disputes and disputes in the Caucasus, which face serious security risks. The main challenges to Russia's territorial security are the collapse of the Soviet Union, which wiped out centuries of expansion, the independence of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania, which reduced Russia's ports in the Baltic Sea to three, and the independence of Ukraine and Georgia, which left Russia with only two ports in the Black Sea [11]. The disadvantage of access to the warm ocean has become an important threat to Russia's national security. Therefore, Russia and Ukraine have been negotiating for years around the issue of the fleet and ports in the Black Sea, and also insist that the three Baltic states are the last bottom line of NATO's eastward expansion.

4.3. Targeted refinement of Russia's national security strategy

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Russia has relentlessly pursued means to maintain the country's security and stability, including but not limited to negotiating with NATO and promoting reconciliation and cooperation with neighbouring countries, as evidenced in successive editions of Russia's national security strategy. In response to the numerous outbreaks of border disputes and conflicts since the dissolution, Russia has adapted its national security strategy to the specific circumstances of the country's borders: in response to the adverse effects of NATO expansion on its western borders, Russia has actively and positively negotiated with NATO and, in the absence of such negotiations, has adopted other flexible responses, such as retaining its buffer zone in Central and Eastern Europe, working to establish stable partnerships with American and European countries, and In response to the ongoing conflicts in the southern border countries, Russia is actively coordinating conflicts to prevent armed conflicts in the southern border countries from affecting Russia's border security and to prevent spillover of conflicts from the southern countries to Russia. Russia is seeking to expand its strategic space to the Far East, participate in cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region and establish its position in the region.

5. Conclusion

Russia's complex border problems pose a threat to its national security system and pose a challenge to the security of the Asian and European continents. Studying Russia's border problems and neighbouring countries' relations will not only ensure Russia's national security but also reduce the outbreak of conflicts between Asian and European countries to a certain extent and maintain the security and stability of the Asian and European continent. Through the integration and analysis of Russia's western and southern borders, the author finds that from a geopolitical perspective, Russia's concern for its territorial security has never diminished, and the crisis-ridden state of border security poses a considerable challenge to the maintenance of Russia's national security, especially as its western borders remain a security threat and will continue to affect Russia's national security. Russia's relationship with NATO will remain a strategic priority for it in the coming years. Russia's strategic focus will then gradually shift to the Far East and the Asia-Pacific region and will continue to refine its national security strategy in response to border issues in line with its offensive rather than defensive philosophy. The study of Russia's main problems will help to improve its national security strategy, ensure the security and stability of its borders, and focus on building and maintaining friendly relations with its neighbours, all of which are crucial to the security of Russia and the Eurasian

continent. The academic community will continue to be interested in Russia's border security issues and neighbourhood relations in the future, especially in the light of the serious scenario of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict escalating into armed conflict, and Russia's national security issues cannot be ignored. The academic community can study Russia's changing interaction with NATO and other countries and organizations, as well as its future course, in light of its legitimate national security needs.

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