

## **Explanation of the Structural and Functional Characteristics of Geographical Buffer Spaces**

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### **Abstract**

Some geographical areas, in order to prevent the possibility of direct contact and conflict between rival powers, often by mutual or unilateral agreements, function as buffer spaces. These powers are then committed not to trespass on any spaces or take control of them. Buffers as geographical phenomena are as old as mankind, but there have been no academic studies on the subject so far, and only some brief scientific definitions of "buffer states" have been proposed by scientists without dealing with their nature, features and usages. On the other hand, "buffer geographical space" was first used by the authors of this study without prior inclusion in geographical, political and international studies.

Rivalry of two powers and existence of a weak space between them with strategic importance for them shifts their attention to this space and a rivalry emerges between them in controlling and maintaining it. Also, such spaces are zones for the incidence of overt and covert rivalries between these powers. Problems that countries, like Lebanon, Iran, Iraq, Korea, Afghanistan and Cambodia in Asia, Poland and Belgium in Europe, Uruguay, Nicaragua, in Central America in the twentieth century, have faced or sometimes they still face. Current study, based on descriptive – analytical method, seeks to understand and explain the nature and structural-functional characteristics of buffer spaces.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Buffer space, Rivalry between powers, Geographical space, Power

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### **Introduction**

At regional or global levels, sometimes two or more powers vie to control the world and geopolitical areas and are still vying in the regional and global scale. They are trying to achieve an extended goal, i.e. ruling and infiltrating geographical spaces. In rivalry pattern between two greater powers, their geographical space is separate from each other. Between the two, there is a space called “the vacuum space”; a geographic space without much power. Geopolitical boundaries of these two powers should not contact because in such a case, the possibility of conflict can arise. Powers become so sensitive to this space that they counteract their struggles for this space. They react immediately with each step and this buffer space turns into a control, maintenance and prudence space. Buffer space cannot protect or vaccinate itself. What prevents this space from collapsing is the action and rivalry of these powers. According to Thomas Ross “Of the 200 or so national political entities on the planet today, at least thirty-two have at some period during this century served as buffer states. Most buffer states of the twentieth century can be characterized as possessing an interior location, especially those on the Eurasian landmass” (Ross, 1986:20). And more interestingly, most of them are located in Eurasia. Their territories were full of mountains, plateaus, swamps, and other inhibiting geographic factors. Existence and maintenance of the buffer state depend on the spatial influence of two or more political or military powers that have close rivalry. Buffer states are considered as small sates but geographically they are not. Average or large countries in terms of population and extent can also serve as buffer states. Political elites of buffer or quasi-buffer states often based on their countries’ foreign policies show tendency toward one of the two powers which leads to

further weakening of these states and they become tools for powers in extending their sphere of influence. Although buffer states, as valid functional elements, exist in international relations, there is a need for redefining buffer spaces. Thus, we try to explain the structural-functional characteristics of buffer spaces. This study tries to provide a definition of buffer space and consequently buffer states and tries to investigate their structural and functional patterns.

### **Theoretical Framework**

**Geopolitics:** Geopolitics is the study of the mutual interrelationships of geography, power and politics and consequences resulting from their combination (Hafeznia, 2006: 37).

**Politics:** Politics is also concerned with the science of administering government and politically organized society which deals with the study of the process of self-government. Political science is a knowledge which discusses government, its organization, functions and roles, authority, governance, individuals' relations with governments, rights and duties of citizens and the realm of human liberty (Hafeznia, 2006: 205).

**Power:** Power is the ability and talent of an individual to do something and its exertion on another individual to create a desirable behavior. According to Morgenthau, all policies are targeted at gaining power (Zarghani, 2009: 11). According to him, power is the control of human beings over other people's thoughts and actions (Morgenthau, 1948:9).

**Space:** Space in geography includes nature and all the resources that can be directly or indirectly clash with human needs and create a new face on earth. Thus, geographical space is a habitat formed from natural conditions and structures of society (Shokuyi, 1985: 118). Geographical

space is a three-dimensional area consisting of identity, structure and boundaries and has different scales and dynamic landscape and it constitutes life territory, mobility, feeling, objective and activities of humans (hafeznia, 2010: 82).

### **The Concept of Buffer Geographical Spaces**

“The buffer phenomenon is probably as old as mankind. Even prehistoric tribes left certain territories between the areas of their settling uninhabited in order to avoid regular contact and, thus, reduce the probability of brutal clashes among one another”. (Turbaned, 2009:35)

“The term of buffer was first applied to a political entity in 1875; buffer state was first used in 1883” (Murray, 1933:127).

“The world’s earliest states, for security reasons utilized transition or border zones to spatially separate themselves”. (Spykman, 1939:406)

Municipal states of Greece perhaps are the first buffer regions or borders created by human beings (Ibid.397). In Sassanid era, also, Iranians created Hire and Greeks created Ghasan as buffer states and their function was to lower the opponent’s pressure.

### **Buffer state definitions**

It should be noted that the concept of buffer space occurs in a systemic look at a geopolitical world. The system is created within a regional and global competition, and suggests that there is a dynamic competition between powers. Meanwhile, different definitions of buffer state have been provided, but there is not a definition about buffer space. Twenty nine definitions of buffer state have been provided by researchers. Below, we refer to only important ones:

1. “A weak state, small in size, probably without a positive foreign

policy of its own, which lies between two or more powerful states and thus serves to inhibit international aggression” (Potter,1930 :45).

2. “A buffer state is a weak power between two or more stronger ones, maintained or even created with the purpose of reducing conflict between them” (Wight,1995:160).
3. “A buffer state is usually defined as a small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival, states. It seems natural to think of it as a sort of political fender serving to reduce the danger of conflict between its greater neighbors” (Mathisen,1971:107).
4. “Buffer states are those which are created in order to prevent friction and strife between two powers” (Mireydar, 2006: 119).
5. “Small political units located lying between large states”(Spykman,1942:440).
6. “An American scholar John Chay holds that a small power must be neutral and independent in order to play the role of a genuine buffer in a great power rivalry” (Chay,1986:192).
7. “A small independent state lying between two larger, usually rival, states (or block of states)”. (Maila,1986:29, Mathisen,1981).
8. “Buffer states are lesser actor (in international relations) sandwiched between more powerfully endowed, ambitious, and often aggressive entities” (Ziring,1986:153).
9. “A buffer state is a small political or administrative unit located between and separating two larger opposing powers”(Ingalls,1986:233).

### **Discussion of Definitions**

“The basic definitions of a buffer state offered by Potter (1930), Spykman (1942), Mathisen (1971), Partem (1983), or any of the authors

in this text were posited over a period of decades yet there is remarkably little difference among them” (Mathisen,1971).

So, the overall framework and definitions provided are nearly identical to the consensus of all the scholars, and they have been mentioned. The main indicators and characteristics of the above definitions are:

1. The most important feature of buffer state is that it is located between two rival powers;
2. Buffer, is a small and weak state in the global system; from the second half of the twentieth century buffer states, under the framework of small countries and weak countries, were under study.
3. Creating geopolitical balance and reducing conflicts between two hostile powers;
4. Neutrality in foreign affairs;
5. Having independence and political sovereignty;
6. Buffer situation is imposed upon these buffer states and sometimes these states are created by powers. And their existence is to ensure balance at global and regional level;

In order to become a buffer state, a country should have the above characteristics and could be included in the above-mentioned definitions. Existing between two powers will not necessarily mean that the state serves as buffer.

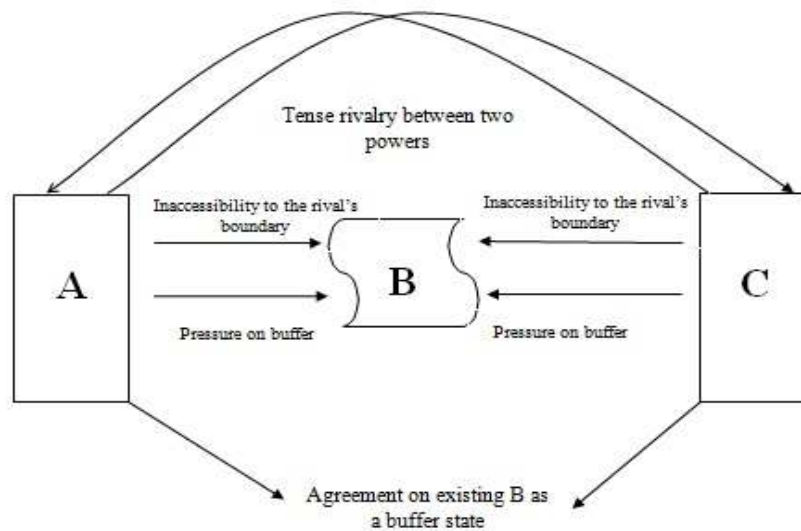
#### **Authors’ definition of buffer space**

According to the provided discussions, following definition of buffer space can be provided:

"Geographical space has one or more independent political units, but neutral, that is lying between two or more competing powers or their

sphere of influence or between rival or greater power blocks and separates these two and reduces the conflict in a way that they have agreed on its buffer situation."

Figure 1: Pattern of buffer space



A = Buffered power its sphere of influence  
C = Buffered power its sphere of influence  
B = Buffer space

### Buffer Spaces Characteristics

It should be noted that the concept of buffer space occurs in a systemic look at a geopolitics world. The system is created within a regional and global competition, and suggests that there is a dynamic competition between powers. In geopolitical world powers struggle for dominance

and power and buffer state is the result of this struggle. Buffer state is the geopolitical impasse between two or more regional or global powers to reach supreme power in the region or the world. Joining or maintaining a buffer space for powers can be very costly, so they prefer to specify a fluid and buffer situation for countries that are located in their geopolitical territory. Each country has its own functional and structural characteristics that reflect the knowledge, opportunities, spatial and geopolitical limitation, functions, and recognition of dominant global or regional system.

## **1. Structure of Buffer Spaces:**

### **1.1. Geographical Characteristics**

Geographic characteristics of buffer Spaces have two dimensions: location and Content.

#### **A) Location**

Geographical location is one of the major natural factors, and basically, it is how a point is located on the Earth's surface which is both relative and absolute (Ezzati, 2003: 75). The value of this location varies according situational changes and has inconsistent nature (Hafeznia, 2006: 161). In this section, we examine only two aspects of relative location: 1) vicinal location, and 2) geopolitical location.

#### **1) Vicinal Location**

"Vicinal location is of utmost importance in the creation of buffer states". (Prescott, 1972: 59). Coterminous countries have more contact with their neighbors, so conflicts can be expected more, while non-adjacent countries have low capability and fewer tendencies to declare war.

"Thus, the contiguity of rival great powers negatively affects stability



in the international system". (De Spiegeleire, 1994) "Several other studies discovered that the number of frontiers a country has positively correlates to that country 'participation in wars". (Turmanidze, 2009:41). And they are always sensitive to the location of their neighbors and they are cautious about situation. Thus, powers have always been trying to have a buffer space so that their borders do not contact.

## **2) Geopolitical Location**

The existence of strategic routes for transporting natural resources in a place can make this place to be considered as buffer.

"The development of buffer status in several states, namely Austria, Belgium, Bhutan, Iran, Nepal, the Netherlands, Poland, Romania, Switzerland and Yugoslavia, owes much to their location as invasion routes or point of contacts between different peoples' . (Ross, 1986:24).

## **B) Content**

### **B.1) Natural environment**

In addition to the geographic location, a set of internal geographical characteristics of a country also affect its buffer status. For example, physical characteristics especially impassable lands or demographic dispersion and existence of transportation routes that are related to the formation and maintenance of the buffer state.

"While modern technology has eliminated the effectiveness of the physical or spatial barrier, it has not reduced the need for the buffer state". (Ingalls, 1980:236) "Afghanistan, Austria and Yugoslavia are three excellent examples of a "crossroads" situation resulting from the rugged topography within a region"(Ross, 1986:23).

### **B.2) Areas of cultural transition and human characteristics**

"Many buffer states can be classed as zones of cultural transition and as such partake of the cultural and ideological patterns on either side of them"(Van Valkenburg, 1955:341).

Most of these countries have hostile environments and heterogeneous population in terms of ethnicity and culture.

### **2. Power distribution in buffer space (existence of big powers and weaker space)**

"There are at least three aspects of power distribution which must be considered. The first is that the buffer state should be smaller and weaker than the two neighboring big powers, the buffer state, however, does not necessarily have to be small; it could be a middle sized or even a large state but the key is that the buffer must be smaller and weaker than the two neighboring powers. If the state located between the two powers is stronger and larger than the powers it will become a "middle kingdom" rather than a buffer state. In other words, the two neighboring powers should be more powerful than the middle state. The second condition is that the middle state should have strength adequate to maintain self-determination. The buffer then must be strong enough to absorb shock exerted by the neighboring large power yet remain independent. If the buffer is too weak it will either be destroyed or become incapable of executing its buffer role. History provides numerous instances in which expansionistic neighboring powers intervened in the affairs of buffer states because of the weakness of the buffer. The excuse provided by the powers was that since the buffer was so weak it could no longer function as a buffer and therefore threatened the power's security. The result of

intervention usually was the demise of the buffer. The third condition is that the two big powers must maintain an approximate parity or balance of power. In addition to the balance of power, a balance of interests is vitally important because power without an interest will not exhibit any influence in international relations "(Chay ,1986:4-5).

In buffer system, there is competition between powers and a space as sub-system under penetrable system which becomes a buffer space between these two powers. Two big rival countries should be much stronger than the buffer so that it can impose its power. The higher power difference between buffer country and two powers, the higher buffer effect and buffer system stability. As long as the pressure on buffer from two powers are equal, the buffer will be maintained, so the two big powers should be satisfied with the same condition with the rival in order to strive for the maintenance of buffer.

### **3.1. Acceptance of buffer space by powers**

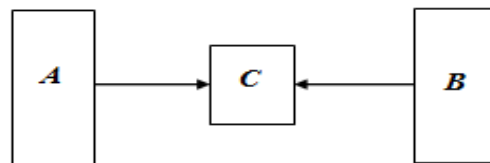
“Buffer states owe their existence to the location of two or more politically or militarily powerful spheres of influence within close proximity to each other and that these opposing powers, in an effort to maintain peace, may cooperate in the establishment of an independent state to separate their interests” (Ingalls,1986: 234)(Mathisen, 1971:109).

Hence, we cannot pay attention to the role of buffer space and ignore the significant role of powers (Partem, 1983:3). Rival powers (buffered powers) have the following characteristics:

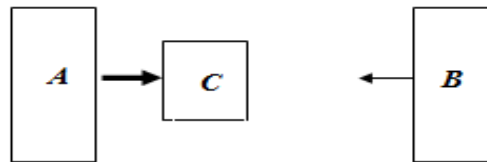
- Geographical distance from each other;
- Power balance between them;
- Strategic interests in the region;
- Having more power than the buffer state;

- Constant fear of a rival's progress toward its borders;
- Having expansionist policies;

Figure 2. Buffer situation between two powers



Equal pressure of two powers = maintaining stability of buffer space



Decreasing pressure of a power = attracting buffer by the other power

A = Superpower C = Superpower B = Buffer

Powers need for security in borders and their indisposition for conflict in their own territory has made the struggler penetrate into buffer territories and fill the power vacuum with neutral buffers and quasi-buffers (Knudsen, 1986:100).

"Hannah point out that there are two conditions which must be met in order to establish a viable, neutral buffer" (Hannah, 1979:188, in Jenkins, 1986:187).

"As long as there is relatively equal and constant pressure from both

sides the buffer system will be maintained. Thus the two larger powers must be in contention one with the other and must each be committed to the maintenance of the buffer system. As is demonstrated in the essay by Jenkins, the British withdrawal from India eliminated the pressure from one side of the buffer system countered on Afghanistan. With no effective power to counter the Soviet influence, Afghanistan was pulled into the Soviet sphere "(Ingalls, 1986:234).

"Great powers try their best to prevent their rivals from annexing buffer states or converting them into their satellites. Under the balance of power (and sometimes even in its absence) any attempt by one of the buffered powers to invade the buffer, causes reciprocal actions by the other buffered power (s). Owing to that, the buffer may stay unharmed (for instance, in 1870 Germany and France did not violate Belgium's neutrality fearing British involvement), but it may also become a shatterbelt or a battleground, eventually bringing about its devastation or partitioning by the great powers into their spheres of influence. The history of Korea, Poland, Cambodia, Lebanon, Georgia and some other countries provides many examples of such a tragic experience.

Therefore, the viability of buffer states somewhat depends on their internal strength, i.e. their ability to keep the buffered actors at peace, as well as, to a larger extent, on the willingness of the great powers to sustain them as buffers "(Rondeli, 2003:165) (Turmanidze, 2009:48).

Buffer space structure, moves the buffer state to the second-hand position in the conflict between powers, but this does not prevent certain assets and resources of the buffer to be exploited. Britain in the first battle with Afghanistan, wanted to subjugate this country, Soviet Union in 1979 showed the same inclination. These samples do not reject the logic of buffer space but it reinforces the idea (Partem, 1983:12).

Sometimes, specifying buffer areas based on their relative or absolute deficiency is not easy. Although relative weakness of buffer is obvious, effort can be made in order to determine the absolute weakness criteria. Buffer states are often small powers and they play important roles in the international arena. Moreover, countries with average power can also serve buffers (Prescott, 1972:59).

#### **4.1 Independency of country**

For a country to be buffer, it should be completely independent or autonomous. Buffer space unit or units should have sovereignty, and in any circumstances, maintain its sovereignty or threatened life. Sometimes, buffer state is inclined to sustain its sovereignty through continuing role of neutrality between rivals. According to Nudson, leadership of buffer states must commit themselves to maintaining and easing the independence and autonomy of the state. Finally, the success or failure of the buffer system is dependent largely on the balance between the two rival countries, acceptance of buffer state by them, buffer state power and its commitment toward national independence and autonomy.

"The powerful neighbors, in many cases not wishing to risk having the buffer area come under the control of an enemy state, agreed to the formation of an independent state to act as a barrier and at the same time neutralize the strategic routes through the buffer zones. Also important is the fact that since many of these buffer areas have been frequently invaded, the population is an amalgam of different peoples who may have been perceived by the powerful neighbors as unable, because of their diversity, to create a nation unified or strong enough to challenge either of the neighboring powers. Thus because of the cultural

heterogeneity of the buffer area resulting, in many cases, from the region's physiography, the neighboring powers held a synoecious attitude toward the buffer area and thusly independence was, if not assured, greatly encouraged by the powers' ( Ross , 1986:23).

There are two views regarding the dependency or independency of a country. On one hand, Spykman, Knudsen, Chay, Partem, du Spigleire, Rondeli and others emphasize that the buffer state must be completely independent and neutral and it cannot be a part of the defense system of a powerful country or its sphere of influence. On the other hand, Wigth, Mathisen and others believe that buffer state can be a part of powers. Both views have their own weaknesses.

Turmanidze "presumes that it is very difficult to identify buffer states by the" true independence "criterion as the latter concept is in fact obscure and there is no clear dividing line between" independence "and" dependence "or being in a" sphere of influence. "Moreover, it is unrealistic to take about the full independence and autonomy of small states in any historical period, especially if they have powerful and expansionist neighbors. Although recognized as sovereign entities by the international law, small / weak states almost never make important foreign policy decisions without taking into account the interests of great powers. "(Turmanidze, 2009:7).

### **5. Neutrality Policy**

Buffer space units should have sovereignty and maintain their political sovereignty. Often, buffer state is inclined to maintain its sovereignty through sustaining and continuing role of neutrality between the rivals. Ultimately, the success or failure in sustaining retaining system is largely balanced between two rival nations, retaining its acceptance by them,

retaining its strength and its commitment toward national independence and autonomy.

"Unless the buffer state succeeds in remaining neutral, its sovereignty is threatened and at times its very existence is placed in jeopardy" (Maila, 1986:30).

"Sovereignty means the right of the state alone to wield power over its territory and population. It also means the power of the state to act without being subordinated to the authority of another country" (Kemp, 2008 : 31).

Powers should recognize buffer status. Belgium is one of the best examples of a buffer state. London Agreement dated November 15<sup>th</sup> 1831, which was signed by Britain, Austria, France, Prussia, Russia and Belgium, recognized Belgium independence and its permanent neutrality. However, neutrality of Belgium was contradicted by Germany in the First World War.

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states in any historical period, especially if they have powerful and expansionist neighbors. Although recognized as sovereign entities by the international law, small / weak states almost never make important foreign policy decisions without taking into account the interests of great powers" (Turmanidze, 2009:7).

"A satellite, that is a phenomenon opposite to the buffer-a tool for preventing or hampering the conflict between rival great powers. A satellite may be used by one of the great powers either to attack the other or to protect itself from the possible enemy attack, but not to maintain peace " (Turmanidze, 2009:7).

"Alexander Rondeli suggest that Soviet satellites in the Cold War, the so-called People's Democracies (Poland, the German Democratic Republic, Czechoslovakia, etc.) Were not buffer states ... some of them had Soviet troops stationed on their territories and the Soviet defense perimeter stretched along their borders. They were members of the Warsaw Pact. Therefore, it would be incorrect to call them buffers"(Rondeli, 2003:161 in Turmanidze, 2009:8).

Thus, with dependency of a buffer state on powers, it can no longer be considered as a buffer. Buffer state is the first victim of war at any time between its powerful neighbors, so it always acts carefully and remains passive for reaching friendly conditions and following foreign policies.

### **6.1. Strategic importance of buffer Spaces for the rival powers**

Buffer space must have special characteristics like geographical, ethnical, strategic, military and etc. to attract the attention of powers. If a space is lacking such characteristics and is not of strategic importance to powers, it does not form a buffer space. It should be important for both rival powers so that they agree on the fact that it is a buffer.

### **7.1. Tendency of powers for adding buffer space into their defense system**

"A buffer state can let its territory be used as a military corridor by one of the great powers (either at its own will or as a result of coercion) makes it really dangerous for another great power to acquiesce to the existence of a weak, neutral state at its border. That is why, whenever possible, great powers refuse to preserve neutral buffers between one another and try to gain influence over their smaller neighbors. As Trygve Mathisen observes: "Stronger powers have often endeavored to include minor powers along their borders into their defense system (Turmanidze, 2009:38).

"According to the research conducted by an American scholar, Tanisha Fazal, on the question of the survival of states in the international system, buffer states are more likely to die than non-buffer states, and unallied buffer states are more likely to lose their sovereignty and disappear than buffer states allied with a great power" (Fazal, 2004:314,316 in Turmanidze, 2009:39).

### **8. Low economic growth, corruption, inefficient management**

"The crucial determinant of the buffer system is the conflict (rivalry and struggle for dominance) between the buffered powers" (Partem, 1983:13-16).

Zirring, about Afghanistan's condition during the competition of Russia and Great Britain, said: "Economic progress was slow and corruption and inept management prevented genuine development despite efforts by international agencies and foreign government". (Zirring, 1986:159) Other buffer states also, because of permanent rivalry

between buffer powers and buffer investors for maintaining their sovereignty, had lagged behind the development process.

## **2 - Functions of buffer Spaces**

Functions of buffer Spaces have internal and external dimensions. The most important buffer roles lie in the external dimensions.

### **A) Function in external dimension**

#### **1. Peace maintenance**

"Primary function (of the buffer Spaces) is to separate the conflicting sides and thus reduce the likelihood of physical (military) contact"(Chay, 1986:2).

"According to Nicholas Spykman, 'when, ... pressures are approximately equal, and it still proves difficult to arrive at a stable common frontier, a buffer state provides a certain degree of security for both sides by acting as a neutral zone, and functions as a keeper of the peace by affecting at least temporarily physical separation of the potential combatants' (Spykman, 1939; 410).

"The system may become unstable for a variety of reasons. If the strategic importance of the buffer area is not equally great to both great-powers, that would be one element of instability. If the commitment of the small buffer state's leadership to continued independence decrease, that could be another."(Knudsen, 1986:90).

"The survival of buffer states depends upon their ability to maintain peace between their neighbors and the willingness of their strong neighbors to resist any attempt at conquest of the buffer by another state"(Ross, 1986:26).

"We must keep in mind, though, that if the two powers are determined to fight, the buffer system is not an effective deterrent. But, if the pressure or shock coming from either side is relatively small and manageable, the buffer state is capable of playing its role and making an important peacekeeping contribution to the region and hence the world"(Chay, 1986:6).

## **2. Delaying war between powers**

Logical actors of buffer system tend to maintain a buffer between themselves because it is necessary to pass through the buffer territory and the attack is the first prerequisite for victory over the main rival. Therefore, both powers, within the system, find the opportunity to push the battle to buffer state and keep their own territories immune from any damage. Every power, in practice, pays attention to its own security, so it is ready to sacrifice buffer safety and remove any obstacle in the way.

"The buffer phenomenon has a dual positive effect on the macro stability of the international system: first, it minimizes threats emanating from the contiguity of rival powers, it adds its inner stabilizing effect to the system' (De Spiegeleire, 1994 in Turmanidze, 2009:44).

Of course, the buffer state cannot defeat either of the great powers, but it can hold up an invasion and give additional time to another power to mobilize its resources and draw up a plan of retaliatory actions. (Spykman, 1942:440).

Thus, buffered powers territories remain safe from the harm of war. Actually, they become victims of powers. If the buffer could not act, it becomes a route for invading forces to pass or a battle field for powerful neighbors. It is a case that occurred to Belgium during the two world wars. Korea, also with increased pressure, turned into a military highway

for the neighbors (China and Japan) which had intention of attacking one another. The worst and most destructive condition is that it is accompanied with an elimination of a power from the scene and the buffer.

### **3. Rivalry of powers for forming regional and global alliances**

At regional level, buffer state behavior may be influenced by pressure from neighboring countries to form alliances. Buffer state remains neutral and is committed to very specific behaviors or forming military alliances. In the first case, buffer state refrains from its one of the important rights (except self-defense right). In the latter, it lends a hand from other countries to maintain its independence. In both cases, the nature of the autonomy and independence of the country is affected. The fact that a country has unity or it resorts to its military alliances is an important indicator of foreign policy and overall behavior patterns of the country. According to Tanisha Fazal, American researcher,

“buffer states are more likely to die than non-buffer states, and unallied buffer states are more likely to lose their sovereignty and disappear than buffer states allied with a great power’ (Fazal, 2004:314,316 in Turmanidze, 2009:39).

Pressure on buffer state to join a party intensifies in three cases, when:  
1.rivalry between two adjacent superpowers is heated  
2. Power level is shifted hazardously toward one of the powers In relation to the other.  
3. Internal conflicts lead to internal crisis and a group seeks support from abroad.

### **4- Power balance between powers**

Existence of power balance is important and it is essential for a

successful country. Not only power balance but also balance in the interests and preferences of powers should exist in the course. As long as such a balance exists between large neighbors, buffer space will exist.

Spykman put the matter in the following words: "in a well as the stability of a frontier, is an indication of a system of approximate balanced force"(Spykman, 1942:441).

### **5. Buffer states foreign policy paradigm**

There are three main types of foreign policy that the buffer state may pursue:

- 1) Neutrality;
- 2) Leading to one of the buffered powers; and
- 3) Relying on a third power (Partem, 1983:20).

The first and third options help buffer states to maintain buffer status; the second strategy makes the country a semi-buffer state.

"In order to be effective, the neutrality of the state must be recognized by other countries. Neutrality, like all other international relations, differs from one political context to another and one time period to another. Switzerland, for example, has made an option in favor of absolute neutrality" (Bonjour, 1946).

"Austria has always tended to practice active neutrality". (Bock, 1983) Another solution is called the "third power". A force that has little tendency to take control of buffer because of geographical distance and shows more tendency for expanding relations. "Beginning in World War I and continuing in the interwar period, the afghan government dealt with Germany as a possible counterweight to both Russia and England. To lesser degree, the Cambodians would occasionally attempt to use the Chinese as a potential supporter against both North and South Vietnam.

Yet the most striking examples of the third-power option were established by the British in their support of Belgian independence and by the United States when it sent troops to defend the Lebanese government”(Partem, 1983:23).

#### **6. Maintaining interests of powers in global arena**

Michel Partem assumed that the buffer system operates according to the rational calculations of the buffered powers (Partem based this hypothesis on the rational unitary actor model formulated by a well-known American scholar Bruce Bueno de Mesquita) (Turmanidze, 2009:59).

Basically, one of the most important functions of the buffer is to protect the interests of the powers in the global arena, and as previously mentioned, if buffer bears no strategic importance, powers do not show any tendency for the buffer and try to subjugate that space.

#### **B) Function in internal dimension**

"Because of its location, during peacetime the buffer is in a position to benefit economically because it may have extensive trade relation with both neighbors”(Ross, 1986:24).

From political aspect, in spite of the existence of internal unrests, relative stability exists within buffer state. These unrests have been caused by within and because of social groups because of cynical attitude to the superior powers, the growth of nationalism, liberation movements, and growing movements against the central government with the support of rival powers, the growth of separationist movements and etc.

**Government Level:** buffer state should be shrewd with high capability. They should always keep close eye on their neighbors, and against any action, react. As a result, ruling power, intelligence level goes up;

intervention, function of political agents in buffer states is significantly observable. Despotism growth and we confront with instability in buffer states.

**-Continuous intervention in buffer space government**

Government in buffer space should be shrewd with high capability. They should always keep close eye on their neighbors, and against any action, react. As a result, ruling power, intelligence level goes up; intervention, function of political agents in buffer states is significantly observable. Despotism growth and we confront with instability in buffer states.

**- Xenophobia**

Xenophobia exists always within a country. In peace or war, the buffer space is more sensitive to conflict between its neighbors than other countries with the same power and size.

Although a rare occurrence, a state may be buffered between more than two powers. Eighteenth-century Poland offers a striking example. During that century Poland had the misfortune of bordering on not two but three larger powers-Prussia, Russia, and Austria. Prussia would not allow all of Poland to fall under Russian control. Russia was intent on gaining as much control as possible, to the exclusion of the Prussians and Austrians; finally, Austria could not tolerate exclusive control of Poland by either Prussia or Russia. In 1772 the almost inevitable partition took place (for further discussion of the partition see below), with each of the three powers taking part:

Austria unwittingly supplied the pretext for the partition by occupying the Zips and some neighboring Polish districts; Prussia first openly adopted the plan of partition and pressed for it; Russia spoke the decisive



word and determined the respective shares (Lock, 1915:51).

**- Instability of buffer Political Regimes**

Regimes in the buffer space are unstable. Sometimes it happens because of powers and sometimes because factors that exist inside a country. For example, the Soviet Union to ensure its role in Afghanistan emphasized to sign security agreement in 1972. Zaher Shah's hesitation in accepting of the Soviet Union request caused the end of his career. After him Sardar Mohammed David with the aid of Afghan declared the end of the monarchy and himself as the Afghan president and Afghanistan as government based on true democracy and Islam.

The United State and other Western countries followed the Soviet and Indian lead in recognizing the new regime, but the People's Republic of China delayed recognition, citing the influence exerted by the Soviet Union ... (Ziring, 1986:160).

In some cases buffer states try to have active foreign policy, so they try to develop relations along with keeping their buffer situation. For example, in the last three decades, the two Korea's have extended their diplomacy with non-hostile countries and have developed with the powers of the Third World.

**- Following de-utilization policies**

Because of its inferior position vis-à-vis both its rival neighbors, the buffer state will occasionally pursue the very opposite of aggrandizement. The desire to avoid conflict and any pretext for it can lead to a policy of "de-utilization": the conscious effort to remain weak. Bannerman (1980:228) writes of the general nature of Lebanese foreign policy: "The Lebanese realize that to maintain their neutrality they either

had to be a powerful regional state, thereby discouraging neighbors from interfering in Lebanese neutrality, or they must be so weak so as to make any move against them a blatant act of aggression. The Lebanese chose the latter course" (Bannerman, 1980:228).

## **2. National and Social level**

"It is hardly surprising, therefore, that so much of (Buffer) national energy has been spent in establishing a national identity that is separate from those neighbors and in assuming international postures independent of them, nor is it surprising that those efforts have been only partially successful" (Tulchin, 1986:213).

A country by having a "bad fortune" of being between two hostile powers is more likely to be involved. Thus, fear of conflict and damage in the buffer state increases. Societies and political elites in buffer or semi-buffer states are often divided according to foreign policy strategies that intensify the weakness of these countries and become tools for powers in extending their sphere of influence.

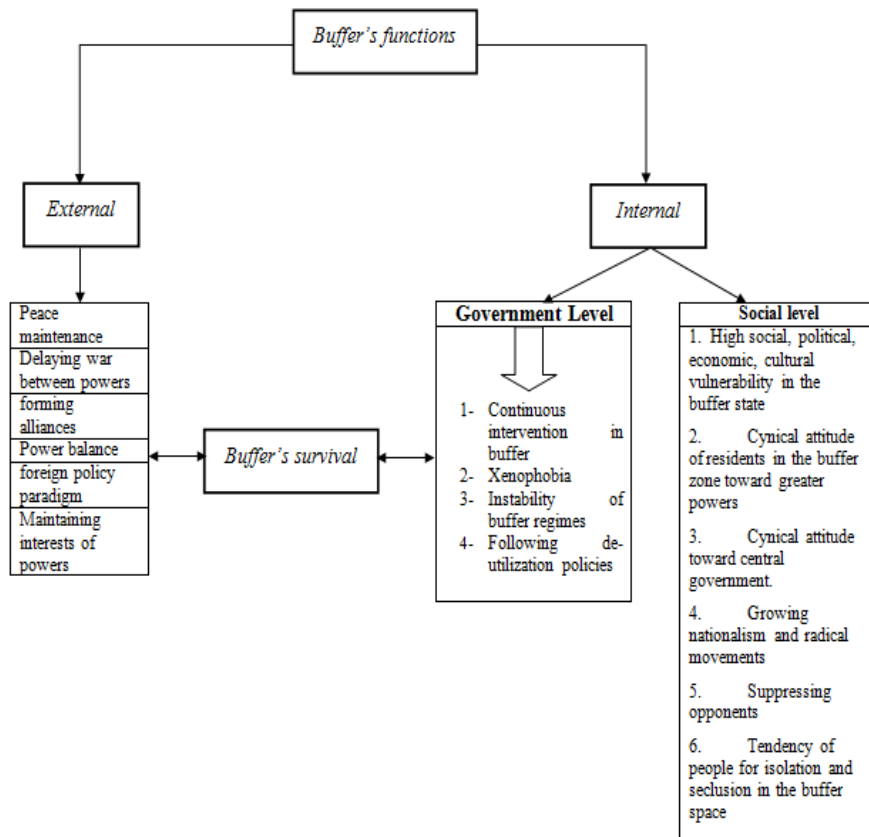
During the last few years, divisions over foreign policy orientation became evident in Ukraine as well, where the results of the 2004 presidential elections have shown that the country's northern and western regions support the idea of integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures, while its southern and eastern regions prefer a close relationship with Russia. (Turmanidze, 2009:16).

In general, the most important aspects of function and social behavior of buffer states can be outlined in the following elements:

1. High social, political, economic, cultural vulnerability in the buffer state;
2. Cynical attitude of residents in the buffer zone toward greater powers;
3. Cynical attitude toward central government;

4. Growing nationalism and radical movements;
5. Suppressing opponents;
6. Tendency of people for isolation and seclusion in the buffer space.

Figure 3. Buffer state's functions



### **3. The Process of buffer space formation**

Buffer space due to weakness is unable to protect itself. What prevents the collapse of this space is the rivalry of two powers. A buffer space may play a minor role, but it will not have decisive role. Two powers, in buffer space, seek to gain an assistant and associate. Afghanistan, during the Cold War, was a buffer space, but the Soviet Union occupied it. All actions of the United State were aimed at confronting this occupation of space. Smallest action and pressure of a power on buffer space instigates immediately the reaction of the other power.

As Martin wight asserts: "Each stronger power will generally have a vital interest in preventing the other from controlling the buffer zone, and will pursue this interest in one of the two ways, according to its strength. It will seek either to maintain the buffer zone as neutral and independence, or to establish its own control, which may lead in the long run to its annexing the buffer zone and converting it into a frontier province (...) Fluctuations of power make most buffer zone unstable and ambiguous. A policy adopted by one great power to preserve the neutrality of a buffer state may be seen by its rival as reducing the buffer state to a satellite; and a buffer state may be regarded by the same statesman, in different circumstances, as either a defensive bulwark or a springboard for further expansion" (Wight, 1995:160-161 in Turmanidze, 2009:41).

With increasing competition between two greater powers around the third country, it gets stuck in a position of apparent weakness. Buffer state because of weakness and small size cannot change the policy if other countries or oppose them.

## **A) The whys and the where forces**

### **1. Existence of two hostile powers**

Thomas Ross emphasizes the importance of vicinal location or location with reference to the neighbors. Ross suggests that this location need not necessarily be contiguous but goes on to note that "the buffer state owes its existence to the location of two or more politically or militarily powerful spheres of influence with close proximity to one another"(Ingalls, 1986:234).

Thus, the place of buffer between to greater power and its rival is one of the main reasons for the formation of buffers.

### **2- Vicinity with hostile powers (rivals)**

Coterminous have more contact with each other, so they are more affected, while, other non-adjacent countries have little tendency and capability to fight. Thus, territorial adjacency of greater powers has negative impact on the stability of the international system. Countries often follow frontal defense strategy, i.e. they deploy their armed forces near their borders and this increases the occurrence of border conflicts. Constant exposure to the forces of the two powers, the increasing probability of war.

### **3- Powers tendency to expand geographical or geopolitical boundaries**

All great powers and empires inevitably determine the limits of their geopolitical boundaries or territories. Thus, they resort to rivalry.

### **4- Existence of a weak space between rival powers**

Great powers noticed threats from their weak neighbors which some of

these threats were real and some were mental. For example

The Japanese and the Chinese used metaphors describing Korea, respectively as a "dagger" pointed at the heart of Japan and a "hammer" ready to strike at the head of China (Chay, 1986:192).

### **5- Failure of two powers or one of them in attracting Buffer State**

Structure of buffer system shift the buffer state into a second-hand position between two greater powers, but it does not prevent the exploitation of buffer state's assets and resources. Afghanistan was a buffer between Great Britain and the interests of the Russian Empire in the nineteenth century. These two empires were eying each other with suspicion and doubt, none of them wanted a peaceful acceptance of each other and co-existence.

### **5. Danger of the buffer for rival powers**

Buffer state can allow its country to be used as a military corridor by one of the powers whether by agreement or force. This situation makes this country to be considered dangerous for the rival. Thus, whenever possible, great powers do not accept the existence of neutral buffers between themselves, so they try to either penetrate these weak countries or make them buffer or prevent the penetration of rivals.

## **B. Manner**

### **1. Rivalry of two powers and the weakness of space between them**

Variations in the relationship between the neighbors of buffer states help to explain the changing nature of buffers. When rivalry increases between two or more powerful states surrounding a third smaller one, the latter is caught in a difficult situation where its weakness becomes

evident. As a small state, a buffer is not able to change the policy of other states, and is frequently not strong enough to oppose such policies. As D. Vital explains: “the measure of state’s power is the capacity of government to induce other states –or governments- to follow lines of conduct or foreign policy which they might otherwise not pursue; alternatively it is the capacity to withstand the pressure of other states or governments – which are intent on deflecting it from a course which the national interest- or the interests of its leader- would appear to require”(Vital,1967).

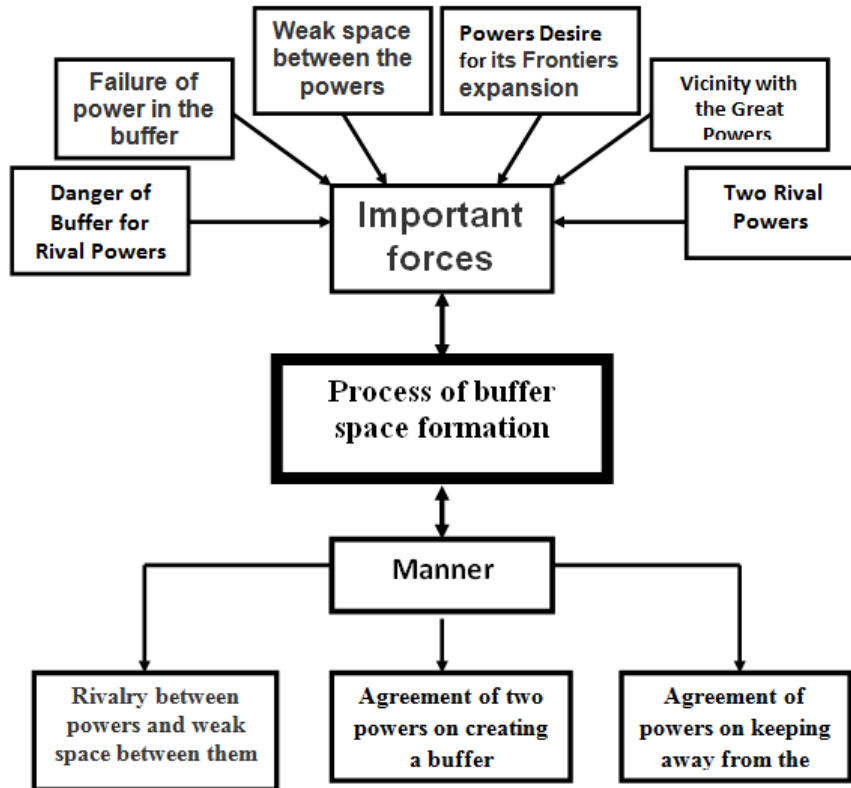
## **2. Agreement of two powers on creating a buffer**

Powers are not satisfied with the existence of a neutral buffer lying between them, so they try to access weak countries, but greater power prevents such an act. Thus, they reach agreement on creating a buffer.

## **3. Agreement of powers on keeping away from the buffer**

The pivotal point of buffer effect is that no power attacks or surrounds the buffer and puts pressure on it since with these conditions, the rival refrains from encroaching on the buffer state.

Figure 4. The Process of buffer space formation



**Differences between buffer and similar types**

The buffer is essentially non-aligned and neutral, while the quasi-buffer is clearly leading towards one side and, hence, is often viewed as a great power property (Turmanidze,2009:11).

“A satellite, that is a small/weak state controlled by a great power and



often occupied by it, is a phenomenon opposite to the buffer- a tool for preventing or hampering the conflict between rival great powers. A satellite may be used by one of the great powers either to attack the other or to protect itself from the possible enemy attack, but not to maintain peace” (Ibid:7).

Turmanidze suggests the new term "quasi-buffer". Buffer acts in two or more directions and prevents further conflict between rivals. On the contrary, quasi-separation increases conflict between them.

When a weak country in terms of geography is adjacent to a stronger country, usually plays the role of a buffer. For example, geographical proximity of Canada to the United States has made Canada to become a buffer later in the beginning of Cold War. Geographical proximity of Eastern Europe countries to the Soviet Union was the main factor for these countries for joining the Communist bloc, thus they became the quasi-buffers of the Soviet Union.

### **Effective Factors changing the buffer situation**

In general, there are six major factors that change the buffer situation.

#### **1. Disturbing power balancer**

“The modification which may occur within the regional context of power may bring about a drastic change within the nature of the buffer state and make it lose its buffer zone status. Belgium, for example, has been for a long time a buffer state between Germany and France. However, the emergence of a new European order after World War Two created a situation in which Belgium was no longer a buffer.”(Maila, 1986:30).

**2. Forming an alliance with a power**

“The buffer state may be compelled in certain situations to form an alliance with one of its neighboring powers. It may accept military presence on its territory and align itself with that of the strongest neighbor. However, the buffer state might be exposed to a far more dramatic situation where its unity may be endangered, and the country may be divided.”(Maila, 1986: 30).

**3. The loss of strategic importance of the buffer for the buffered powers**

Buffer state will exist as long as its strategic importance exists. With the loss of strategic importance, the buffer state will be also lost.

**4 – Entrance of the one of the powers’ forces to the buffer space**

When the military forces of either buffered power enter into the buffer space, it will be no longer play the role of buffer between powers. Buffer state exists when it lies between two greater powers and it is not occupied by any of them.

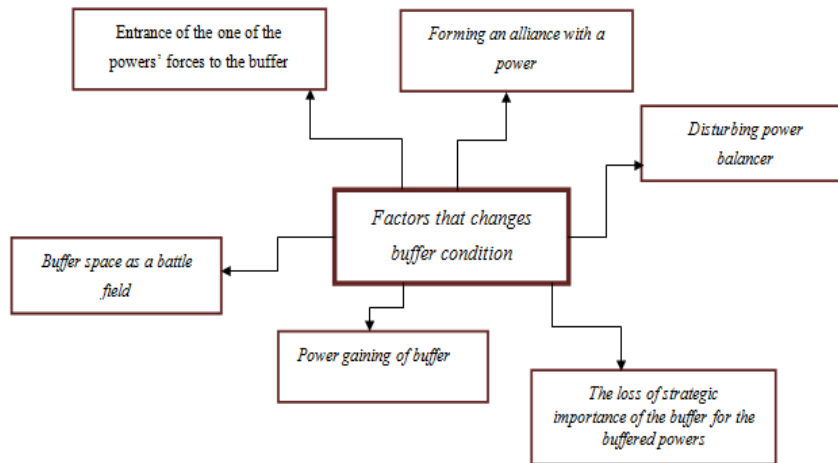
**5 –Buffer space as a battle field**

The worst and most destructive condition is when a big country by exerting pressure, along with violence, makes the buffer state a battle field. This situation leads to removal of one of the great powers from the scene and the buffer State too (Chay, 1986:197).

**6- Gaining power**

“The buffer must be strong enough to absorb shock exerted by the neighboring large powers yet remain independent.” (Chay,1986:4-5).

Figure 5. Factors that change power conditions



**Conclusion**

For many years, powers by competing with each have tried in many different ways to protect their territories from rivals’ invasion. Thus, they attempt to create buffer spaces in their boundaries. With expansion of powers’ sphere of influence and their geopolitical boundaries, buffer spaces became an inseparable part of their foreign policy and security defense policy. Buffer space is a geographic phenomenon which occurs because of rivalry between powers.

A country with buffer situation is created because of the existence of two powers that tend to create a buffer state, which is neutral, to keep away from each other. Buffer is the result of peace and plays the role of the natural barrier between two potential powers. Although buffer states have been considered as physical barriers, geographers should extend the

scope of their studies beyond this variable. Geographers can investigate this issue that how natural phenomena pave the way for a final conclusion. We saw that buffer states have been located between two enemy countries or forced to play such a role because of having unsuitable natural environment.

Scientists believe that buffer states survive and they are unlikely to be eradicated in the near future. Being a buffer can be considered as a fluid condition which can occur in a geographical space in a period of time and it can be destroyed in another time. Buffer states never appear in the absolute vacuum of powers and if it happens, their independency will be seized by a superior military power.

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