

New Great Game in Central Asia: Conflicts, Interests and Strategies of Russia, China and United States

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Abstract

Central Asia, the hub of natural resources, has been the battleground of international power politics among the big powers since long. In order to have influence in the region, the Russian and the British Empires indulge in the “Great Game”. However, it ended with the collapse of the Russian empire. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created an unexpected power vacuum in Central Asia followed by a fierce competition between the big three, Russia, China and US. This competition is commonly known as “The New Great Game” in the present day international politics. The rich energy resources are usually considered the main reason of the renewed interests in the region and provide principal motivation for Russia, China and US. However, the role of energy resources is usually overstated. This paper will identify which other factors along with energy resources should be considered in order to have a broader and comprehensive understanding of the present Geo-political scenario in the Central Asia. Using the Neo-Realist approach, this paper will first analyze the significance of the Central Asian states, how they provoke strategic competition between great powers and how pipeline politics translate it. Finally, the paper will analyse the competing interests of Russia, China and US and the strategies adopted by each for the achievements of its objectives. It will be concluded by stating that how Russia, China and US struggle to attain, keep and enhance power and that energy resources are just a mean to this supreme objective. It will also conclude by asserting that although the great powers behave aggressively and self-interestedly they may find a minimum degree of cooperation to tackle common concerns such as a growing radical Islamism.

Keywords: New Great Game, Central Asia, Geopolitics, Energy Resources, Russia, China.

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Introduction

Central Asia is a vast landlocked region, situated in the heart of Asian continent. There is no common agreement regarding the exact geographic location of it. Besides this uncertainty, it has been the habitat of nomads. Popular “Silk Road” connects it with outside world. Because of this, it has acted as a crossroad for the flow of goods, people and ideas among Europe, the Middle East, South and East Asia. Presently known Central Asia is composed of five Muslims dominated Central Asian Republics that got independence from Soviet Union in 1991. It is being regarded as a buffer zone between the two neighboring powers Russia and China, thus sharing borders with the two big players of the international politics. This region is rich in hydrocarbons, natural gas, black Gold, Iron, Uranium and other precious minerals. The rich natural resources and its geographic location, connecting East & West through land route, give it immense importance in the modern day international politics. This region is land locked and for trading, it has to depend on any other neighboring state, thus giving it a dependent status.

Forth with the disintegration of Soviet Union, the energy resources of the region became accessible for the outside world. In the subsequent decade long struggle and competition for the control and domination of the energy resources, its transportation routes and influence started among big powers commonly called the “New Great Game”.¹ The initial competitors of this game were United States and Russia but later on other players like China, European Union, Pakistan, India and Turkey also got involved in it.²

The strategic rivalry among Russia, China and United States makes the region’s importance visible. Central Asia’s strategic importance for Russia, China, and United States varies according to the perception of its economic, political, security and strategic interests. It is an admitted fact that the energy reserves of the Middle East are not sufficient to meet the increasing energy needs of the world particularly the west, its major consumers. Exploring new Hydrocarbons reserves is of utmost importance, therefore the world particularly the big powers have focused on Central Asia, rich in natural resources particularly Oil, Gas and Coal.³ Presently this region is under the monopoly of Russia with China it’s ally and United States its big rival in the region devising strategies and diplomatic techniques to diminish each other influence, thereby encouraging strategic rivalry and competition.

After independence Central Asian Republics revised its geographical, historical and cultural linkages and in collaboration with the West discovered the hitherto taped hydrocarbons resources thereby generating a multifarious geopolitical tussle among the big powers for influence in the region. The worth of Central Asia is inherent in its vast economic potential and geo-strategic location. It is becoming the economic hub of the world.⁴ This region is attractive for trade and investment. It has important strategic location situated at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, the Persian Gulf, and the Middle East, surrounded by Russia, China and India, the big economies, investing and competing for leading role in the region.

The three big powers are pulling the Central Asian energy resources towards its sides. Since 1991 many pipeline initiatives has been taken but all in vain due to international constraints. Historically, Central Asian Republics have been the part of former Soviet Union. Before the independence of Central Asian Republics, the pipelines passing through the Caspian Sea were under the control of Russia and it continued even after its independence. Construction of pipelines is complex phenomenon not financially but due to international geostrategic constraints and competition. Russia still has strong cultural, economic and political ties with the Central Asian Republics. The present pipeline passing through the Caspian Sea, under the control of Russia, is not enough for the transportation of growing natural gas and oil production in the region. The neighboring countries of the Caspian Sea are interested in the construction of alternative pipeline thereby releasing the Central Asian Republics from the Russian domination. This may reduce the Russian monopoly and influence in the region. Cost analysis is not the hurdle in the way of the construction of pipeline networking rather the conflicting geopolitical interests of the three great powers. The only objective of its realization is to reduce Russian influence in the region. These aspects form part of the logic behind the “New Great Game” and strategic competition, not limited to oil and natural gas competition but the pursuit of economic and political influence in the region leading to conflicting interests and innovated strategies among Russia, China and United States, the big players of international politics.

It is an admitted fact that the hydrocarbon resources of the Middle East could not meet the demands of the United States, China and the European world because of increase in its consumption and decrease in its reserves. Therefore alternate

energy supply channel is of utmost importance for these states. Most of the states have fixed their eyes on the Central Asian region energy resources. Extraction and diversification of energy transportation routes will however put an end to Russian monopoly over central Asian hydrocarbon resources.

To counter Russia's influence in the Central Asian Republics and Caucasus region United States along with European allies backed some important projects such as Nabucco gas transportation pipeline to carry gas from Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan, to international market, bypassing Russia, expected to be operational in 2018. Kremlin obstructed this gas pipeline project through the pro-Russian government of Ukraine under Leonid Kuchma. As a result of orange revolution in Ukraine (2004) the pro-Russian government of Leonid Kuchma was replaced with liberal opposition leader Viktor, he changed the course of the matters and joined western oriented political structure. It is said that United States was behind this revolution to through the pro-Russian government. In this article interests and strategies and its convergence would be analyzed in order to predict about the future of this tug of war in the Central Asian region.

New Great Game: A Historical Perspective

The geo-political importance of Central Asia is an open secret. This region has been described as the heart of the world. A modern geographer Halford John Mackinder in 1904 wrote, "The one who rules Easter Europe, command the heartland and the one who rules the heartland commands the world".⁵ This theory was validated by the subsequent great games in the heartland, the long struggle for influence in the region between Russian and British Empire in the latter half of the 19th century. Both the empires exerted their utmost power to establish dominance in the Central Asian Republics and the Caucasus states.

The title of heartland was coined during the second half of the 19th century to describe central Asian and Caucasus region which were under the control of Tsarist Russia. This landlocked region abundant in gas and hydrocarbons has the focus of Russian strategy. The control of Indian Ocean and Mediterranean has been the focal point of Soviet Union, but due to defeat in Crimean War which diminished its interests thereby changing the course of Soviet Union foreign policy. After that Tsarist Russia fixed his eyes on Central Asia with the hope to proceed further towards South, securing an outlet to the Indian Ocean. Russian's strategy of

expansionism towards South was encountered with strong opposition from British, as sub-continent was ruled by Britain at that time and they regarded it as a golden sparrow and jewel in the crown of the British Empire. It was threatened by the gradual advancement of Russian forces towards Central Asia. Accordingly, to eliminate this threat the British Empire tried asserting superiority in the Central Asian region. Russian forces advancement towards Afghanistan via hot water was obstructed by Britain to protect the British colonies in the sub-continent from the hegemonic aspiration of Russia. These and other events set up stage for long lasting conflict between Russian and British Empire in the last two decades of 19th century. However this conflict came to an end with the disintegration of Russian empire in 1991. The disintegration of Soviet Union created power vacuum in the Central Asian region, enriched with hydrocarbon, gas and other precious mineral resources. The big powers of the world politics Russia, China and US rushed to fill the vacuum left by Soviet Union. In this way a sort of power politics started between them for influence in the region using conflicting strategies to achieve their objectives in the region commonly known as “New Great Game”.

Geo-strategic Importance of Central Asian Region Today

The region today has great importance in the foreign policies of the great powers. This area has an abundance of tapped and untapped energy resources. These energy resources are far larger than the energy resources of the Middle Eastern region.⁶ The central Asian energy resources are enough to satisfy the energy needs of the of the big energy consumers such as Russia, China and US and can be the best substitute for Middle Eastern energy resources, whose supply is vulnerable to fluctuation due to the risk of terrorism, Islamic extremism and presently social revolutions in the region. The untapped richest energy resources so far are located in the Caspian basin surrounded by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia.

The role of Caspian basin and Central Asian Republics as a commercial hub cannot be neglected. This region has been a cross road between East and West since ancient time. An ancient time it connected Beijing with the Mediterranean Sea and was the corridor followed by caravans of camels loaded with Eastern goods aimed for Western markets. This corridor was familiar with the name of “Silk Road”.

It has been considered by Tsarist, Soviet Union, and modern Russian government as a strategic hub. This region acted as strategic rear reservoir of hydrocarbon resources during the 2nd world war and Cold War between Soviet Union and US. The disintegration of Soviet Union leaving a partial power vacuum in the region and the decrease of Russian control over it was accelerated by the following factors, Turkey perpetual struggle for the enhancement of influence in Armenia, Georgia and Azerbaijan, declaration of independence by Ukraine in 1991, the renovation of nationalist zeal in all the federating units of Soviet Union, Central Asian Republics attempts to decrease economic dependence on Soviet Union and the modern Russia. Although, the models of development pursued by these newly independent Central Asian Republics has a Soviet flavor.

As a result, the Central Asian Republics started diversifying their economic and political partners. In this way the implementation of liberal classical policies aimed at fostering greater economic cooperation between the Central Asian Republics and regional political integration has failed due to some practical hindrances such as the poor and politically unstable Kyrgyzstan joined World Trade Organization in 1998 while the other states of the region such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has so far have observer status in it.

Quickly, it became evident to the political leadership of these states that their poor economies could not confront the bulk of goods imported from other neighboring countries particularly Beijing, an economic giant with various competitive and comparative advantages. Therefore it became imperative for them to pursue protectionist policies to safeguard their national economies focusing primarily on strengthening social institution. More direct foreign investment was considered helpful for the development of transportation infrastructure for the enhancement of trade within the region and economic integration among the fragile Central Asian Republics. Resultantly, a diplomatic struggle among the big powers started each seeking a lion share in the Central Asian energy resources.

It is believed that political, economic, social and religious forces have made the world states increasingly interdependent.⁷ If the Central Asian Republics want to ensure its commercial, financial and military development then it should develop diversified and profitable trade relations, the establishment of new transportation routes for the export of large volumes of energy resources. In this way it has opened avenue for the US, China and

the European world for participating in the interesting energy deals in a region that was formerly under the control of Russia exclusively.

In this way “New Great Game” started in the energy rich Central Asian region since 1991 and is still going on. It has now become an integral part of the process which could possibly determine the future of international structure.

Russia, China and the US are pursuing their own interests and objectives in the region. The present day protagonists of international politics cannot be the mere spectators and the role of small states cannot be underestimated. They are now actively involved in determining who gets what, when, where and how in the geopolitics of the Central Asian Republics. This paper takes a close look at the great powers conflicting strategies and interest to get dominance in this important region of the world.

The Big players of Central Asian Geo-politics

Russia

Central Asian Republics, rich in vital energy resources has been an integral part of the Russian government. It has tried to extend its borders till South and Central Asia since the time of Tsarist Russia. The Russian empire stretching from Caucasus glaciers to Siberia was in well position to benefit from the Central Asian Energy resources. However the vast devastation of 2nd World War gave it the lesson that multinational empires do not last forever. After 2nd World War, the Ottoman, German, Austro-Hungarian empires disintegrated. The Russian empire was already in a dilapidated condition since February, 1917. Its grip on Central Asian Republics was temporarily reduced. The aspiration for independence of the various ethnic groups and nationalities of the new Soviet system were frustrated and were subjected to the control of new empire. Stalin during the middle of 1930 took advantage of the huge gas and oil supply to fuel its massive war machinery for the expected Germany attack. In this way the Stalin regime during the Cold War period tried to get excel in technology, economics and military terms and became real opponent of the West imposing division of labor with the Soviet Union, reducing the Central Asian region states to the status of mere suppliers of raw materials to the other federating units of the Soviet Union.

The inherent weaknesses of the empire became evident after the death of Stalin. This was followed by De-Stalinization of

the empire. The subsequent government of the Khrucheve (1956-1964) and Gorbacheve (1986-1987) allowed limited devolution of power from the central government to the various federating units, which inspired the growth of independence movements in the Central Asian region. In the region Islamic militants groups demanded self-government.⁸ The weakening of Soviet Union was equally echoed throughout Central Asia. In 1991 the liberation of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Georgia and Ukraine further weakened its position in the Black Sea region, thereby obstructing the way of Soviet Union to maintain Eurasian empire.

With the help of Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey the Central Asian Republics sought to get out of the clutches of Soviet Union.⁹ As a result Moscow has been forced to share the hydrocarbon resources of the Caspian basin with its former republics. Relying on the financial assistance of West particularly China has been able to transport its hydrocarbons and gas resources through a pipeline passing through the present Russian territory. Central Asian Republics in its foreign policies have given immense importance to US for weakening Russia's control over energy transportation routes.¹⁰

Russia's Interests in Central Asian Region

Moscow's interests in Central Asian region are diverse. The first is the fear of proliferation of the region's independence movements, filled with Islamic extremism, a perception shared by Beijing. Religious extremism along with weapons smuggling and drug trafficking is considered to be a real threat. Moscow in 1990 send a large number of troops to Tajikistan to mitigates the destabilizing effects of Islamic extremism in the region adjacent to Afghanistan.¹¹

Its second interest in the region is hydrocarbon resources, considered strategic in character. Russia is determined to maintain central role in the extraction, refining and exportation of these energy resources to European market. Huge quantity of it has been exported by Moscow to central and Eastern Europe originated in the Central Asian Republics and Caspian basin. It follows that decrease of any sort in the Russian energy consumption in the European world would in the long term shatter the relations of Russia with Central Asian region states, to the advantage of European and Atlantic countries.¹²

Russia after realizing to tickle with US hegemonic ambitions in the Central Asian region unilaterally was beyond its capacity particularly after the incident of 9/11 and the subsequent

war against terrorism, and its penetration in the Central Asian region was in search of allies. Moscow is willing to turn its eyes towards those states which share its concern over US penetration into Central Asia. This perception of Russia has brought it closer to China evident in the shape of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001.¹³

China in order to satisfy the energy needs of its huge population has entered into bilateral agreements with Central Asian Republics, in opposition to Russia's ambitions in the region, as it may put an end to its monopoly over Central Asian energy resources and its price control mechanism.

In July, 2009, for instance, China National Petroleum Corporation and Kazmune gas, an oil company of the Republic of Kazakhstan completed 962 kilo meter long Atlasu-Alashankou oil transportation pipeline, leading from Atyaru in the republics of Kazakhstan to Alshankou in Beijing, providing Beijing an access to huge energy resources of Central Asian and Caspian region. This project is considered to be a game changer in the region in the race for controlling Central Asian energy resources. In the same way CNPC signed another agreement related to oil and gas with Uzbekistan in June, 2006.¹⁴ These along with other agreements have been the basic cause behind the rivalry between Moscow and Beijing. The two ex-communist rivals would require foresight and farsighted vision and coordination if they want to achieve mutual cooperation for weakening United States in Central Asian geopolitics.

China

Among other reasons, the Beijing's plan of building high-speed rail infrastructure connecting Central Asia, Far East and Europe is the reason behind the conflict between big powers over Central Asian and Caucasus region's energy resources. The ambitions of creating modern transportation infrastructure, china took a big and bold step towards in November, 2006 by signing an agreement by the eighteen countries representatives for the realization of high speed rail project. Expectedly it will be completed with the cooperation and assistance of member states involved, in 2025. This project is regarded as reinterpretation of the old silk road connecting east with west in an environment of tough competition with the Siberian railway infrastructure. This is not intended for passengers only. A basic reason behind it is the generation of new industrial centers in the Eurasian region urging to speed up trade in

goods and lowering transportation expenses to facilitate the transportation of energy resources.

China's strategy is well thought and simple. Its aim is to increase its participation and cooperation with the countries of all continents South East Asia, South America and Central and South Asia. To meet with this end it has employed the African model, which consists of providing low cost technology advanced railway infrastructure to the energy rich Central Asian region states. In exchange china will be able to get access to Central Asian region hydrocarbon resources and raw materials.¹⁵

Central Asian energy resources are indispensable to meet with the vast energy needs of china, an Asian economic giant. However, the strategy of china presents a perceived threat to Russian monopoly over Central Asian energy resources. Russia's Gazprom, has currently holds a monopoly in the Central Asian region and withstand crucial attacks on its position from united states and china in the shape of proposed pipeline projects, designed as an alternative to the present operational pipeline controlled by Moscow.¹⁶

China's interests in Central Asia

Beijing political strategy in Central Asia is guided by two important factors:

- i). To get lion share in the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asian region with the help of profitable long lasting economic ties with the region.
- ii). Physical Integrity of the Peoples Republic of China, security of its national borders and promotion of regional stability.

Beijing had no influence in the Central Asia even during the cold war as this region was under the control of Soviet Union, However, this situation changed considerably with the change in china approach towards international relations in the 1980s, when she adopted the policy of good neighborly hood. Since then efforts have been made to engage in dialogue with neighboring countries. This very first target of this new approach was Russia because of geographic location and large size, followed by India, Korea (North, South) and Mongolia. The disintegration of USSR in 1991 means the demise of bipolar international system. This even brought geopolitical earth quake in the region, leaving a vacuum in the region to be filled by communist China for immediate profit.¹⁷

China concluded high ranking political, commercial and military agreements with the neighboring Central Asian Republics.¹⁸ The trade volume between china and Central Asian states reached 465 million dollar in 1992 and 7.7 billion dollar in the year 2004.¹⁹ Trade between China and Central Asia states presently increased much. China exceeded Russia in trade volume with Central Asian states in 2009. Russia's trade with the region was 22 billion dollar in 2010 while china Central Asia was 29 billion dollar. The growth of strategic goods and Increasing trade volume and investment of China in the region contributed much for the ride of china as a big trading partner of Central Asian region states. In 2009, the largest total trading volume among the Central Asian republics is between Kazakhstan and China amounting to 13.8 billion dollar.²⁰

The cordial economic relations that Beijing has developed with the neighboring regional states are further enhanced by economic interdependence between them. The African method has enabled the government of China to effectively play a geopolitical game for the achievement of long standing regional goals. Getting access to Central Asian hydrocarbon and gas resources has the first priority in Central Asia. Beijing has invested significantly in the infrastructure for production, drilling and refining Central Asian and Caucasus hydrocarbon resources. This has been accompanied by huge pipeline network for transportation of oil and gas to mainland China, bypassing Moscow, to satisfy its economic ever growing energy ambitions.

Diversification of energy resources (oil & gas) transportation routes and strengthening regional economic cooperation are the two efficient tools to counter Russia's monopoly over central Asian energy. TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan- India) pipeline project is backed by China and Asian development bank. The aim of this project is to transport Turkmen gas to china through Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. This has been the potent instance how Beijing is trying to oust Russia and other neighbors from the Central and South Asian region. National Petroleum Company of china, CNPC has entered into bilateral agreements of energy with Central Asian states, including construction of rails and roads.²¹ With its help, the government of China wants to enhance transportation of energy between Beijing and its North Western neighbors, consequently, opening the gate for transportation of agricultural and other finished goods from Beijing to Central Asian states. It means that Beijing, economic integration is not an end in itself rather a means to military and political integration.

Regional stability and security are the other important interests of China in the region. In order to meet with this end Beijing is promoting cooperation for combating the three evils, extremism, separatism and terrorism. Particularly, it has preoccupation with the prevention of extremist and separatist movements spreading in its province of Xinjiang. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the South Asian and Central Asian states is dangerous for Beijing for it has the real potential threatening regional stability. This situation resulted in the establishment of Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which according to China may be used as an instrument as an instrument for the development of military and economic cooperation for fighting against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization is capable of increasing Beijing's economic and political in the Central Asian Republics and Russia being its main pillar wanted to isolate it by restoring control over all the former Soviet Union republics. Counter terrorism war and the need of insurance of regional stability is not seen in China as expedient and necessary steps to secure regional stability. After 9/11 incident the United States led war against terrorism saw it stationing troops permanently in the Central Asian Republics. This move of US instigated China to take anti US position through Shanghai Cooperation Organization. To China it was clear that by doing so US wanted to impose its economic and political influence in the Central Asian Republics.

In the coming time, Beijing will sort to counter US competing claims in geopolitics of the region and to mitigate the ancient concept of Central Asian region to be an exclusive domain of Russia under tsars, Soviet Union and post-soviet Russia.

United States

As a result of orange revolution in Ukraine in 2004 Viktor Yushchenko, a pro-European came in government with the support of United States against Viktor Yanukovich, a Pro-Russian. This was followed by US sponsored Tulips revolution in the republic of Kyrgyzstan and as a result Asker Aakayev was ousted .the opposition leader , Kurmanbek Bakiev came to power and work hard to get rid of the soviet union period authoritarian system. However, he failed in delivering due to bribery and corruption. Corruption and nepotism was far greater than the previous administration. Besides this he was facing with a lot of other problems such as economic crises and conflicts between different tribes. The central government was unstable and was engulfed in

corruption and lacked resolve. These situations did not allow the central government to focus on foreign policy priorities. In order to have good relation with both the east and the west Bakiev allowed both United States and Russia stationing its troops in the republic of Kyrgyzstan. Russia established its bases in Kant in 2003 and United States at Manas in 2001.

Bakiev administration announced in 2003 that Manas air base would be vacated soon. He argued that some economic consideration and negative public opinion towards it were behind this decision. However, despite Moscow continued pressure he took back the decision and allowed the continuation of us bases there but on renewed terms and condition. He was ousted from the government as a result of the revolt in March 2010. Roza Otunbayeva, an opposition leader formed in interim administration. This revolt escalated into civil war in Kyrgyzstan was the outcome of some internal factors. The masses rose against the Kyrgyz government due to acute exasperation. It is also regarded as the implementation of Kremlin plan, backed by Vladimir Putin, the Russian Prime minister to put an end to color revolutions in the region particularly in Georgia and Ukraine, which is threatening Russian hegemony over the Central Asian region. Russia at once recognized the interim government under Otunbayeva and projected its good will by offering \$ 150 million credit. The uprising of Kyrgyzstan had an increased probability of reversing with severe political agitation throughout the region, there by justifying, US policy makers to keep troops in the republic of Kyrgyzstan as an instrument for the achievement of US strategic objectives in Central Asia.

US Interests in Central Asia

Washington got interested in Central Asian region with the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 and subsequent shift in international power structure. Its first priority in the region was taking away the former Soviet Republics from the Russian domain and communistic ideology from the region. United States applied liberal political and economic reforms with the hope that it would transform the Central Asian states from socialist economy to market based economy. Thus freedom support act was, leading to allocation of \$150 million to boost regional economic development from the 1992 to 2005.²²

Western liberal values were not regarded sufficient for the removal of it from the soviet orbit dismantling of military arsenal and closing of Moscow military bases in the Central Asian region

was also essential in this regard. This strategy was outlined exhaustively in a national security strategy of enlargement and engagement. Its main aim was the export of development models for the promotion of democratic institutions, free trade and demilitarization of post-soviet space.

The United States strategic interests in the Central Asian region projected in the 1999 “Silk Road Strategy Act”, emphasizing the need of closer, integrated and profitable economic engagement among the Central Asian states and the Western world. Such interaction would promote financial and trade cooperation and would act as a counter proliferation of nuclear arsenals, terrorism, drug trafficking and corruption.

Soon it became evident that Washington has unambiguous interests in the regions energy resources, for it has yet found any alternate to Middle Eastern hydrocarbon resources. It proceeded with concluding energy agreements with energy rich Central Asian states.²³ Efforts have been made for the construction of energy transportation pipeline (oil & gas) as an alternative to historical Russian pipeline “Druzba” such as BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) Nabucco and TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline. In this way US can put an end to Russian monopoly over energy transportation routes and its price mechanism.²⁴

The 9/11 incident together with neo-conservative government changed the US political priorities and the world politics. The war against terrorism was envisaged by US political leadership as a necessary step to ensure its supremacy not only in the Asian continent but throughout the post-soviet bi-polar world. The bush doctrine enshrined in “national security strategy” clearly expressed the need to renew US foreign policy to tickle with the perceived threat of Al-Qaeda and to oust Taliban government in Afghanistan.²⁵ In order to meet with this end US deployed troops in Afghanistan and signed bilateral agreements with the Central Asian Republics.

US got access to, and established base at Karshi Khanabad in the republic of Uzbekistan as well as Manas air base in the republic of Kyrgyzstan. Besides this it obtained a right to fly over its territory for transportation of logistics to Manas air base and from the republic of Tajikistan its air ports for temporary use at Dushanbe. For the exchange of information it signed agreements with all Central Asian Republics except Turkmenistan.²⁶ In pursuance of this strategy, in the beginning united states relied on other regional powers such as Russia and china, as these powers

were also concerned with terrorists and jihadist networks threatening its national integrity, regional stability and security.

As a result United States further entered into the region through its campaign of democratization of the pro-Russian authoritarian Central Asia. However, this policy with its good intention annoyed the political leadership of the Central Asian states, thereby deteriorating US relations with these states. It convinced the US political leadership that these programs of reforms, respect for human rights, democratic civil society and international free trade would cause destabilization in these newly independent fragile states. They were convinced that only strong central authoritarian government can guarantee stability and order in these states.

The contrast of views with United States led the Central Asian Republics perceiving US hegemonic aspirations negatively and therefore prompted to strengthen and develop its relations with Moscow and Beijing. US declined to offer considerable aid to the Central Asian world. As a result of Andijan incident in 2005 in the republic of Uzbekistan United States was ordered to vacate its military base in Uzbekistan.²⁷

Being aware of the geopolitical changes in the Central Asian region, Russia and China became ready to put aside their differences and opted for conditional cooperation against the shared rival through SCO. In its session in Astana, China, Russia and the four Central Asian Republics with the exception of Turkmenistan, collectively decided that United States should announce the date for the withdrawal of its forces from the Central Asian territory. The uprising in the republic of Kyrgyzstan in 2010 and the new Kyrgyz government under Roza Ottunbayeva direction for continuing presence of US troops in the Manas air base into question. This has coincided with threat to United States interests in the Central Asian Republics, which has created new complicated developments in the 19th century, “New Great Game”.

Conclusion

The shift in international power structure with the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent independence of the Central Asian Republics brought changes not only in the geopolitics of Central Asia but the world over. The energy rich newly independent Central Asian Republics became bone of contention among the world states in general and Russia, China and United States in particular. Russia in order to gain its lost position wants to preserve pro-Russian authoritarian system of

governments there, contrary to that United States want to replace it with western style democracy through liberal democratic institutions, liberal values and free market economy. She is also struggling to maintain soviet period energy transportation infrastructure passing through the present Russian territory and its price mechanism. On the other hand China and United States struggling for diversification of energy transportation infrastructure for dual purposes, to put an end to Russian monopoly over it and its price control, to satisfy its own domestic energy needs. The European allies of US presently depend on fragile and unstable Middle Eastern energy resources. In case of disruption of it they would have no alternative then to go into the fold of Russia therefore compelling US to have safe energy supply for its European allies from Central Asian region. Shared interests of them in the region are stability and security. All of them have agreed to curb the three evils from the region for their distinct objectives. Russia wants these destabilizing forces may not cross over towards it; China wants these elements may not destabilize its fragile province of Xinjiang, which already has the sparks of separatism. United States having no direct concern with these elements just wants to penetrate into the region under the pretext of war against terrorism and to have vigilant eyes on Russia and China. So the important question which needs an answer here is where this tug of war will lead these states. After analyzes of the interests of Russia, China and US in the region, it can be predicted that these states will not lead to hot war. Their interests are mainly concerned with the Central Asian energy and its infrastructure. In case of war it will be destroyed and will be perceived as a defeat for all of them. So it can be arguably said that this will lead them towards compromise. Presently, it is dominated politically by Russia, economically by China and United States has just commercial presence there.

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