

## CENTRAL ASIA CENTRE OF NEW GREAT GAME

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### Abstract

*Central Asia has long been a matter of geostrategic importance merely because of its proximity to several great powers on the Eurasian landmass. Central Asia, whose centrality in world affairs remained relatively in significant during the Soviet occupation, is on the path of reclaiming its lost value because of its huge reserves of oil and gas, and technological infrastructure left behind by the USSR. However, presently the region is witnessing currents and cross-currents of instability and chaos which are further aggravated by external players like USA, Russia, China, EU, Japan, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, who are trying to control the flow of oil and gas reserves to further their respective interests. Control over these energy resources and export routes out of the Eurasian hinterland is quickly becoming one of the central issues in 21<sup>st</sup> century politics. Like the “Great Game” of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, in which the geopolitical interests of the British Empire and the Soviets clashed over the Central Asia, today’s struggle between the regional players of Shanghai Cooperation and the West may turn on ‘New Great Game’ to control the oil reserves in Eurasia. The main centre of activity is once again Afghanistan. This paper intends to study the prevailing environment in the region, identify interests of USA and Shanghai Cooperation and assess as to who would be able to employ ‘Monroe Doctrine’ upon others.*

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### **Historical Background**

The geopolitical clock is running backwards in Central Asia<sup>1</sup> and conditions of the late nineteenth century have returned and are affecting foreign policy in the region. Central Asia which has been once a pawn of Great Game<sup>2</sup>; played between the British Empire and the Russian Empire to attain strategic supremacy in Central Asia in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, has now set a stage for the successor states to the Soviet and British empires to renew the struggle for hegemony in the region. This new Great Game is not a repeat of the 19<sup>th</sup> century “Great Game,” where the Central Asian states were pawns of great powers, rather are active players in this struggle for power.<sup>3</sup>

From 1813 to 1907 Great Britain and Tsarist Russia were engaged in a strategic competition for domination of Central Asia, known in Britain as “The Great Game”, and in Russia as the “Tournament of Shadows.” The British feared that Russian control of Central Asia would create an ideal springboard for an invasion of Britain’s territories in the subcontinent, and were especially concerned about Russia gaining a warm water port. The British sea power and base in the Indian subcontinent served as the platform for a push Northwest into Central Asia, while the Russian empire pushed southwards from the North. As the Tsar’s troops began to subdue one Khanate after another the British feared that Afghanistan would become a staging post for a Russian invasion of India. The First and Second Anglo-Afghan Wars were, attempts aimed at the establishment of a *forward policy* to counter the southwardly creeping expansion of Russia. Following the humiliating retreat from Kabul, the British curbed their ambitions and saw Afghanistan as a buffer state. The Russians however, continued to advance steadily southward toward

Afghanistan and by 1865 Tashkent had been formally annexed. Samarkand became part of the Russian Empire three years later and the independence of Bukhara was virtually stripped away in a peace treaty the same year. Russian control now extended as far as the northern bank of the Amu Darya/river. As Imperial Russian expansion threatened to collide with the increasing British dominance of the occupied lands of the Indian sub-continent, the two great empires played out a subtle game of exploration, espionage and imperialistic diplomacy throughout Central Asia including Afghanistan. Imposition of the Gandmak Treaty<sup>4</sup> (concluded on 26<sup>th</sup> May 1879) by British India upon Amir of Afghanistan and imposition of Durand line Agreement<sup>5</sup> of 1893 are few of the incidents of virtually stripping off Afghanistan from its sovereignty. The Gandmak treaty was got reaffirmed through Anglo-Afghan Pact of 1905.<sup>6</sup> The conflict always threatened, but never break out into direct warfare between the two sides. However, the centre of activity remained Afghanistan. 1907 Anglo-Russian Convention brought an end to the classic period of *the Great Game* and outlined a framework for all future diplomatic relations. The Russians accepted politics of Afghanistan solely under British control and the British agreed to maintain the current borders and actively discouraged any attempt by Afghanistan to encroach on Russian territory.

The second phase of *the Great Game* began with the Bolshevik Revolution of 1917 which nullified the existing treaties and set to march for acquisition of newly defined goals and objectives. Third Anglo-Afghan War of 1919, King Amanullah Khan's declaration of full independence, attack on British India's northern frontier and signing of the Rawalpindi Agreement of 1919, all contributed in re-establishment of Afghanistan's self-determination in foreign affairs and stripping off the

Anglo shakels .<sup>7</sup> In May 1921, Afghanistan and the Russian Soviet Republic signed a Treaty of Friendship.<sup>8</sup> The Soviets provided Amanullah with aid in the form of cash, technology, and military equipment. On seeing Amanullah slipping out of their sphere of influence the Great Britain imposed minor sanctions as a response to the treaty. During the era of King Muhammad Nadir, both the Soviets and the British played the circumstances to their advantage: the Soviets getting aid in dealing with Uzbek rebellion in 1930 and 1931, while the British aided Afghanistan in creating a professional army of 40,000 fighters. British and Soviet interests were temporary aligned with the advent of 2<sup>nd</sup> World War, which help bring a period of cooperation between the two,resultantly this phase of the Great Game between the two powers came to an end.

With the of World War II, the United States replaced Britain as the global power, containing the Soviet Union, asserting influence in the Middle East in pursuit of oil and access to other resources. This new realignment of power politics round the globe was called Cold War. With the disintegration of USSR, the Cold War reached to its logical end and the dismantlement of the Soviet Union also brought about the liberation of six Central Asian Muslim states, Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Since Azerbaijan is part of Caucasus region, therefore, it is excluded from further discussion in this paper. All these states are ethnically heterogenous, Kazaakhstan having largest percentage of Russian population. With the independence of Central Asian States the New Great Game began with new players and renewed aims, which may not include physical subjugation of Central Asia. The new independent states freed from Soviet yoke, looked beyond Moscow for investors in their vast oil and gas fields. U.S. companies

rushed in, it was not acceptable to Washington to flow the fuels through Iran. Since the next best route ran through Afghanistan and Pakistan, Islamabad and Washington backed the Taliban as they swept to power in 1996 apparently bringing the stability that foreign investors needed to go ahead with the deal. Unfortunately Taliban regime could not see thro this game & were some how unwilling to oblige the United States & its oil companies. The die was already cast. The decision was already made to demolish & destroy the Taliban regime. The U.S. Govt. was just looking for an appropriate “Political Context” to go for war with the Taliban. This Context was worked thro 9/11; Taliban regime was accused of harboring Osama bin Laden- thus fit to be destroyed.

The third and current phase began in October 2001 when USA was offered bases in Central Asia to fight the Taliban. The USA influence went into a spiral after the U.S. started aggressively promoting western style democracies in Central Asia and in the former Soviet republics. The high point of these policies, with negative repercussions for the U.S., was reached when it responded to the Andijon violence of May 2005 in Uzbekistan by severely criticizing the Uzbek government. In retaliation, the U.S. was asked to vacate its base in Uzbekistan. Kyrgyzstan also demanded the vacation of its air base by the U.S. but agreed to extend the lease with a multifold increase in the demanded lease amount.<sup>6</sup> This call was also echoed by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in July 2005 which demanded that the U.S. vacate its bases in Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.<sup>9</sup>

May 2005 when the Central Asian governments first openly questioned whether they could trust the British and American governments and three distinct foreign policies emerged among the Central Asian states.

## **PREVAILING GEO-POLITICAL ENVIRONMENT**

Central Asia has long been a geostrategic location merely because of its proximity to several great powers on the Eurasian landmass. It has been divided, redivided, conquered out of existence, and fragmented time and again but has rarely become the seat of power for an empire or influential state. Consequently, the region has served more as the battleground for outside powers than as a power in its own right. Once a possessor of Great Silk Route, Central Asia whose centrality in world affairs remained relatively insignificant during the Soviet occupation, is on the path of reclaiming its lost value because of its huge reserves of oil and gas, and technological infra structure left behind by the USSR. These oil and gas reserves are very crucial in fueling the global economy in the near future especially, on the face of depleting hydrocarbon resources in the Middle East. Presently the region has difficult time for its stability and plagued with many problems eroding its stability, hindering development and threatening its internal and external security and sovereignty. Despite having enormous economic potential from the exploitation of natural resources the area is endowed with, the risks of continued political instability, ethnic-religious violence, economic hardship, and burgeoning drug trade is looming and remains constant sources of instability. Prevailing state of geopolitical environment of the Central Asia can be characterized with following:

Geographically located, with Russia to the north; China to the east; Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan to the south; Turkey and Georgia to the west. Borders Nuclear China, Russia and Pakistan. Holds abundance of oil and natural reserves and vast mineral and natural resources. Imperialist competition in the region is centered on the exploitation of its these considerable resources of oil and gas. Estimates range from 110 to

243 billion barrels of crude (see Table.1), worth up to \$4 trillion. According to the US Department of Energy, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan alone could sit on more than 130 billion barrels, more than three times the United States' reserves.<sup>10</sup>

**Table:1 Oil & Gas Reserves in Central Asia**

Country	Oil Reserves Billions of Barrels			Gas Reserves Trillion Cubic Feet		
	Proven	Possible	Total	Proven	Possible	Total
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	7	32	39	7	32	39
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	9-40	92	101-132	1	15	15.1
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	.55-1.7	38	38.55-39.7	9-40	92	101-132
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	.3-.59	2	2.3-2.59	.55-1.7	38	38.55-39.7

Source: US Department of Energy. Energy Information Administration, "Caspian sea Region Survey of Key Oil and Gas Statistics and forecasts, Jul-2006"

**Oil Pipelines Politics:** Americans, Europeans, Russians and Central Asian republics, all are anxious to speed up the oil flow, but the secure pipelines are lacking. The existing pipelines in Central Asia are capable of transporting a small fraction of the area's oil and gas to market along two routes: through Dagestan and Chechnya to Novorossisk in the north and a second route west to the Georgian port of Supsa. To quicken the attainment of the objective, the most promising routes have been identified as follow:

- ✓ Russia favors a northern route. Kazakhstan would expand its existing pipelines to link them with the Russian network of pipelines. Azerbaijan would build a pipeline from Baku to Novorossisk. Critics worry about the pipeline's path through Chechnya and charge that if the project was successful, Russia would enjoy too great a control over Central Asian oil.
- ✓ Azerbaijan, Turkey, Georgia, and the United States favor a western route. According to one variation, oil and gas would flow to the Georgian port of Supsa. From there, it would be shipped through the Black Sea and the Bosphorus to Europe.
- ✓ The most direct, and cheapest, route is to south, across Iran to the Persian Gulf, which is not, acceptable to USA, therefore, it blocks this option.
- ✓ China is willing to construct an oil pipeline across Kazakhstan to China.
- ✓ The American Unocal is working on plans to construct oil and gas pipelines from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan and later to India.

This pipeline politics is once materialized will make the region hub for gas and oil pipelines and communication corridors emanating from it in all directions connecting China, Russia, Europe, the Caucasus region, the Trans-Caspian region and the Indian Ocean. See Map-1, on next page.



**Map-1: Central Asian Oil and Gas Pipelines**



Source: <http://www.worldpress.org/specials/pp/pipelines.htm>

Western investments have made some inroads into the Central Asian oil industry, but the same is not true of the gas sector. The leaders of the biggest gas-producing countries Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have not remained friendly with the U.S., and their investment climates are similarly unwelcoming.

Overall, in most of Central Asia, local economies are characterized by excessive government intervention, corruption, weak corporate governance, insufficient legislative frameworks, and incompetent, corrupt court systems.

*Uzbekistan* occupies unique geo-strategic and geo-political position being the only country sharing borders with rest of the four states, largest population of 25 million, with sizeable Uzbeks in neighboring countries, which can be used as leverage. Excessive use of force by the Uzbek government in quelling the uprising in Andijan was condemned by the Western world but supported by , the received verbal and financial support from China, India, and Russia. The European Union imposed trade and travel sanctions against Uzbekistan on 3 October 2005. Karimov ordered U.S. troops to leave the Karshi-Khanabad airbase on 29 July 2005 within six months. On 21 December 2006 Russia gained the right to use the Navoi air base in Uzbekistan in the event of an emergency. China is actively trying to obtain a base in Uzbekistan.

The next most important nation is *Kazakhstan* with a GDP of \$138.7 billion (2006 est.) and above 8% growth rate (2006 est.).<sup>11</sup> It is the largest of the former Soviet republics in territory, excluding Russia, possesses enormous fossil fuel reserves and plentiful supplies of other minerals and metals. It also has a large agricultural sector featuring livestock and grain. Kazakhstan's industrial sector rests on the extraction and processing of these natural resources and also on a growing machine-building sector specializing in construction equipment, tractors, agricultural machinery, and some defense items. There is a fierce competition between the European Union, China, and India to secure energy sources.<sup>12</sup> The Government of South Korea agreed to invest an additional \$2 billion in joint projects in the energy, uranium-extraction, construction, transportation, and banking sectors. Kazakhstan seems to be "one of the very few countries capable of boosting its oil production and thus becoming an important alternative energy supplier to global and European markets. Its proven oil and gas reserves are 26 bbl (2004 est)

and 1.841 trillion cu m (2005 est) respectively.<sup>13</sup> Its production of oil and gas 1.3 million bbl/day (2005 est.), and 20.49 billion cu m (2004 est.)<sup>14</sup> indicate that it is expected to become the top oil producer in a decade.

Amongst other three nations of Central Asia, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan control maximum share of the water resources with tremendous possibilities for its exploitation, and Turkmenistan is rich in natural gas while its geo-strategic location on the Caspian Sea adds to the strategic significance of the area.

**Tajikistan** has allowed Russia to maintain a base in Tajikistan while allowing China to invest in Tajiktelecom, the state-run telephone company, doubling sales of aluminum to Norway, and selling gold, diamonds, and copper to Britain. In return for the base the Russian government has begun to give Tajikistan military equipment free-of-charge, as it is doing in Kyrgyzstan in return for its base there. In November 2006 the Tajik Defense Ministry received two Mi-24 and two Mi-8 helicopters. The Tajik government granted Zarubezhneftegaz, a subsidiary of Russian state-owned oil company Gazprom, two licenses to conduct geological surveys in Tajikistan, a move that usually precedes oil and gas exploration deals, on 29 December 2006.

**Kyrgyzstan** with GDP \$10.49 billion (2006 est.) and growth rate of 2% (2006 est.)<sup>15</sup>, is a poor, mountainous country with a predominantly agricultural economy. Cotton, tobacco, wool, and meat are the main agricultural products, although only tobacco and cotton are exported in any quantity. Industrial exports include gold, mercury, uranium, natural gas, and electricity. Following independence Kyrgyzstan was progressive in carrying out market reforms, such as an improved regulatory system

and land reform, but political instability during 2005-06 has undercut the investment climate. The new administration is pursuing a policy of counterbalancing Russian and U.S. interests, allowing Russia to maintain an airbase and the U.S. a military base with which it can conduct operations in Afghanistan. The Russian government has begun transferring military equipment to the Kyrgyz free-of-charge as part of the base deal. Two Mi-24 and two Mi-8 helicopters were given to the Kyrgyz Defense Ministry on 26 December 2006.

**Turkmenistan** borders the Caspian Sea, Iran and Kazakhstan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan. Its extensive hydrocarbon/natural gas reserves could prove a boon to this underdeveloped country if extraction and delivery projects were to be expanded. The Turkmenistan Government is actively seeking to develop alternative petroleum transportation routes in order to break Russia's pipeline monopoly. Turkmenistan is a largely desert country with intensive agriculture in irrigated oases and large gas and oil resources. With an authoritarian ex-Communist regime in power and a tribally based social structure, Turkmenistan has taken a cautious approach to economic reform, hoping to use gas and cotton sales to sustain its inefficient economy. Privatization goals remain limited. In 1998-2005, Turkmenistan suffered from the continued lack of adequate export routes for natural gas. Total exports rose by an average of 15% per year in 2003-06, largely because of higher international oil and gas prices.<sup>16</sup> In 2003, Turkmenistan signed an agreement to sell almost all of its gas to Russia starting in 2009.<sup>17</sup> Overall prospects in the near future are discouraging because of widespread internal poverty, a poor educational system, government misuse of oil and gas revenues, and Ashgabat's unwillingness to adopt market-oriented reforms. Proven oil and gas reserves are estimated as

273 million bbl (2002 est.) and 2.01 trillion cu m (2005 est.) respectively.<sup>18</sup> Recently, however, China also has expressed interest in Turkmen gas. On April 3, 2006, the leaders of the two countries signed a deal whereby an export pipeline will be built from Turkmenistan to China and China will buy 30 billion cubic meters (bcm) of Turkmen gas every year for 30 years beginning in 2009.<sup>19</sup>

*Afghanistan* provides a land bridge between Central Asia, Iran and South Asia as the Central Asian republics of Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have borders with Afghanistan, Iran lies to its west and Pakistan on the east and south. Therefore, with the control of Afghanistan comes the control of the land routes between the Indian subcontinent and resource-rich Central Asia. Thus stability and peace in Afghanistan and Central Asia offers tremendous potential for intraregional trade and economic prosperity.

The painstaking process of nation-building, the legitimacy crisis, rapid social and economic transformation, decolonization, ethnic diversity, border disputes, and a catalogue of other issues are all sources of instability in the Central Asian state. Zbigniew Brzezinski in 1997, while analysing Central Asia in his book *'The Grand Chessboard'*<sup>20</sup> calls the area an ethnic cauldron, prone to instability and conflicts, a mess of historical cultural influences, tribal and clan loyalties, and religious fervor.

## **EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT**

The internal environment of instability and chaos in Central Asia are further marred with external intrigues, busy in playing their own music. While the great powers like USA, Russia, China, EU and Japan are trying

to influence Central Asia to gain a foothold and control the flow of oil and gas reserves, the lesser powers like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, are intruding in the game to further their own interests. Control over these energy resources and export routes out of the Eurasian hinterland is quickly becoming one of the central issues in 21<sup>st</sup> century politics. Russia, Turkey, Iran, China, Pakistan, India and the United States all are projecting influence into the area as follow:

Russia continues to dominate political decision-making, although as these countries shed their post-Soviet authoritarian systems, Russia's influence is slowly waning. Turkey has some influence because of the ethnic and linguistic ties with the Turkic peoples of Central Asia, as well as serving as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline route to the Mediterranean. Iran, has historical and cultural links to the region, as is vying to construct an oil pipeline from the Caspian Sea to the Persian Gulf. China, already controlling Xinjiang and Tibet, projects significant power in the region, especially in energy/oil politics. Pakistan, armed with nuclear weapons is capable of exercising limited influence. India, as a nuclear-armed rising power, exercises some influence in the region, especially in Tibet with which it has cultural affinities. And the United States with its military involvement in the region, and oil diplomacy, is also significantly involved in the region's politics.

## **OVERVIEW OF THE US POLICY CONCERNS**

Bases of its relations with regional governments of Central Asia were initially centered on the area's energy resources, its geo-strategic location, the dangers of drug smuggling and terrorism, and the weapons

of mass destruction infrastructure that remained after the Soviet Union's breakup. Before the invasion of Afghanistan or occupation Iraq, American foreign policy favored a plan to build an oil pipeline from post-Soviet Azerbaijan, through post-Soviet Georgia, to an Eastern Mediterranean port in Turkey. This pipeline, if built, might also transport oil from other friendly former Soviet Republics in Central Asia. However, it gained sudden importance and brought Central Asia into a different focus as the US deployed forces and set up bases of operation in the region. The United States, has succeeded in pumping its forces and establish military bases in Central Asia under the guise of counter-terrorism, deploying thousands of US troops in Afghanistan and republics of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Georgia. These US combat troops on former Soviet territory have dramatically altered the geo-strategic power equations in the region, with Washington trying to seal the Cold War victory against Russia, contain Chinese influence, and tighten the noose around Iran. Oil giants such as Exxon Mobil, Chevron Texaco, and British Petroleum have already invested more than US\$30 billion in new production facilities.<sup>21</sup> The aggressive US pursuit of oil interests in the Caspian did not start with the Bush Administration, but under Clinton who personally conducted oil and pipeline diplomacy with Caspian leaders. Most of the experts believe that the Americans are believed to be in Central Asia for oil and, with respect to Afghanistan, the right of way for an oil pipeline. Today, much is at stake in Central Asia for the U.S. and its allies. United States needs to continue to diversify its energy supplies, maintain its military presence in the area, and alter the local socio-political environment to its long term suiting by promoting democratic and free-market values in an area.

**USA Interests in the Region:** The United States has varied and at times competing interests in Central Asia. Above the significance of its ethno-religious composition and vast deposits of oil, gas, coal, and uranium, the region, plays an important part in U.S. global strategy in view of its proximity to Russia, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and other key regional actors. U.S. interests in Central Asia can be summarized as follows:

- ✓ In order to ensure free and fair access to the oil reserves in Central Asia, the U.S. should strive to preserve the independence and economic viability of the region, strengthen bilateral and multilateral political and military cooperation with these states.
  
- ✓ America's primary objective seems weaning the Central Asian countries away from Russian influence. Therefore, U.S. should also try to prevent the reconstitution of Moscow's sphere of influence in the region and deny China access to the people and the energy resources of the area. According to Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of State Steven Mann, "institutions such as NATO will continue to draw the nations of Central Asia closer to Europe and the United States," while the United States also will encourage the states to develop "new ties and synergies with nations to the south," such as Afghanistan, India, and Pakistan.<sup>22</sup> It is in this connection that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian Affairs Richard Boucher came up with the idea of developing a power grid from the underutilized hydro-power potential of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and power stations based on Uzbekistan gas, with connections to Afghanistan initially and in later phases to Pakistan and India.<sup>23</sup>



- ✓ To counter China influence and attempt to compete in energy sector of Central Asia as she accrue more Central Asian energy assets, will have more leverage with which to prevent U.S. encroachment into their alleged spheres of influence. Its purchase of the Petro Kazakhstan oil company in 2005, acquisition of Canada-based Nations Energy by China International Trust and Investment Corporation (CITIC) in the fall of 2006, and the signing of several significant pipeline agreements in the region are leap jump in this direction.

Promote enlighten moderation and secularization of these newly independent states of Central Asia and strengthen existing secular Muslim societies of Turkey and Azerbaijan, against Islamic militant groups.

- ✓ Guard against Islamist backlash by supporting recognition and dialogue between existing regimes and secular opposition groups and other legitimate, non-destabilizing political actors.  
Threats emerging out of Russians geo-strategic ambitions can be countered by helping to create free market economies, democratization investing and acquisitions of assets and plan /promote new pipelines through Pakistan, Turkey and Caspian Sea, avoiding Russian and Iranian territories at all cost.
- ✓ Post 9/11 national interests demand that United States puts special focus on the promotion of security, domestic reforms in five Central Asian countries to prevent them from becoming harbors for terrorism.<sup>24</sup> Therefore, take necessary steps to prevent terrorist

regimes or groups from illicitly acquiring Soviet-era technology for making weapons of mass destruction.

- ✓ Another one of the major U.S. security interests was elimination of nuclear weapons remaining in Kazakhstan after the breakup of the Soviet Union and other efforts to control nuclear proliferation in Central Asia. The United States tendered aid aimed at bolstering their export and physical controls over nuclear technology and materials to preempt any Iranian move for acquiring technology or warheads.
- ✓ In order to achieve aforementioned the U.S. should:
  - Support projects to increase and diversify non-Russian energy transit routes for Central Asian oil and gas;
  - Further develop ties with Central Asian states to expand trade and security relations with the U.S.;
  - Continue to encourage good governance, modern institutions, and legislative reforms in Central Asia; and
  - Adopt a nuanced approach to regimes with which the U.S. is not currently on good terms, allowing for engagement to address top national priorities, such as energy security and the global war on terrorism.

### **CHALLENGES TO USA INTERESTS**

**China:** While the important reason for a Chinese interest in the region also appears to be an effort to secure China's growing need for oil and natural gas, but answer to her security concerns along her Western border and Xingjian internal security also rests upon peaceful development in her Central Asian neighboring states and China's

relations with them.<sup>25</sup> China, whose dependence on imported oil increases with its rapid industrialization, wants to build eastbound pipelines from Kazakhstan. China also hopes to use Central Asian markets as a catalyst to fuel a new prosperity zone in Xingjian for foreign investment and revive the Silk Route, pushing Chinese economic interests beyond Central Asia to the Persian Gulf and even to European markets.

While the great powers are trying to influence Central Asia to gain a foothold, the lesser powers like Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, are intruding in the game to further their national interests. Thus, Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia and China and each state of Central Asia seek in their own way to promote stability within Central Asia while expanding their own regional influence. However last few years have seen a marked shift from individual state games amongst the regional players to a unified team effort to prevent their interests. SCO is attaining the status of unified regional voice to limit American playing field, and willingness to share the spoils with in the region.

**Shanghai Cooperation Organization:** Initially the Shanghai Cooperation Organization <sup>26</sup>(SCO) remained exclusively focused on resolving border disputes, countering terrorism, separatism and extremism in the region, and the year 2005 took shaped the turn in perception. The perceived shared threat of Washington's presence in Central Asia loomed larger than their differences in policy goals, has brought a shift toward greater cooperation between the Russia and China. Instead of involving isolated resistance to US moves in the region, both invoked SCO to offer a unified front with the participation of other neighbors. Proceedings reflect that two states have solved their long-

standing border disputes and laid the foundation for greater integration of their state-controlled oil companies and banking sectors. Both states have joined hands in challenging USA hegemony, on the issues of "non-interference in internal affairs," "mutual respect" for other nations' "sovereignty and stress the role of "multipolarity" in dealing with conflicts.<sup>27</sup> The joint statement, also contained a clear message to the other members of the S.C.O that Washington poses a threat to Central Asia's sovereignty; China and Russia can offer a similar economic and security package, only it will be designed to preserve the current status quo not to encourage market economies or democratic reforms<sup>28</sup>. Fearing future waves of "color" revolutions in the region, Central Asian states were eager to receive this message. Prior to 5<sup>th</sup> July 2005 Summit China and Russia succeeded to encourage the S.C.O. member states to act multilaterally in an effort to limit Washington's reach. July,5, 2005,S.C.O. Summit sought to limit Washington's presence in the region, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan shifted their support to China and Russia in order to protect their sovereignty from U.S. meddling. The joint declaration issued at the end of the summit clearly reflects Central Asian states see it in their interests to fill the power vacuum that the withdrawals would create with that of China and Russia, which they believe would better ensure the longevity of their regimes. Their joint response included:

- ✓ Rejecting monopolizing or dominating international affairs.
- ✓ Insisting on "non-interference in the internal affairs of sovereign states.
- ✓ Urging the U.S. to declare a timetable for withdrawal from Afghanistan and the Uzbek and Kyrgyz bases in the region that were established to support the Afghan operations.

Instead setting time to withdraw from the region, USA quickly secured permission to continue using military facilities and airspace of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, and Tajikistan to support operations in Afghanistan. These events symbolize the resurgence of the traditional “great game” among the major external players in the region.<sup>29</sup> Central Asia interlaced with such currents and cross currents has been defined by Peter Hopkirk as ‘beginning of the New Great Game’<sup>30</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski called it ‘the emergence of a Grand Chessboard’<sup>31</sup> or may be termed as the start of the final clash of civilizations as Samuel Huntington has described it<sup>32</sup>.

## CONCLUSION

The struggle for Central Asian oil is a multifaceted game. It involves security, geopolitical, and economic interests not only of Russian, Chinese, and other neighbors like Pakistan, Iran, and Afghanistan, but American and European as well. It appears the United States is planning to be in this oil world for the long haul and China moving to expand its influence using Pakistan and Iran. Russia will attempt to retain its military presence in the region to protect its own assets. Beijing, Moscow along with their Shanghai Corporation Organization and Washington are once again using Central Asia, the setting for the "Great Game" between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain more than 150 years ago. In the contemporary version of the game, Washington approaches each state bilaterally, offering incentives to support the operations in Afghanistan while undermining the consensus put forth at the recent S.C.O. Whereas, China and Russia are acting in tandem to shore up support for S.C.O. policies by offering blanket support for the current

regimes and showing willingness to cooperate other regional players in sharing the spoils of the game. However, manipulative moves being undertaken by both camps indicate that states hosting the game will continue to swing their support from China and Russia to the U.S., and back again, so long as they keep their hold on power.

Pakistan merits special place in both the camps because of the contiguity of geographical boundaries through Afghanistan and Iran, its strategically most suited location with shortest land rout to hot waters, and commonality of Islamic belief and culture. It is up to Pakistan to play its cards with vision and statesmanship. However, Pakistan must underscore three points in its policy formulation. Firstly, it must understand that friends in international affairs keep on changing but neighbors remain permanent. Secondly, it must apprehend that the reinforcement of Islam in the Central Asian states will strengthen the positioning of Pakistan in the region Thirdly, Pakistan must believe that there is no real commonality of interests between the US and Pakistan, therefore, it should not facilitate any US effort where Iran is left out of the race. Pakistan attempts to weaken Iran's hold on Central Asia would not only threaten the proposed gas pipeline from Iran-Turkmenistan via Pakistan to India, but also strengthen India partnership with Iran on strategic grounds. Foregoing in view, Pakistan needs to build a long-term strategy to play a role and derive geo-strategic and geo-political benefits from the Central Asian region.

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## End Notes

- <sup>1</sup>. Central Asia is here defined as including the five post-Soviet states of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan as well as Afghanistan
- <sup>2</sup>. The Great Game, a term usually attributed to Arthur Conolly, was used to describe the rivalry and strategic conflict between the British Empire and the Tsarist Russian Empire for supremacy in Central Asia. However, Miron Rezun cites in his book, *Intrigue and War in South west Asia* (westport, Praeger Publishers, 1992,p.2)that the originator of the phrase “great game” was J.W.Kay, who used it in his book, *History of the war in Afghanistan*, but Kipling popularized it in his novel, *Kim*.
- <sup>3</sup>. “This new "great game" in the heart of Asia is unfolding not so much among the old colonial powers as among their former minions, many of whom are themselves just emerging from colonial domination and seeking to define their roles in their regions and the world.  
  
Boris Z. Rumer, "The Gathering Storm in Central Asia", *Orbis*, Vol. 37, No. 1, Winter 1993, p. 89.
- <sup>4</sup>. Abdul Ali Arghandawi, *British Imperialism and Afghanistan, struggle for Independence 1914-21*, Delhi, Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers, 1989, pp.323-325
- <sup>5</sup>. *ibid*.pp326-328
- <sup>6</sup>. Louis Dupree, *Afghanistan*, Karachi, Oxford University Press, 1997,p.485
- <sup>7</sup>. Arghandawi, *British Imperialism and Afghanistan*, *opcit*, p.361
- <sup>8</sup>. *ibid*. p.362
- <sup>9</sup>. For a detailed analysis of U.S. bases in Central Asia and interests of the SCO see Lionel Beehner, “Asia: U.S. Military Bases in Central Asia,” Council on Foreign Relations website <<http://www.cfr.org/publication/8440/asia.html#3>> (November 15 2006).
- <sup>10</sup>. Lutz Kleveman , “Oil was: from Central Asia to Iraq” 9<sup>th</sup> October 2003. Available at: [www.openDemocracy.net](http://www.openDemocracy.net)
- <sup>11</sup>. CIA World Fact book, Kazakhstan. Available at: <https://cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/kz.html>
- <sup>12</sup>. Kazakh Foreign Minister Kassym-Jomart Tokayev “address to the European Parliament’s Foreign Affairs Committee”, 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2006

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The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) started in 1996 as the Shanghai Five, consisting of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Initially focused on resolving longstanding border disputes between China and the ex-Soviet states, after 1998 the focus of the group expanded to dealing with terrorism and separatism as China's concerns in Xinjiang. The group was renamed the SCO with the inclusion of Uzbekistan in June 2001. American invasion of Iraq deepened fears in China and Russia of American unipolarity, the two nations worked to revitalize the SCO. The declaration of the June 2003 SCO meeting emphasized the role of the United Nations in dealing with international disputes, clearly targeting U.S. "unilateralism." At the July 2005 SCO summit, three nations--India, Pakistan and Iran--were admitted as observers. India's presence at the SCO is important to Russia for balancing against Chinese power in the region, while the inclusion of Pakistan was insisted upon by China to balance against a potential Russian-Indian bloc in the SCO. Iran's acceptance within the SCO provides it with a hedge against U.S. and European pressures on terrorism and nuclear weapons development.

<sup>27</sup> . Joint Statement of the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation Regarding the International Order of the 21st Century," signed by Chinese President Hu Jintao and Russian President Vladimir Putin on July 2, 2005

<sup>28</sup> . *ibid*

<sup>29</sup> . Wolfe, "The 'Great Game' Heats Up in Central Asia," August 3, 2005. Available at: [http://www.pinr.com/report.php? Ac = view\\_report&report\\_id=339& language\\_id=1](http://www.pinr.com/report.php?Ac=view_report&report_id=339&language_id=1).

<sup>30</sup> . Peter Hopkirk, *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1994

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