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**Strategic Importance of Central Asia:
The New Great Game between the United States and Russia**

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Abstract <p>The aim of this thesis is to assess the strategic importance of Central Asia as a whole and interests of great powers in the region in particular within the theoretical framework chosen. The work shows Central Asia as an area of the New Great Game, analogue of the original Great Game which was played out between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia in XIX century. The parallels between the original Great Game and the New Great Game are drawn in order to understand the scope and the true intentions of the players of the latter one. Also, the security issues in the contemporary Central Asia are explored and analyzed to provide with the background for future predictions. Furthermore, the indirect purpose of the thesis is to examine whether the international system has changed from that of two centuries ago by comparing the structure of the international systems at the time of two Games.</p> <p>Different theories are gathered into one system theory which serves as a framework for analytical elaboration. The theories used are – the theory of offensive realism, regional security complex theory, strategic theory and the concept of strategic geography, where the applicable essence is withdrawn for analysis of the processes in the contemporary Central Asia. The strategic interests of the regional powers in Central Asia are described and analyzed with the significant help of the theoretical part.</p> <p>In order to reach the aim of the research the historical concept of the Great Game is chosen as a method. By comparison of the location, players, means and goals with the New Great Game the validity of concept is verified and, consequently, applied to the Central Asian case.</p> <p>On the basis of theoretical and methodological parts the empirical findings are withdrawn and analyzed in turn providing us with the reasonable conclusions on the issue. The perspectives of the two key players - the US and Russia - are analyzed and the possible predictions are made. In a similar way, certain scenarios are provided to Central Asian states, depending on the development of the New Great Game. Finally, the recommendations for further research are given.</p> <p>Last but not least, this work is a study of one part of geopolitics in one region at one time, thereby the conclusion drawn is actual only for one region, but not for the discipline as a whole.</p>		
Keywords Central, Asia, Great, Game, Russia, USA, strategic, importance, analyze, region, power		

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Map of Central Asia

The Caucasus and Central Asia



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List of Abbreviations

CIS	Commonwealth of Independent States
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
OPEC	Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries
OSCE	Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
UN	United Nations
US	United States (of America)
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

1. Introduction

“He Who Controls Central Asia Controls the World”
Halford Mackinder¹

1.1 Regional Background

The collapse of the Soviet Union has enabled the emergence of five independent states – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, and appearance of power vacuum in Central Asia, because of withdrawal of Soviet power from the region. Immediately after the withdrawal of the Soviet empire from Central Asia, the region has become an attractive share for many regional powers² who have rushed to the region, because of regional oil and natural gas deposits along with other strategically important commodities such as uranium which makes up an essential element in nuclear power production.

The war on terror in general and against Al-Qaeda in particular enhanced international attention on Central Asia as an area of strategic importance. However, the anti-terrorist campaign is only an episode, even though an important one, in a larger contest, called the “New Great Game”. The term has occurred in early 90s of XX century to depict a replay of the first “Great Game” which was introduced in Rudyard Kipling’s novel *Kim*,³ where the Tsarist Russia and British Empire were struggling for supremacy in Central Asia in general and in Afghan region in particular.⁴ Afghanistan was of primary interest for two empires, whose geographical location offered the most strategically convenient area for control of India and Turkestan.⁵ Lord George Nathaniel Curzon, viceroy of India in 1898, was absolutely aware about the stakes for the British Empire in the Great Game, saying: “Turkestan, Afghanistan, Transcaspia, Persia – to many these names breath only a sense of utter remoteness or a memory of strange vicissitudes and of moribund romance. To me, I confess, they are the pieces on a chessboard upon which is being played out a game for the dominion of the world”.⁶

Now, more than one century later, great powers once again challenge to control the core of Eurasia which was unexpectedly left in a post-Soviet vacuum. Understandably, nowadays actors are different and even rules of the challenge were reshaped. In a nutshell, everything is more complex than those of a century ago. The United States has directly involved into the New Great Game, overtaking the leading role of the British Empire; Russia remains a key player, even

¹ Mackinder, H.J. (1969), “The Scope and Methods in Geography, and the Geographical Pivot of History”, Royal Geographical Society

² Here and further on the term “regional power” is being used in a broader perspective embracing all powers, including the US, involved in the New Great Game

³ Kipling, R. (1994), “*Kim*”, London: Penguin Books

⁴ Rashid, A. (2000), “Taliban: Militant Islam, Oil and Fundamentalism in Central Asia”, NY: Yale Nofa Bene, p. 143

⁵ Turkestan formerly comprised all five Central Asian republics

⁶ Quoted in Rashid, id., p. 145, see also Kleveman, L. (2003), “The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia”, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, p. 3

though not as powerful as it was; and new regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, Japan, China, India, Pakistan hastened to Central Asia; European Union, with Germany and France ahead, is a sound player in the region as well; not to mention many transnational corporations, whose budgets exceed those of some Central Asian countries, are also in chase for their strategic interests and stakes.

In this regard, the logical question should be raised by someone: does the region really matter? The answer is, obviously, yes it does. The superabundance of energy resources makes Central Asian region an epicenter of geopolitical or, perhaps geo-economic rivalry.⁷ The biggest difference of today's New Great Game and the original Great Game is the stakes. While the Old Great Game was mostly for control of Afghan region with all ensuing benefits, the New Great Game is based on energy resources, mainly crude oil and natural gas. In addition to that, the various natural resources are also at stake. And to elevate the importance of the region even further, the following claim has to be done. Geographical location of Central Asia makes the region extremely attractive for great powers in their strategic plans (the point will be elaborated further on).

Setting the context

The term Central Asia is generally used to refer to the former-Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, which are located between the Caspian Sea to the west, China's Xingiang region to the East, Russia to the North and Iran and Afghanistan to the South.⁸ It has a population of more than 50 million and occupies just less than 4 million square kilometers.⁹ Central Asian states share a common history and religion and four of the five claim a Turkic heritage and speak the similar languages (Tajiks speak a tongue related to Persian).¹⁰ Central Asian states share a variety of common problems such as externally imposed borders, undeveloped industrial sector, environmental degradation, demographic explosion, limited water resources and landlocked geographical location.

A common security concern of Central Asian states is dependence on Russia. All of the states were integrated into Soviet economy and were heavily dependent upon subsidies from the centre.¹¹ Although some of these ties have been broken by the collapse of the old union, their legacy remains, as all states depend upon Russia for imports of industrial products, consumer

⁷ Rumer B. & Zhukov S. ed. (1998), "Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence", Armonk, New York: M. E. Sharpe, p. 25

⁸ Menon, R. "In the Shadow of the Bear. Security in Post-Soviet Central Asia", *International Security*, Vol.20, No.1, summer 1995

⁹ Ibid

¹⁰ Kubicek, P. "Regionalism, Nationalism and Realpolitik in Central Asia", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.49, No.4, 1997, pp. 637-38

¹¹ Ibid

goods and food. Russia is also the largest export market and overall accounts for half of the trade of each Central Asian state.¹² Moreover, Central Asia is dependent upon Russia for its security, as Russian troops guard the CIS borders and agreements with Russia are the cornerstone of each state's security policy.¹³

The phenomena of the region

The past importance of Central Asia comes from two sources. The first was the world's greatest trade route, between China, the Middle East and Europe. This state of affairs disappeared at the end of the 15th century, with the opening of the Europeans of the sea route to Asia around Africa and later Suez Canal. It may never return as a factor of global importance given the capacity of modern shipping and remaining insecurities of the land route.¹⁴

The second source of importance was Central Asia's capacity to produce repeated waves of warrior nomads, at a time when mountain bowmen were effective soldiers in the steppes of Heartland.¹⁵ This too became irrelevant since the invention of guns and bullets for more than four centuries ago. In fact, the last time those developments in Central Asia were of truly great importance for the wider world was during the early 16th century when Central Asian statesman Babur invaded India.

When the assessment on present importance of Central Asia is made, the parallel is drawn between the Russian-British Great Game of the 19th century and the current geopolitical rivalry of the major powers that started since the collapse of Soviet Union. The main difference of the New Great Game, as argued, is that there are new players including the Central Asian states, which would decide the fate of the region.¹⁶ However, the important moment is that Central Asia's significance to the outside powers has usually been peripheral, even in the case of the previous rivalry between Russia and Britain. Although the Tsarist Russia needed the region as a source of raw material for its industrial growth, the importance of Central Asia for Britain was a matter of buffer zone against Russian encroachment to British India and British lines of communication in Persian Gulf. Yet, the Turkish-German threats to Europe during the World War I led to the abandonment of their rivalry over Central Asia.¹⁷

Since the independence of Central Asian states in 1991, the region's strategic significance has been reassessed continuously. A lot has been talked about the importance of

¹² Olcott, M. "The Caspian's False Promise", *Foreign Policy*, summer 1998

¹³ Hale, H. "The Rise of Russian Anti-Imperialism", *Orbis*, winter 1999

¹⁴ Lieven, A. "The (not so) great game", *The National Interest*, winter 1999/2000

¹⁵ Ibid

¹⁶ Kasenov, U. "Novaya 'Bol'shaya Igra' v Tsentral'noy Azii?" (A New Great Game in Central Asia?), *Central Asia and Caucasus*, No.8, 1997

¹⁷ Ibid

Central Asia in terms of socio-cultural notions, such as the location of the region between different civilizations such as Islamic South, Christian North and Buddhist East. The assessment in terms of state - power relations has been the encirclement of Central Asia by significant powers like Russia, China, India, Pakistan and Iran, four of which are nuclear states. However, the most obvious significance of Central Asia seems to be its rich natural resources and its potential to turn into a source of global instability.

The security dimension linked to the importance of Central Asia is its destabilizing potential if the region becomes the supplier of the weapons of mass destruction, conventional weapons, drugs and terrorists. As Central Asia possess vast reserves of uranium, as well as an infrastructure to produce uranium-238, at the times of economic hardships, they may consider selling uranium to pay for their imports, which may have a serious implication to global security.¹⁸ The acquisition of nuclear materials by Iran, Pakistan, Libya or terrorist groups, for instance, may have tremendous security implications for Israel, India and the West, at least in the form of arms racing.¹⁹

Conventional weapons systems could themselves be a potentially rich source of hard currency for Central Asian governments. Kazakhstan, for instance, has one of the largest arsenals of weaponry inherited by Soviet times and contributed by the transfer of most ex-Soviet military arsenal from Eastern Europe to its territory.²⁰ The governments of many republics have allowed the sale of weapons through the government controlled firms.²¹

Central Asia is also turning into the main crossroad of drugs and terrorism, as it has long porous borders with Afghanistan. As it was estimated Afghanistan has become the largest producer and exporter of opium accounting 75% of the world's total output.²² The need for the cash in order to provide basic needs and sustain fighting against opposing groups drive local Afghan warlords to export drugs to Europe, the main transit route to which lies through Central Asia. Similarly geographic location of the Central Asia between Afghanistan and Caucasus may contribute to regional instability, as it has become the transit corridor between Chechen and Afghan fighters.²³

¹⁸ Snyder, J. (1995), "After Empire: the Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia", Washington: National Defence University Press. In addition, since Soviet times Central Asia has had the capabilities for producing biological weapons and testing grounds for them. The lack of adequate control, as some newspapers speculates, enabled some terrorist groups, associated with Osama bin Laden, to buy anthrax and bubonic plague viruses from Kazakh arm dealers. Daly, J. "Global implications of Aral Sea desiccation" at www.cacianalyst.org, accessed on 04/10/23

¹⁹ Banerjee, D. "Problems of Regional Security and Nuclear Proliferation", *Central Asian Survey*

²⁰ Ibid

²¹ Olcott, M. "Central Asia's catapult to independence", *Foreign Affairs*, 1994

²² Rubin, B. "The Political Economy of War and Peace in Afghanistan", *World Development*, Vol.28, No.10, 2000

²³ "Birlik's Appeal to Clinton" at www.birlik.net, accessed on 02/09/22

1.2 How Much Oil in Central Asia and Could the Central Asian Oil Change the Centrality of the Gulf?

Caspian Sea contains the world's biggest untapped energy resources and, since, not all energy deposits are discovered yet, there is a range of approximate amount of oil and gas from 50 to 110 billion barrels of oil, and from 170 to 463 trillion cubic feet of natural gas. Furthermore, the recent discovery of yet another massive oil reserve in Kazakhstan in mid-May 2000 paved the way for the US Department of Energy to expect of a total of 243 billion barrels of oil reserves in Central Asia. Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan alone could sit on 90 billion barrels of oil, more than two times the US' own reserves. Only Saudi Arabia, with 262 billion barrels, can challenge the supremacy in oil deposits.²⁴ But one essential aspect should be taken into account – Central Asian energy resources are costly enough, since Central Asia is a landlocked region and maritime transportation is not viable, the only way to deliver the regional oil to world markets is pipelines, and as we will see below, the pipelines are also of significant interest for many regional powers involved into the New Great Game. That is why Central Asian oil has long-term based interests, but great powers want to secure these resources right now. Initially, it was expected that Caspian oil would be able to change the centrality of the Gulf, but contrary to many anticipations there is less oil in the Caspian basin than in the Persian Gulf region. According to some forecasts, Central Asia could reach a share from 6 to 8 percent of the world oil market by 2015.²⁵ But, it should be absolutely clear that the major share of oil supply will continue from the Middle East, and this is also a good reason why the US wants Central Asian oil. Central Asian countries, being non-members of OPEC cartel, could considerably help the US to diversify oil supplies and thereby to create an alternative to OPEC and help the US to become free from the Gulf dependency, which from the oil crisis in 1973 has used its monopoly position to set their leverages on the agenda against great powers.²⁶

1.3 Central Asian Security and its Potential Impacts

The end of the Cold War and the dissolution of the Soviet Union have dramatically reflected on the world balance of power, thus raising new security concerns for the states of the former Soviet Union and the world at large. As the empirical evidence suggests that security of states in modern times can be best served through multilateral co-operation and interdependence, the ex-Soviet states are pursuing the policies of inclusion into the world community to meet their security interests. While a solution for some of them is potential incorporation into Western

²⁴ See online at International Energy Agency, Paris on www.iea.org, and the US Department of Energy on www.eia.doe.gov

²⁵ Kleveman, L. (2003), "The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia", NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, p. 5

²⁶ Ibid

security and economic structures, for others new security systems are needed to cope with their security challenges.

Central Asia, which consists of five ex-Soviet states, is a clear example of the second case. **The important feature of the region is that the local states have been taking complex solutions to complex security problems.** Facing a conflict potential in all three - intra-state, inter-state and international levels both *ad hoc* and institutionalised measures have been taken with a different degree of success. Since the regional states are still in a nation-building process and security challenges they face have been changing, the final word on the formation of the regional security system is yet to be said.

1.4 Research Questions or Operational Framework

In the course of this work I will explore the regional powers' interests, detaching real interests from those which are imposed upon international society from these regional powers to shape public opinion. I will also analyse the strategic importance of Central Asian republics from the great powers' viewpoint. In other words, how important the region is for the great powers will be analyzed. And external and internal sources of the security threats to Central Asian states will be analyzed in turn. The great powers' rivalry over the control of the region's resources and advancing their political, ideological and security agendas in a zero-sum way will be looked as an external factor that destabilises the regional stability. The internal security threats will include the potential conflicts through ethnic and territorial disputes, as well as a struggle for legitimacy and power in conditions of rising economic inequality and corruption, and the appearance of the new rival forces in political scene in the form of political Islam, nationalist and democratic movements.

Therefore, the overall objective of this research will be to *assess* the strategic importance of Central Asia in a new geopolitical environment where the great powers are involved in the New Great Game. To show the complexity of the issue I will analyze the great powers' interests in the region as well as national interests and capabilities of Central Asian states. Similarly, I will *assess* the importance of great powers (the US and Russia, in particular) there. The research will concentrate on the following sub questions: Whether the situation in nowadays Central Asia can be named as the New Great Game and why? Whose chances are better to 'win' the New Great Game and establish ultimate sphere of influence there? And to what extent the US' and Russia's interests are affected by development in this region? What are external and internal sources of the security threats for Central Asian states?

2. Methodology

2.1 Historical Concept as a Method

The collapse of the Soviet Union and subsequent occurrence on the world map of five Central Asian states paved the way for unjustified exploitation of the historical concept “Great Game”. As we proceed further on in understanding the concept of the Great Game and the New Great Game it would be merely seen that the concept has been used as shorthand for contest for sphere of influence, hegemony and benefits, which is much identical in this aspect with offensive realism, and for referring to crude oil and natural gas resources in Central Asia.²⁷ Obviously, it is not limited only to these aspects and could be easily elaborated to military, cultural, religious competition with different actors at various levels: local, regional, transnational and multinational levels. As the world community found out about Central Asian energy resources and vacuum of power which has subsequently occurred after the break up of the Soviet empire, the concept “New Great Game” has become an inalienable part of various reports, researches, news, governmental releases in explicit as well as implicit forms. The exploitation of the concept did not decrease but even increased after the notorious September 11 events and consequent US invasion to Afghanistan. The growing use of the concept, which sometimes transformed into misuse, has been caused by emerging geopolitics of Central Asia along with the growing interest in the region. In this regard, the concept of the “New Great Game” can be used as a tool for security analysis and strategic importance measurement; the concept could be also an invaluable asset for understanding the new geopolitical environment which has occurred after 1989-1991 events. One more point is of marginal importance while undertaking this research – this is a study of one part of geopolitics in one region at one time, thereby the conclusion drawn will be actual only for one region, but not for the discipline as a whole.

The use of the term the “New Great Game” as a guide for embracing many issues which have taken or would have taken place in the region chosen, will be elaborated below. However, there are two issues which have to be clarified in the framework of the concept. The first one is the applicability of the term, and the second one is the accuracy of the concept beyond the term. The analysis and comparison of the New Great Game with the original Great Game is a tool by which the applicability of the term can be verified. The analysis could be based on various levels – location, players, objectives and means.

²⁷ Weisbrode, K. (2001), “Central Eurasia: Prize or Quicksand? Contending Views of Instability in Karabakh, Ferghana and Afghanistan”, Adelphi Paper 338, Oxford: International Institute of Strategic Studies/Oxford University Press, 2001, pp. 11–14.

Location

Location is a fundamental aspect for both Games. From geographical perspective there are obvious resemblances between the New and original Great Games, since it was/is played out almost on the same geographical space, however with a slight difference – the original Great Game was played mostly in Afghan region, whereas the new one is being played out in Central Asia and in South Caucasus to some extent. Thus, it should be absolutely clear that even though, there is no exact match in the geographical location, there is enough of rough similarity to enable a source of reference and, moreover, in both cases there are different reasons, but the same aim – to control Central Asia.²⁸ References to the New Great Game have varied enormously – from the Caspian Sea to the whole Eurasian continent. Thus, the ambiguity of divergence of the geographical context between the two Games is inevitable.

Players

While the original Great Game had only two key players – Britain and Russia, the New Great Game evolved further in this aspect, bringing in more players on the arena. This cleavage seems as a main difference in the concepts and could be considered as a cornerstone for further comparisons. The evolution of the Great Game is clear – Russia remained as a key player, even though much impaired than it was represented in the original Great Game; Britain conceded its positions to the US as a powerful player and many other competitors such as China, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India etc. appear as challengers for Central Asia. But this perception is superficial enough: two biggest challengers – the US and Russia contradict mostly in their interests to each other, whereas other players' interests complement the US and Russian interests. Certainly, sometimes China intervenes in the Game, but it is only in one case – in so-called “pipeline issue” and it is rather an exception than regularity. State level also underwent some serious changes – five new states have occurred with their different aims and methods, and, even moreover, these states do challenge to be players in the New Great Game on their own searching for their interests and objectives and “it is a mistake to treat issues in which third parties are embroiled as if these countries were pawns in a global balancing game, instead of dealing with the issues' intrinsic merits and the nations' interests”.²⁹

Having taken into account the aforesaid statements, the similarities of the politics involved in were argued: “The Great Game was a game of high politics—a game of colonization and

²⁸ See, for instance, Davis H.W.C “The Great Game in Asia (1800-1844)”, London: Oxford University Press for the British academy, The Raleigh Lecture on History, 10 November 1926; Hopkirk P. (1992), “The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia”, New York: Kodansha International; Meyer K.E.&Bryson S.B. (1999), “Tournament of Shadows: The Great Game and the Race for Empire in Central Asia, Washington, DC: Counterpoint

²⁹ Hoffman, S. (1978), “Primacy or World Order”, New York: McGraw-Hill, p. 175

military contest between the two empires ... the New Great Game has nothing to do with high politics of the two imperialist powers. The New Great Game, if at all it could be described as such, pertains to low politics. It is about creating niches of influences in Central Asia by neighboring countries”.³⁰ But it could be argued that there is another side of the coin, called the “New Great Game” – where regional states “seek[ing] to define their roles in their regions and the world”³¹ and not only among the great powers.

To add some colors to the general picture – non-state bodies and international organizations are also active players in the Game. The UN, OSCE and NATO at the supra-state level, whereas multinational companies, non-governmental organizations, various lobby groups, religious extremists groups, terrorist groups, and criminal organizations at sub-state level also involved in the Game.

Objectives

The objective of the original Great Game was the geopolitical domination of the world, attribute peculiar to Imperialism.³² The interests of British and Russian Empires were not complementary, but contradictory in their nature. That is why the concept of the original Great Game was simple enough – a victory of one empire meant a defeat of another one. Thus the final aim of the Great Game was the Imperial need for power based on establishing hegemonic influence.

In this sense, the aims of the New Great Game are far more complicated: at state actor level include some forms of neo-imperialism, backing of state security issues and intensification and strengthening of cultural ties, whereas at non-state actor level – maximization of profits, based on securing contracts and local influence, as well as politico-religious objectives.

Means

The original Great Game was mainly a backstage struggle, where small groups under predominant forces supervision were trying to achieve their aims, not having used dangerous weapons and so on. However, military force was used more for the demonstration of power, than as a real method to win the struggle. The character of objectives in the New Great Game, correspondingly, affects the scope of means and ranges from diplomatic negotiations to creation of coalitions and conspiracies, and from mass-media manipulations to military force deployment.

³⁰ Shamsuddin, A. “The New Great Game in Central Asia”, *International Studies*, Vol 34, No 3, 1997, pp. 339–340

³¹ Rumer, B. “The Gathering Storm in Central Asia”, *Orbis*, Vol 37, No 1, 1993, p. 89

³² Doyle, M.W. (1986), “Empires”, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, see also Hardt, M. and Negri, A. (2000) “Empire”, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press

The stagnation between the two Games also reshaped the use of the term “power”. The evolution of the international system as a whole is no longer enabled the explicit use of the struggle for “power”. Although, there are still demonstrations of forces, the unjustified use of force has diminished between the two Games. That is why there is a belief in the subject of international relations that the theory of offensive realism and concept of geopolitics have become obsolete nowadays, being aggressive enough and not being able to reflect the contemporary processes in international relations. In this regard, the most exponential antithesis for that belief could be the notorious war on Iraq. While we can speculate much about the real aim of that war, the idealistic approach based on promotion of human rights and aid to Iraqi people sound, at least, naïve.

But back to the games – the original game was based on the contest of two empires, where the interference of a third party was impossible. Also, one thing should be kept in mind; the international system of that time was somewhat different from the contemporary one. Aggressive and non-peaceful intentions of some empires were fraught with change of frontiers and dissolution of the states, impose of pressure and manipulation upon less-powerful states were considered as a permitted and effective tool of policy-making. The states-victims of the Game had little or even no protection against Great Empires, and were doomed to accept any scenario imposed upon them by the empires. The evolutionary change of the international system has brought out different rules for the New Great Game. Establishing the UN along with the creation of the international legal system, being backed with the dissolution of empires as a consequence of the World War II, enabled a respect for the sovereignty of each state and its frontiers with the overall equality of all states under the international legal system as a part of the UN charter. This significant change of the international system drastically reverberated on the New Great Game – states cannot be demolished, dissolved, controlled and states’ frontiers cannot be changed in a non-peaceful way as it was in the original Game. It is an interesting feature of the original Great Game, that there are some arguments that the original Game’s “object was not to win, but not to lose”.³³ According to this statement, there could be no end to the original Great Game, if the World War I was not broken up and, consequently, the structure of the international system was not reshaped. The New Great Game, quite contrary, has the clear objective – to win, regardless the final reward.

The cost-benefit analysis also distinguishes between the two Games. The payoffs of the original Great Game, which was provided with the territory takeover, was mainly based on increased security and prestige, which, by the way, was of no small importance in that period, while the costs were higher than the benefits of the Game. The British Empire was feared that

³³ Ingram, E. (1979), “The Beginning of the Great Game in Asia, 1828–1834”, Oxford: Clarendon Press, p. 339

the potential neighborhood with the Tsarist Russia would have affected in threatening the pearl of the British Empire – India; “not everyone was convinced that the Russians intended to try and wrest India from Britain’s grasp, or that they were militarily capable of doing so. It did seem ... that the antagonists in the Great Game were mutually prone to exaggerating each other’s capacity for mischief, and that it was hard now to discern what enduring benefit Russia or Britain derived from dominion over so much Asian real estate”.³⁴ The benefits of the New Great Game are more evident and numerous – economic profit due to warranty of energy supplies, security of other natural resources, pipelines construction, enhance of security opposing the terrorist groups, sustainable politico-military position, creation of Islamic or Pan-Turkic states and other corresponding benefits, whereas the costs make up billions of dollars plus non-measurable security concerns.

Thus, having all these differences and similarities between the original and the New Great Game can we still apply the concept of the Great Game to describe the contemporary situation in Central Asia? Someone could say no, arguing that the political, economic, military, social and cultural circumstances are somewhat different. Not only that but objectives and means are different as well. The real resemblances are mainly based on geographical location, on power and on various comments and claims given by different commentators on the events in Central Asia. And, if we suppose that commentators and researches are right in claiming the events in Central Asia as the New Great Game, we can proceed further on and encounter the main setback while using the historical concept as a method – there is limited explanation of the New Great Game concept, sometimes it is even a misuse of the concept, which pushes us on the risky path to be misunderstood or unvalued. The implications of that misunderstanding could be decisive for understanding the situation in the region as a whole: the analytical framework could be distorted to the prejudice of the research at theoretical as well as at practical level.

2.2 Whether the Concept is Valid or not?

Whether concept is valid or not? The answer to this question is vitally important. There are many commentators, researches who strongly insist on dissimilarities between the Games. In spite of being already accepted as a universal concept by many academicians and commentators, there is no single answer found to this issue yet. Those who use this concept are indirectly indicating the validity of the concept, but there is still a strong army of people who openly debate this concept.³⁵ Apparently, the contemporary geopolitics of Central Asia differs slightly from

³⁴ Hopkirk, P. (1994), “The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia”, NY: Kodansha International, p. 6

³⁵ for example, see Buzan, B. and Waeber, O. (2003), “Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security”, Cambridge University Press

that of the nineteenth century.³⁶ To call or even labeling the contemporary situation as the “New Great Game” is to be responsible for the uniqueness of the existent processes in the region. In different parts of the world there are many actors seeking to increase of the sphere of influence observed. In fact, it is an inalienable part of international politics and economics, actors “act according to long stand tenants of realism and *realpolitik*”.³⁷ Also, it is argued, that search for influence is based on market economy, so-called *realeconomics*. For instance, Russian attempts to reassert its influence over the region is not something extraordinary or unique. History knows many examples similar to this, when metropolis had tried to regain its influence over former colonies.³⁸ But the methods, all the parties involved in the New Great Game use, are definitely unique. The regional powers pull Central Asia in different directions in their lustful gaining of power attempts, leaving no parallels for comparison with other regions on earth. The struggle for energy resources cannot be labeled as a unique process as well, at first sight – the same categories of actors are also involved in all energy producing areas.³⁹ If we project the oil and gas example to a simple economic basis, the competition of companies/corporations to secure profitable contracts can be barely seen as a new issue. Hence, if the aforesaid is true, the situation in Central Asia is far from being unique, consequently, these issues lead onto the opinion that there are many New Great Games throughout the world. But that is not true, oil and gas are the final prize in the New Great Game in Central Asia and it is not certain yet who will get this prize and at what cost. Moreover, in combination with the theory of offensive realism the formed “power vacuum” in Central Asia after the break up of the Soviet Union attracted some countries which could have happily lived even without Central Asia, such as Turkey, for example, because of one reason – thirst for an easy bait. And it makes the Central Asian case unique, and furthermore, the main traits of the original Great Game are obvious.

One more fundamental issue has to be raised – in what way the regional powers can achieve their aim, access to oil and natural gas? The question goes directly to the companies which are participating in the New Great Game. If it is a state company, the answer is pretty much clear – American state company will observe the American national interests, while Russian company will meet Russian national interests. With multinational companies situation is somehow different – being registered in one country and having shareholders of different nationalities worldwide, it is not correct to expect from them the observance of any national interests. For instance, in the question of pipeline routes, “companies are basing their decisions on the most financially affordable and timely route rather than complying with the geo-strategic

³⁶ Shamsuddin, A. “The New Great Game in Central Asia”, p. 339

³⁷ Blank, S. “Every Shark East of Suez: Great Power Interests, Policies and Tactics in the Transcaspian Energy Wars”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 18, No 2, 1999, p. 150

³⁸ Shamsuddin, A. “The New Great Game in Central Asia”, p. 330

³⁹ Rashid, A. and Saywell, T. “Beijing gusher”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 February 1998, pp. 46-50

concerns of the United States”⁴⁰ or Russia, putting their main interests in economic profits rather than international politics. Therefore, it is a mistake to think that any company involved in the New Great Game pursues either American or Russian interest, not to mention other players of the New Great Game. That is why, it is easy to assume that companies apart from competition in securing profitable contracts, seek for collaboration in many fields, for instance, to overcome political hurdles and, moreover, multinational companies have strong commercial ties with each other worldwide. Sometimes, there could be seen the cooperation on a state-level as well. In the framework of the New Great Game this phenomenon has been described as complementary interests of the involved states. For instance, in the question of pipeline routes there is cooperation between the US and Pakistan as well as between Russia and Iran⁴¹ and even the states whose interests should contradict with each other – Russia and China, according to the framework given, do cooperate for mutual benefit.⁴² However, the last case requires some clarifications which can explain the hidden agenda of these cooperations. In 1996, Russia and China signed the Strategic Partnership Agreement which was heavily criticized for pragmatic aims and economic limitations; it was called an ostentatious act of friendship by many specialists and academicians.⁴³ Also, it could be considered as a strong implication of Machiavellian methods in the struggle for power, where the end justifies the means.⁴⁴ Moreover, these claims push us to the conclusion that external aims of collaboration between states do not correspond to internal intrigues and hidden aims – which can be considered as a strong proof and firm conviction of the applicability of the concept.

2.3 Structure of the Thesis

The thesis operates on three levels. Chapter 3 provides a complex theoretical framework based on a system approach in order to pave the way for empirical findings and to explain the contemporary issues in Central Asia from the strong theoretical background. The remaining parts are firmly based on empirical evidence, in which major powers, mostly the US’ and Russia’s interests in the region are analyzed in turn. Chapters 4 and 5 are pivotal items in the thesis, since they enable to apply the chosen theoretical framework, namely offensive realism, regional security complex theory, strategic theory and the concept of strategic geography. Chapter 5

⁴⁰ Miles, C. “The Caspian Pipeline Debate Continues: Why not Iran?”, *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol 53, No 1, 1999, p. 327

⁴¹ Roberts, J. “Caspian Oil and Gas” in Cummings, S.N. (2003), “Oil, Transition and Security in Central Asia”, London and NY: Routledge Curzon, pp. 151-159

⁴² Reuters, “China Pipeline Terms Agreed”, The Moscow Times, 26 July 2002 on <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2002/07/26/045.html>, Accessed on 20 August 2004

⁴³ Anderson, J. (1997), “The Limits of Sino–Russian Strategic Partnership”, Adelphi Paper 315, Oxford: International Institute for Strategic Studies/Oxford University Press

⁴⁴ Machiavelli, N. (1916), “The Prince”, The Macmillan Company, Copyright

submerges us to the New Great Game which is played out in nowadays Central Asia, providing with the broad perspective for analysis by depicting regional background based on historical developments, geographical location and overall strategic importance and attractiveness of the region. Chapter 5 concentrates on security issues in the region, embracing internal as well as external threats to Central Asia. It has to be stressed from the outset that all the empirical data are based on indigenous sources and solid literature. This approach helps to stick to the point and follow the criteria indicated in the commencement of the work and, above all, it is the best way to extract the objective conclusions.

In Chapter 3, there is a theoretical framework which provides with essential keys to further elaboration on the subject. In this regard, the brief examples drawn to confirm the accuracy of the chosen framework seem sensible. The chapter paves the way to understanding of the Chapters followed. The Chapter is based on the system theoretical approach which significantly helps to explain the picture as a whole rather than falling apart. Apparently, these theories were not invented to explain the Central Asian phenomenon; they are ready-made theories which were adjusted to the Central Asian case and regional developments. That is why it is really difficult or even impossible to find a single theory able to show and explain the picture as a whole.

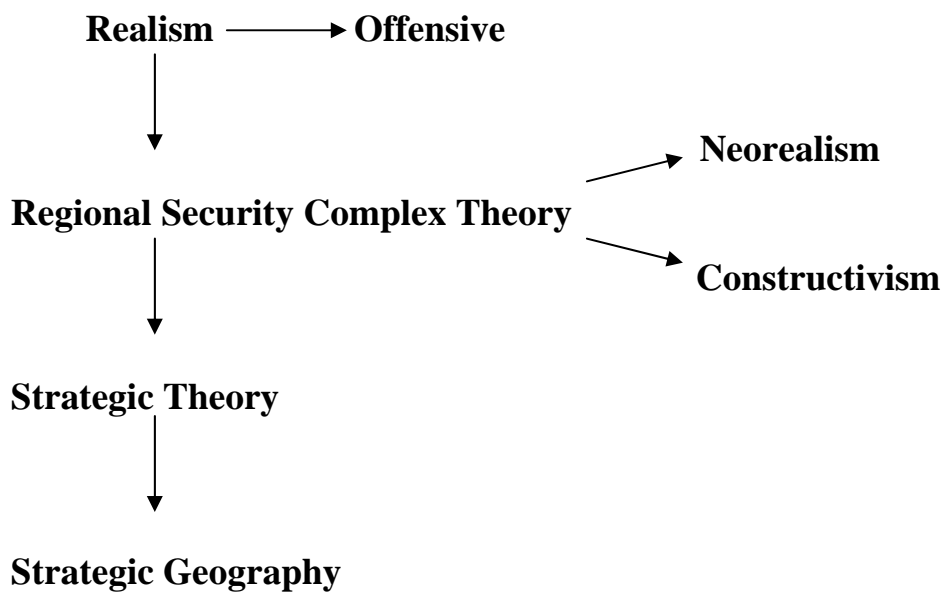
In Chapter 4, there is analysis of the security policy aftermaths of the escalating interest and direct engagement of regional powers in Central Asia. The term “regional power” is used in a broader perspective in order to embrace the United States, the European Union, etc. Since the impact of intervention of regional powers is two-fold in nature, some of them have a constructive approach towards Central Asia, whereas others’ interventions, applying the traits of offensive realism, are fraught with destructive results. And, these claims pave the way for exploring security issues in Central Asia, both at domestic level as well as at international context. It is suggested that two regional “heavyweights” – Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are lacking of cooperative approach would draw the management of security issues on themselves individually, even though it is quite obvious that security dynamics require full-fledged collaborative approach. With regard to their powerful allies, only Russia and the United States could afford/be able to elaborate a strategy for handling security issues in Central Asia. The Chapter considers the advantages and disadvantages of both parties to succeed in their endeavors. Chapter 4 clearly identifies mainstream trends in the region, which enables to shed the light on internal situation in Central Asia and creates a basis for analysis of potential of the region, both as an independent player and as an ally of powerful states involved in the region. Chapter 4 also pays attention to internal dynamics of potential intra-regional and intra-state conflicts. Also, the possible scenarios are outlined providing with a platform for analysis of Central Asian security.

Chapter 5 clearly demonstrates that the region is doomed for a great powers rivalry over setting an influence in the region. Secondly, even though the region itself is not a sound player in the contest, the domestic situation in the region should be taken into account. Moreover, five republics of Central Asia had similar starting conditions after the collapse of the Soviet Union, but the situation is changing gradually, because of different development directions have been chosen by all five Central Asian republics and different economic and political capacities of the states concerned. Central Asia would have unlikely been such a magnetic region if it had lacked of natural resources, most of all, the oil and natural gas. These two natural resources were the prerequisites for an endless rivalry in the region and, hence, it is a core part not only of Chapter 5, but of the work as a whole. Chapter 5 enables to apply the theoretical framework of the thesis. It starts with analogy of the historical event called “Great Game” in the XIX century, when the struggle for hegemony between the British and Russian empires for territorial expansion and implementation of imperial ambitions in the Afghan Region, whose central location provided with the most strategically feasible base for an invasion of India and Turkestan and nowadays situation and struggle in the region with latter-day challengers. The parallel drawn helps to get into the subject and analyze the resemblances of historical event and contemporary situation, which could merely push to conclusions of nonrandom interest to the region. Central Asia is surrounded by four and potentially five nuclear powers – Russia, China, Iran, Pakistan, and India, as well as Afghanistan and a NATO member – Turkey. But, paradoxically, it is not a full list of “participants” in the region. The United States, the European Union with Germany and France ahead, Japan and even Israel are all involved in the great “Great Game”. But stakes are different nowadays – crude oil and natural gas deposits made this region appealing and formed a basis for thrift of offensive realism, where the United States and Russia are the main actors. The offensive realism and the regional security complex theory are the framework to operate within; drawing sought conclusions about the overall aim of the work conducted, namely, the strategic importance of Central Asia through the prism of different actors engaged. Thus, it can be easily concluded that Chapter 5 is a backbone of the thesis and a peculiar bridge between theoretical framework and empirical data.

And the final accord of the thesis is its conclusion part with the answers to the questions indicated at the outset of this work. Conclusions are formed on strong analytical contemplations and empirical findings of the research. Finally, the recommendations for further research are given for further elaboration on the subject.

3. Theoretical Framework – Can Any Theory Explain the Central Asian Phenomenon?

In fact, there are many theories which can explain the contemporary situation in Central Asia. Depending on perspective chosen various theories can be applied; however, there is not a single theory which can comprehensively explain the Central Asian phenomenon. The scheme below is a theoretical framework, which is considered as the most applicable one to the Central Asian case and it is a backbone for the overall research. There is a long path to walk in order to reach so-called “theoretical saturation” which has to become a key point to the successful empirical operation and to display full answers in the framework of this research. The theoretical survey starts with realism in its offensive form to unearth great powers’ intentions and interests in the region, followed by the regional security complex theory based on neorealist and constructivist traditions in order to discover security issues in Central Asia, then the framework will be narrowed down to strategic theory to disclose the political implication of strategic importance of the region and, finally, the concept of strategic geography will be used to concentrate, mainly, on non-military components of the New Great Game in Central Asia.



3.1 Offensive Realism – Humanistic Intentions or Hidden Interests?

The theory of offensive realism, which has taken its niche in this research, can be considered as the most inappropriate and controversial at the same time. Many experts and academicians in the field of international relations scrutinize this theory as an out-of-date and obsolete to many extents. But the choice of offensive realism is not casual and has the right to be a part of this research because of many reasons. First of all, theory of offensive realism after the 1989-1991 events is still viable, since, in fact, even after the end of the Cold War not much has changed in the international system. Moreover, the structure of the international system has remained pretty much the same as it was 10-15 years ago. The reason for this claim is the

following. Although, it is quite pessimistic to realize that great powers in the contemporary international system are preoccupied only with their aims, objectives and interests rather than with general promotion of human values, such as democracy, human rights, etc.; the realism in general, and offensive realism in particular help to get rid of blinders of idealistic perception of the structure of the international system, by demonstrating us the world as it is, not as we would like it to be.⁴⁵

One of the main assumptions of offensive realism is that great powers use any opportunity to gain power at each other's expense.⁴⁶ So, this can be observed in today's Central Asia as well – the interests, hence the objectives, of the two key players in Central Asia – the US and Russia – are mostly contradictory in their nature rather than complementary. Exactly, as it was during the Cold War, when the US and the Soviet Union were involved in regional politics worldwide, the US and Russia prevail over regional politics of Central Asia now providing us with the reason to call their activities in the region as a great rivalry.

Being descriptive and prescriptive theory concurrently, offensive realism describes why great powers behave such as they behave and how they should behave in the future.⁴⁷ This description coincides with the situation in Central Asia. In other words, the US and Russian behavior in Central Asia can be easily explained by their interests in the region and on this basis prediction can be withdrawn. According to the main assumption of offensive realism, states maximize their relative power, with hegemony as their ultimate goal.⁴⁸ This assumption works in Central Asian case as well, however, with one amendment – hegemony over Central Asia has an economic nuance as the driving force for maximization of power.

Certainly, as it was claimed at the outset of this chapter, offensive realism itself cannot cover all the issues in Central Asia, it has certain limitations which are the main setbacks to use the theory as an overwhelming one. One of the main limitations of the theory can be recognized the ignorance of individuals or ideologies in the international system. And, since, such individuals as Vladimir Putin and Islam Karimov, presidents of Russia and Uzbekistan correspondingly play an important role in the New Great Game the other theories are being used to show the whole theoretical picture. But one aspect should be kept in mind – other theories do not contradict to the theory of offensive realism, but supplement it.

3.2 Regional Security Complex Theory - isn't it Too Complex?

⁴⁵ Mearsheimer, J. (2001), "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics", London & NY: W. W. Norton & Company, p. 4

⁴⁶ Ibid, p. 5

⁴⁷ Ibid, p. 11

⁴⁸ Ibid, p. 22

Regional security complex theory is an advanced theory which enables us to understand external security as well as internal one. Regional security complex theory is an essential key to understand the new post-Cold War structure, where two great powers compete on a different level, and to evaluate the relative balance of power in the regional framework based on regional and global trends. For our research the regional level is chosen which embraces the neorealist and constructivist traditions. The regional level of regional security complex theory is based on structural scheme of neorealism, but it does not correspond with the neorealism's focus on the global level structure. On the constructivist side, regional level is based on political processes which form the securitization of the region.⁴⁹ Hence, symbiosis of neorealism and constructivism constitutes regional security complex theory which is set as a frame for analysis of security issues in Central Asia. Thus, regional security complex theory links the contemporary international system in the world in general, and in Central Asia in particular with the Cold War period's international system. The theory itself is a ready model to explore, explain and analyze developments in any region in the world.⁵⁰

The security complex explicitly explains why we consider whole Central Asian security at a time, not study on security on a country-by-country basis. As B. Buzan states, "a group of states whose primary security concerns link together sufficiently closely that their national securities cannot reasonably be apart from each other",⁵¹ which is the case in Central Asia. Then B. Buzan and O. Waever proceed further, stating that "a set of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritization, or both are so interlinked that their security problems cannot reasonably be analyzed or resolved apart from one another",⁵² merely strengthening our confidence about applicability of the theory chosen and, furthermore, strengthening the accuracy of our logic.

Regional security complex theory is functional in our case for many reasons. First of all, it outlines the analytical framework for the region. Secondly, it paves the way for empirical findings, being a strong background of the issue. And, thirdly, the regional security complex theory can be used as a fruitful soil for elaboration of more advanced theories, on the basis of its clear-cut nature, as an alternative or consecutive to the existent one.

The theoretical scheme provided at the outset of this chapter is not casual. The regional security complex theory, made up of neorealism and constructivism, covers strategic theory and,

⁴⁹ Buzan, B. and Waever, O. (2003) "Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security", Cambridge University Press, pp. 2-3

⁵⁰ Ibid, p. 40

⁵¹ Buzan, B. (1983), "People, States and Fear", Brighton: Wheatsheaf

⁵² Buzan B. "The Asia-Pacific: What Sort of Region in What Sort of World ?" in McGrew, A. and Brook, C., ed. (1998), "Asia-Pacific in the New World Order", London: Routledge, pp. 68-87

subsequently, concept of strategic geography, which are lacking links of the theoretical framework.

Evolution of the regional security complex theory in Central Asia

At domestic level, the security is one of the mostly prioritized directions in Central Asia. Competing elites on the regional level are trying to bargain national autonomy for external support. And states are too weak to promote their own vision of security. The politics of Central Asia is not constant enough - with dubious elections, controlled mass-media, and persecution of opposition, mainly Islamist opposition. The regimes in general can be characterized as individualistic or personalistic, with power amassed in restricted group of people's hands. As Buzan argues, "having an individual at the centre of the domestic level of security, often means volatile policies"⁵³ and it could be also a good implication of emergence of Islamic radicalism in the region, which transforms into terrorism later on, because of suppression of Islamism in Central Asia.⁵⁴ Recent years were marked with the elevation of Islamic fundamentalism in the region. For instance, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan has connections with Al-Qaeda and during the anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan it was seen fighting on the Taliban side. Thus, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan along with Hizb ut-Tahrir, another religious movement, was being accused many times for terrorist acts in Central Asia, representing a vast menace for the region. Many experts indicate three main factors of threats in Central Asia, which are:

1. Drug trafficking
2. Wide availability of arms in Afghanistan
3. Strengthening of Islamic groups⁵⁵

The regional security complex theory is mainly based on geopolitical concepts. Constantly shifting patterns are flexible enough to digest different combination of alliances. The theory is easily absorbed by the domestic regional policy, meanwhile shaping the foreign policy.⁵⁶ And, in this regard, the geopolitical maneuvers for natural resources and pipeline routes make up the contemporary Central Asian situation more geopolitical, causing instability and unexpected and unpredictable results at the same time. Different strategic games are played out

⁵³ Buzan, B. and Waever, O. (2003) "Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security", Cambridge University Press, p. 403

⁵⁴ Norton, J., "Islamic Militancy in Central Asia: the Causes are Many, the Answers Complex", Christian Science Monitor, February (28): 15, 2002 see also ⁵⁴ Rashid, A. (1995), "The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism", Oxford University Press & London & New Jersey: Zed Books

⁵⁵ Olcott, M.B., "Preventing New Afghanistans: a Regional Strategy for Reconstruction", Carnegie Endowment Policy Brief 2001, p. 11

⁵⁶ Buzan, B. and Waever, O. "Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security", p. 414

in Central Asia and the regional security complex theory is able to accommodate them on its regional level.

Central Asia with its unique location and the contemporary security issues can challenge for a separate regional security complex theory.⁵⁷ Usually, there is one misunderstanding in security studies of Central Asia when Central Asian region is placed together with South Caucasus as a single space for securitization. Although, many experts and academicians as well as domestic elites would like to see Central Asia as an independent structure in the international system, the following fact is undeniable – involvement of Russia is still tangible and in its modern form Central Asia can be considered as a sub-complex of Russian security which has remained from the Soviet times.⁵⁸ There are many internal problems in Central Asia which have not been securitized on a constant basis. But real battles did not take place, except one case – Tajikistan which suffered from the civil war. As was noted by M.B. Olcott, “Central Asia has suffered virtually every social ill hyperinflation, rising unemployment, rising death rates, falling birth rates, deteriorating health care, government corruption and crumbling infrastructure which could be expected to increase social tension and so make inter-ethnic violence more likely, yet Central Asia has recorded no large-scale ethnic-based disturbances since 1991”.⁵⁹ These developments confirm the weakness of Central Asian states – interaction between the countries is not as high as it was expected, the states are preoccupied with their domestic problems rather than solving common regional issues; national and ethnic identities are not clear cut to create problems on national or ethnic bases; boundary conflicts are rare and mostly concern the fertile Ferghana Valley, where the existent border has been established regardless of ethnic and national identities in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.⁶⁰

The region suffers from drug trafficking and religious movements, being a transitory area from Afghanistan to Russia. The joint efforts of China, Russia and most of Central Asian republics to combat terrorism and drug trafficking were developed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which have intentions to become a security umbrella for Central Asian states.

Traditional struggle for leadership in the region between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan is also arousing security problems. But in general, internal regional relationships are not intense enough. “Nobody is looking to set up a system of alliances between the republics [of Central Asia]. Relations between them are relatively cool: there are few direct links, particularly as

⁵⁷ Peimani, H. (1998), “Regional Security and the Future of Central Asia”, CT: Praeger

⁵⁸ Buzan, B. and Waever, O. “Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security”, p. 423

⁵⁹ quoted in Goudie, D. “An Overview of the Ferghana Valley”, Perspectives on Central Asia 1 (1), 1996 on <http://www.eisenhowerinstitute.org/programs/globalpartnerships/securityandterrorism/coalition/regionalrelations/OtherPubs/Goudie.htm>

⁶⁰ Buzan, B. and Waever, O. “Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security”, p. 424

regards air transport; embassies have been slow in opening; and political summits are rare and tend to be a matter of form, despite the signature of technical agreements”,⁶¹ what implies the incapability of the states to challenge for regional supremacy yet. The states are open for external powers involvement in the region, where as the most exponential case could be considered Kazakhstan.

As it was noted above, the Russian status in Central Asia is firm enough. *De facto*, Tajikistan is under Russian protectorate in Central Asia. Russian special status in the region is injected by many collective agreements with Central Asia such as “Collective Forces of Rapid Deployment”, “Common Security Agreement” and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

According to the regional security complex theory, Central Asia is a distinct regional subcomplex of Russian security, however, with strong prerequisites to become an independent regional security complex.⁶² And this assumption could be enforced if the Central Asian states would be able to threaten each other in the future, whereas Russia would not be able to interfere and become the balancing power in the region and, furthermore, other regional powers would not take any initiative, then Central Asia could be recognized as the full-fledged regional security complex. If the US enhances its activities in Central Asia, setting more military bases, the situation would be in favor of creation of independent regional security complex, since the US could become a counterbalancing power in the region, leaving much space for the regional security complex thrive in Central Asia.⁶³

As we can see, regional security complex theory is not too complex theory, but quite contrary significantly simplifies the analysis of the security issues in Central Asia being a room for practical variations based on a flexibility of the given theory.

3.3 Strategic Theory as Measurement of Strategic Importance

The various definitions of strategy often refer to use of military power and relates to objects of war, but many “strategists” argue this one-sided understanding of strategy. Some “strategists” such as G. Foster and R. Osgood scrutinize the term “strategy” in a broader way meanwhile following the core term of strategy – “power”. According to G. Foster, “strategy is ultimately about effectively exercising power”.⁶⁴ Meanwhile, R. Osgood goes further defining strategy as “nothing less than the overall plan for utilizing the capacity for armed coercion – in conjunction with economic, diplomatic and psychological instruments of power – to support

⁶¹ Roy, O. (2000), “The New Central Asia: the Creation of Nations”, London & NY: I. B. Tauris Publishers

⁶² Buzan, B. and Waever, O. “Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security”, p. 428

⁶³ Ibid, p. 429

⁶⁴ Baylis, J., Wirtz, J., Cohen, E., Gray, C.S. (2003), “Strategy in the Contemporary World”, Oxford: Oxford University Press, p. 4

foreign policy most effectively by overt, covert and tacit means”.⁶⁵ Other “strategists” such as W. Murray and M. Grimsley lean on “process” as a main focus in defining strategy: “strategy is a process, a constant adaptation to the shifting conditions and circumstances in a world where chance, uncertainty and ambiguity dominate”.⁶⁶ During our study, the non-military dimension of the strategic theory is extracted and applied to the regional developments.

As we can see from the definitions, non-military dimension of strategic theory is applicable to our case, being a considerable help in assessing the strategic importance of Central Asia, since there is no direct military engagement in the region seen or presumed, except the American military bases deployment, which has a deterrent military effect. In this regard, the title of the work could seem vague from one side, since the question of importance of the region could be raised from the following perspective – strategic importance of Central Asia for whom? The answer to this question should be accurate enough. Most of all, as it was in the objectives of this research, assessment of strategic importance implies regional power’s viewpoint and can be assessed from their prism of vision of Central Asia and only after that the internal regional perspective could be examined and analyzed.

As the broader definition of the strategy was chosen, the theoretical framework on which the assessment would operate on is the following. Strategy as “the theory and practice of the use, and threat of use, of organized force for political purposes”⁶⁷ along with Grand Strategy which involves the coordination and control of “all the resources of a nation or a band of nations, towards the attainment of the political objectives”⁶⁸ are pivotal points in the analysis. First part of the complex approach in evaluation of Central Asia’s strategic importance deals with great power’s purposes in the region. It underpins the theoretical “common sense” to great powers political interests in the region. The US military airbases in Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan while being used for the anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan, have also, as it was mentioned, a deterrent effect on Russia and China as a potential threat of use of military air force against them. The same effect Russian military bases in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan exert on Iran and China, respectively. Second part deals directly with Central Asian republics whose desire to become a sound player in the New Great Game, according to strategic theory, require mobilization of joint forces to stand more effectively for their own positions. Also, the attempts of Central Asian states’ to use their geographical advantage and advantage based on possession of natural resources to attain political objectives, such as backing of non-democratic regimes, violation of human rights could also fit to the strategic theory.

⁶⁵ Baylis, J., Wirtz, J., Cohen, E., Gray, C.S.. p. 4

⁶⁶ Ibid

⁶⁷ Gray, C.S. (1999), “Modern Strategy”, Oxford: Oxford University Press

⁶⁸ Liddell Hart, B.H. (1967), “Strategy: the Indirect Approach”, London: Faber & Faber

Strategic theory also implies that strategy and policy, if not identical notions, then cannot be divided, since they represent the inalienable conjunction. This point was elaborated by eminent statesman – Henry Kissinger, who stated that, “the separation of strategy and policy can only be achieved to the detriment of both. It causes military power to become identified with the most absolute application of power and it tempts diplomacy into an over-concern with finesse”.⁶⁹ This point concerns the US and Russian foreign policy-making, taking into account great power’s strategies and subsequent pursuit for the objectives in the region. Therefore, the US’ and Russia’s attempts of denial to name the contemporary situation in Central Asia as the New Great Game have no plausible soil at all. Again, the situation with military bases deployment in Central Asia is the most exponential in this aspect – the US’ utilization of the Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan areas and Russian use of the Kazakhstan and Tajikistan territories are clear examples of grand strategy aimed at chase of their interest in the region, inasmuch as strategy and policy can not be divided, according to the theory.

The location of military bases, as we have already seen, brings some pressure even without being used. The deterrent nature of Russian and US military bases in Central Asia justifies the applicability of strategic theory and, on the one hand, use of military pressure is a pivotal aspect of strategic theory, hence, Central Asian case ideally fits to the theory, but, on the other hand, military pressure in the region has no military effect, creating military tense but not actions, it has rather psychological effect than military one.⁷⁰ Thus, if the situation is correct, the theory chosen is not the right one, since it fails to explain the psychological and, apparently, economic dimensions of the issue. But objectives of regional powers are economic in their nature (crude oil and natural gas), hence, strategic theory, being able to explain the political side of the issue, fails to explain other components which have to be explored during our study. But such an understanding is not qualified enough, since, as it was said, not a single theory can explain all the contemporary processes in Central Asia. The complex theoretical approach should be used to discover Central Asian phenomenon properly. Moreover, strategic theory is a good theory to explain the political dimension, but to explore other developments in Central Asia we need to apply other theories there.

One of the main issues of strategic theory during our research is that it is too narrow to explain all the contemporary processes in Central Asia. Strategic theory significantly helps in assessment of strategic importance of Central Asia but at the same time it fails to explain the potential threats in Central Asia – threats to political, economic or social interests. These multi-

⁶⁹ Baylis, J., Wirtz, J., Cohen, E., Gray, C.S., “Strategy in the Contemporary World”, p. 3, see also Kissinger, H. (1957), “Nuclear Weapons and Foreign Policy”, NY: Harper & Row

⁷⁰ Buzan, B. (1987), “An Introduction to Strategic Studies: Military Technology and International Relations”, Macmillan International Institute Press for Strategic Studies, pp. 135-138

dimensional threats can be explained using broader and more complex theoretical framework such as regional security complex theory and the concept of strategic geography.

3.4 Strategic Geography as a Focused Geopolitical Concept

Since our study requires an interdisciplinary approach which covers politics, economics, geography, etc. the concept of strategic geography can be introduced. Strategic geography is a more focused concept of geopolitics covering such areas, which have an influence on security and economic aspects, either positive or negative - as access or control of spatial areas (land, water and air). In other words, it covers all dimensions of geography, which include both physical and human geography, where political, economic and military geography are also included.⁷¹ Being a more focused concept of geopolitics it reflects and explains the processes in Central Asia, related, first of all, to economic interests of great powers in the region.⁷² Strategic theory operates on three levels, which are:

- Interests;
- Capabilities;
- Commitments;⁷³

With regard to interests of regional powers in Central Asia, it is the main aspect of their involvement in the region. Although, the interests of regional powers in Central Asia vary to some extent, and sometimes even significantly, the main interests can be highlighted and carefully analyzed then. The crude oil and natural gas have their special niche as a final prize in the New Great Game. And even though, the question of energy resources, ironically enough, is a matter of long debates, the regional powers' need in Central Asian oil and gas is doubtless. And the following statement is an extra support for the aforesaid claim: "the oil shocks of the 1970s made Americans aware of their dependence on foreign oil"⁷⁴ and the US wants to have access to all oil deposits worldwide. Russia also has its claims on Central Asian energy resources. Other actors in the New Great Game challenge for lesser stakes in comparison with energy resources – pipelines. This question is of current importance for different players such as Iran, Pakistan, China and Turkey. It could be assessed as small states are big winners. For instance, Pakistan would become more significant on the international political arena, if pipelines come through its territory, meanwhile, earning 8 billion of American dollars in transit fees and getting its own oil

⁷¹ Kemp, G. and Harkavy, R.E. (1997), "Strategic Geography and the Changing Middle East, Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, for the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, pp. 5-13

⁷² Ibid

⁷³ Faringdon, H. (1989), "Strategic Geography: NATO, the Warsaw Pact, and the Superpowers", London & NY: Routledge, pp. 7-14

⁷⁴ Baylis, J., Wirtz, J., Cohen, E., Gray, C.S., "Strategy in the Contemporary World", p. 310

and gas at half price.⁷⁵ But this question is not solvable without Russian and American interference. This aspect of political coalitions refers to political issue of strategic theory and was already explored.

As it was partially mentioned, the capabilities of the states involved in the game are different. Some of them such as the US and Russia are in front line of the New Great Game – the US attempts to win the “struggle” using its enormous political and economic potential through various aid programs and lobbying Central Asian interests in the framework of international organizations, whereas Russian capabilities are mainly based on former Soviet leverages and strong historical ties.

Question of commitments is the most controversial one in the framework of applicability of the concept of strategic geography to Central Asian case. The US commitments mostly deal with the following issues:

- Support in defense reform, helping Central Asian states to reform their militaries to transition from the Soviet-era legacy of top-heavy materials to smaller more professional forces capable of supporting legitimate defence needs;
- Promotion of regional peacekeeping capabilities;
- Combat terrorism;
- Fostering greater regional cooperation etc.⁷⁶

The Russian commitments look as follows:

- Ensuring the implementation of Common Security Agreement;
- Combat terrorism;
- Cooperation in military and economic fields.⁷⁷

The majority of commitments are carried out with the help of allies that is why we cannot exclude other regional powers from the list of commitments.

The concept of strategic geography added the last colors to the overall picture, putting in order the contemporary processes in the region and has paved the way for empirical findings and analysis of the New Great Game in Central Asia.

⁷⁵ <http://www.unocal.com/uclnews/97news/102797a.htm> - accessed on 2003/12/19

⁷⁶ Joshi, N. (2003), “Central Asia: the Great Game Replayed”, Delhi: New Century Publications, pp. 51-52

⁷⁷ Ibid, p. 28

4. Central Asian Security in the International Context

4.1 External Challenges

The geopolitical vacuum created by initial Russian retreat from Central Asia has invited different powers into the region, interested in exploiting the vast resources. An assumption that these powers would use the economic means to benefit from the region's resources may prove benign, as the economic potentials of those powers differ substantially. Therefore, the powers that have a strategic interest in Central Asia may employ a more traditional means of *realpolitik* to defend their interests.

Russia

Despite its initial retreat from Central Asia, for more than a year since Soviet break-up, Russia has maintained its strong presence in Central Asia. The reason for the withdrawal of Russian interests from their region has been its preoccupation with reconfiguring relations with the West and perception that Central Asia was holding back the progress within Russia.⁷⁸ However, deteriorated relations with the West and concerns that other unfriendly powers may dominate the region led to the increase of Russian presence in Central Asia. The concerns over the well-being of 10 million ethnic Russians living in the region has also become an important issue once nationalist policies of the regional states and civil war in Tajikistan resulted mass immigration of Russian speaking population, who posed considerable socio-economic problems within Russia.⁷⁹

The economic deterioration and the crisis of identity in Russia have also played an essential role to define Russian policy towards Central Asia. As Central Asia has been a stable market for Russian goods, non-competitive elsewhere, Russia could not afford to loose the region to outside companies. Besides, the disruption of cheap raw materials' supply from Central Asia put Russian industry (particularly, textile industry) under severe constraints causing unemployment and economic decline.⁸⁰ Therefore, it was assumed that the restoration of former economic ties would ease the economic difficulties in Russia. Finally, an identity crisis coupled with the humiliations in international political arena aroused nostalgia for superpower status pushing the Russian interventionist policies forward.⁸¹

Although Russian interests in Central Asia were immediate and vital, the Russian domestic politics impeded the imperial policies towards Central Asia. The conflict between

⁷⁸ Rumer, B. "The Gathering Storm in Central Asia", *Orbis*, winter 1993

⁷⁹ Gretskey, S. "Russia's Policy Toward Central Asia", *Central Asia and Caucasus*, 1997

⁸⁰ Ibid

⁸¹ Ibid

“Westernizers” (Presidential Administration and Ministry of Foreign Affairs) and “national patriots” (military, security services and most parliamentarians) delayed any coherent policy towards Central Asia and other CIS Republics.⁸² While “Westernizers” advocated building the relations on commonly accepted norms and principles, “national patriots” insisted on broad interpretations of Russian geopolitical interests in developing relations with former components of the former Soviet Union.⁸³ When the interests of the both sides collided, the Russian military took independent policies, as the cases of Tajik and Moldavian conflicts demonstrate. In Tajik civil war, for instance, the commanding officers of Russians 201st motorized Rifle Divisions, stationed in Tajikistan, acted as an independent political power thus forcing Russian politicians to involve into the conflict.⁸⁴

At the same time pressurized by social and economic hardships and NATO’s eastward expansion “Westernizers” had to develop a new Russian policy towards ex-Soviet states which became known as ‘near abroad’ policy. The crisis of Russian relations with the West as a result of Kosovo war and Russians Chechen campaigns for which Islamic fundamentalists are blamed led to more assertive Russian foreign policies, in particular towards Central Asia, since the region is seen as a buffer zone against the encroachment of Islamic extremists to Russia’s Muslim regions. The victorious march of Taliban, who supports Chechen fighters, and the election of determined leader - Putin as a Russia’s new president have been the decisive factors to pull Central Asia back to Russian orbit.⁸⁵

The Russian leverage to keep control over Central Asia has been diverse. The control of the communication systems has been critical in this sense. As the legacy of Soviet economic system all Central Asia’s interaction with the outside world depended on Russian transport infrastructure, therefore, Russia has been able to regulate them.⁸⁶ It becomes far more important with the fact that Central Asian economies are highly dependent on the export of raw materials and import of basic goods, which goes through Russian transport system. For instance, the dependence of Kazakhstan and Turkmen oil and gas exports through Russian pipelines enabled Russia to dictate the amount of the exports and their allocation. Turkmenistan was very vulnerable in this account: it had to sell its gas to the CIS countries which did not pay their bills.⁸⁷ When Turkmenistan looked for the alternatives for Russian owned pipeline for its gas export to Europe, Moscow cut back Turkmenistan’s promised delivery to Europe by 20% and

⁸² Rumer, B. “The Gathering Storm in Central Asia”

⁸³ Rumer, B. “The Potential for Political Instability and Regional Conflicts”

⁸⁴ Gretskey, S. “Russia’s Policy Toward Central Asia”

⁸⁵ For analysis of the new Russian strategy in Central Asia see “Russia rethinks its Central Asian strategy” at www.eurasianet.org, accessed on 03/02/01 The article suggests that under President Putin Russian foreign policy is rethinking the concept empire with more reliance on Russian economic levers.

⁸⁶ Karimov, I. (1997), “Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century”, Curzon Press

⁸⁷ Starr, F. “Power Failure. American Policy in the Caspian”, *The National Interest*, spring 1997

then for two years blocked deliveries to other parts of Europe.⁸⁸ The similar methods were used against Kazakhstan as well, when Russia closed all Kazakh exports in 1994 to ensure that oil from the massive field at Tengiz is exported solely through Russia's Black Sea port of Novorossiysk.⁸⁹ Moreover, Russia has blocked any development in energy sector by insisting that Caspian was a lake and not a sea, a formulation that would give Moscow a veto power over all plans to exploit Caspian resources.⁹⁰

The economic leverage has also been a part of Russian influence. Since many Central Asian states are indebted to Russia, they were forced to make payment in form of shares in the regions' refining and processing facilities, as they are privatized. The heavy dependence of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan on Russian loans, for instance, led to the excess concessions to Russia from economic to military and political issues: from accepting Russian military presence to raising Russian as an official language, parallel to local.⁹¹

Perhaps the most effective way of controlling the Central Asian states has been the Russian military presence in the region. Although the initial number of Russian military in Central Asia was reduced, the events of the last three years have strengthened Russian "military card" to dominate Central Asian politics from the following perspective. The fear of Islamic fundamentalism from the South and weak military capacities of Central Asian states to deal with Islamic insurgents forced them to acknowledge that Russia was a "main guarantor" of their security.⁹²

Some Russian analysts even proposed to use Russian-speaking populations as an instrument of control over Central Asian states as well. According to them the local Russian movements, particularly Cossacks, and local pro-Russian opposition forces have to be supported to further Russian interests in Central Asia.⁹³ Taking into account the significant presence of Russian speaking population in key military, economic and administrative positions, as well as cultural and informational influence of Russia over the region such a strategy can seriously challenge the independence of Central Asian states.⁹⁴

⁸⁸ Starr, F., "Power Failure. American Policy in the Caspian"

⁸⁹ Ibid

⁹⁰ see, for instance, "Politics of oil in Caucasus and Central Asia", *Adelphi Papers*

⁹¹ Granting an official status to Russian language in Kyrgyzstan was partly linked with the concern over the immigration of the Russian speaking specialists from the Republic

⁹² A. Rashid suggests that Russia deliberately encourages Islamic extremists in order to force Central Asian states to accept Russian military forces in their territory. Rashid, A. "Pamirs offers IMU a secure basis" at

www.eurasianet.org/resources/uzbekistan/index.shtml - accessed on 2003/12/04

⁹³ Bushkov, S. "Russia in Central Asia", *Sodrujestvo NG*, 01/01/31

⁹⁴ Karimov, I.

The US

The US interest in Central Asia is based on strategic interest in oil, containing the regional powers and preventing the spread of WMD technology. It has been argued that the emergence of the Caspian as one of the major sources of energy supplies could reduce the heavy dependence of the US and its allies on Persian Gulf's oil and helps to restrain the increase of oil price.⁹⁵ Besides, Caspian energy would offer a tremendous commercial opportunity for the Western firms as well as contributing to economic growth and stability of the US ally – Turkey.⁹⁶

The major reason for the US interest in Central Asia, as some argue, has been the concerns over the re-emergence of Russian hegemony:

Given the amounts of oil and gas at stake [in the Caspian region], and the current state of world energy markets, one must wonder whether the statements of vital interests are intended to serve as justification for policies adopted with other objectives in mind (such as containment of Iran and weakening Russian influence).⁹⁷

At the same time, the US has pursued the policy of “dual containment” of Iran, as it seen in initial US support of anti-Iranian Taliban in order to build pipelines through Afghanistan and increase further isolation of Iran.⁹⁸ As the US support of Taliban waned, because of the harbouring terrorists, the US might construct those pipelines through Pakistan.⁹⁹ Instead, one can assume that the US efforts were increasingly concentrated on Baku-Ceyhan project, which is envisioned to “free” Central Asia's and Caucasus' dependence from Russian and possible Iranian communication systems.

Since the US emerged victorious from the Cold War and does not perceive any adversary equal to its power, the attention of the US strategists have been more focused on the threats coming from terrorist groups. The fear that terrorist organisation may use weapons of mass destruction against the US targets led to active US involvement in removing the nuclear weapons and fissile material from the region as well as deactivating nuclear test facilities and safeguarding reactors and fissile material production sites.¹⁰⁰

Soon after the terrorist attacks on US on September 11, 2001, all the Central Asian states offered their support to coalition anti-terrorist forces in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan have hosted the US troops and accommodated the coalition's military airbases. After 9/11, the US has substantially increased its security assistance to Central Asian states for anti-

⁹⁵ Bolukbasi, S

⁹⁶ Ibid

⁹⁷ Quoted in A. Lieven's “*The (not so) great game*”.

⁹⁸ Garfinkle, A. “*Afghanistanding*”. *Orbis*, summer 1998

⁹⁹ Ibid

¹⁰⁰ Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. “Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia” at www.cacianalyst.org – accessed on 2003/05/06, pp.71-73

terrorism, counter-narcotics, non-proliferation, border and customs, and defense cooperation programs, while also increasing aid for democratization and free market reforms.¹⁰¹

The following table allows us observing these figures.

Table 1. US Foreign Assistance to Central Asia (in millions of dollars)

Central Asian Country	Cumulative Funds Budgeted 1992-2002*	2001 Budgeted*	2002 Budgeted*	2003 Budgeted***	2004 Request***
Kazakhstan	885.95	74.87	89.34	42.72	32
Kyrgyzstan	635.03	41.46	95.66	37.85	40
Tajikistan	489.96	56.48	141.29	25.8	35
Turkmenistan	218.2	12.57	18.06	7.8	8
Uzbekistan	530.59	57.22	239.78	38.75	42
Total	2,759.73**	242.6	584.13	152.92	157
Percent of Eurasian Aid	13%	21%	25%	20%	27%

Source: State Department, Office of the Coordinator for US Assistance to Europe and Eurasia

* FREEDOM Support Act and agency Funds

** In addition, \$22,61 million in region-wide funds were budgeted 1992-2002

*** FREEDOM Support Act and other Function 150 Funds, not including Defence or Energy Department Funds; the 2004 request excludes funding for exchanges.

China

China could be one of the powers to challenge Russian and American influence in Central Asia. Its growing role is already seen in rising economic involvement in the region. The primary economic interest of China is focused on energy resources as a result of substantial economic growth of the Chinese economy for the last decades. In 1998, China signed its biggest overseas investment contract in history with Kazakhstan, to build an oil pipeline from Kazakhstan through Xinjiang to Central China.¹⁰² It has also pledged to support a Kazakhstan-Turkmen –Iran pipeline in order to diversify energy sources away from Southeast Asia and Middle East.

China finds the region as a market of 50 million for its consumer goods and a potential source of primary and processed raw materials from cotton to non-ferrous metals.¹⁰³ As the gap of economic development between China's coastal and inland regions grows, there is a strong possibility that Chinese Western regions may increase their economic interaction with Central Asia. A strong base for that could be the construction of rail and road networks that connect

¹⁰¹ Buyers L.M. ed. (2003), "Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues", NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, p. 227

¹⁰² Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. "Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia". pp.71-73

¹⁰³ Ibid

China with Central Asia and Europe, and the ethnic affinity of Xinjiang Uighurs with Turkic people of Central Asia.¹⁰⁴

Along with a growing economic influence, the potential threat posed by China could be its demographic expansion, cross-borders intervention and territorial claims to Central Asian states. The demographic imbalance in Chinese-Central Asian border has been increasing since China has taken the policy of “Chinesation” of Xinjiang province to eradicate the separatist activities. Besides, the Chinese policy to develop the Western China for the new Chinese-Han settlers, which led to the diversion of substantial waters of Ili and Irtysh rivers, may raise the danger of water shortage for Balkhash Lake and Kazakhstan’s capital-Astana and it may increase the tension between Kazakhstan and China.¹⁰⁵ The Chinese fear of Turkic and Muslim separatism in Xinjiang, increased by the independence of the latter’s ethnic kin - Central Asians, and possible political consolidation of the substantial numbers of exiled Uighurs and Kazakh living in Central Asia against China might also serve as an excuse for the Chinese cross-border intervention into Central Asia, as well as to territorial claims to them.¹⁰⁶

Iran

Iran is next to dominate Central Asian region, as it has an advantage of geographical proximity and close cultural ties with Persian speaking population of Central Asia. While Iran needs the region to break its international isolation, Central Asian states consider Iran as the key country to meet their needs in diversification of pipeline routes and transport communications. Iran has already made significant investments in a railway link between Mashad and the former Soviet railway system in Turkmenistan, which would connect all Central Asian States to Iranian network in Gulf.¹⁰⁷ It is also a key player in the competition over pipeline routes because its Gulf ports are the shortest pipeline routes from the Caspian Basin to the Indian Ocean.

As the prospect of transporting Caspian oil through Iran is resisted by the US, Iran together with Russia is resisting the development of Caspian oil by complicating the solution of Caspian Sea’s legal status, therefore its development by Central Asian states.¹⁰⁸ Much feared attitude of Central Asian states towards Iran has been the possibility of exporting Iranian model of theocracy to Central Asia. This fear found some ground, since Iranian support of Tajikistan’s

¹⁰⁴ Munro, S. “China and Asia”, *Orbis*, fall 1994

¹⁰⁵ Radio Free Europe/Radio liberty, 13/02/01

¹⁰⁶ Munro, S.; Gleason, G. “Why Russia is in Tajikistan”, *Comparative Strategy*, Vol.20, No.1, January-March 2001

¹⁰⁷ Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. “Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia”

¹⁰⁸ “Politics of Oil in Caucasus and Central Asia”, *Adelphi Papers*

Islamic opposition and suspicions that same assistance could be given to Uzbekistan's Islamic opposition as well.¹⁰⁹

Turkey

Turkey has been the most dynamic country to involve in Central Asia largely because of its close ethnic affinity with Turkic Republics of Central Asia and the latter's desire to emulate secular Turkish model of development.¹¹⁰ The disillusionment of Turkey with Europe added with the sore relationships with neighboring Islamic countries and new opportunities to benefit from economic interaction with Central Asian states, particularly in sphere of energy, have also played a significant role to push Turkey into Central Asia.

Being a NATO member, Turkey has been a "bridge" for Central Asian states to the West. It actively supported Central Asian countries pro-western orientation, as well as defending their interests in international organizations. Moreover, the regular summits of the Turkic speaking republics and Turkish promise to invest in Central Asian economies were all seen as an indication that Turkey would replace Russia in Central Asian region. The cornerstone of that strategy supposed to be Baku-Ceyhan pipeline route from Azerbaijan to Turkey, with expectations that Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas would be linked to that pipeline route, thus bypassing Iran and Russia. Turkey has also resisted the Russian route of transporting Kazakh oil through Black Sea in part to support Baku-Ceyhan project.¹¹¹

But, Turkey has lost its positions in Central Asia, because of arrogant vision of Central Asia from Turkish foreign policy. Initially, Turkey saw itself as a "big brother", whereas Central Asian states saw Turkey as an equal partner. The differences in initial expectations were fraught with the loss of credibility and Central Asia has begun to drift apart from Turkey since 1994-1995.

Pakistan

Another significant player in the Central Asian game is Pakistan. Pakistan's interests in Central Asia are mainly an access to the region's resources and ensure a "strategic depth" in its fight with India.¹¹² In order to fulfil these objectives Pakistan has chosen the strategy of supporting the Taliban movement, the main faction in Afghan civil war. The success of Taliban, as Pakistan expects, would bring stability to Afghanistan, which would facilitate the construction

¹⁰⁹ Zeev, B. "K Probleme Uzbekistano-Iranskix Otnosheniy" (On Problems of Uzbek-Iranian Relations), *Central Asia and Caucasus*, No.7, 1997

¹¹⁰ Esenov, M. "Central Asia on the threshold of the XXI century", *Central Asia and Caucasus*, No.8, 1997

¹¹¹ Bolukbasi, S. "The Controversy over the Caspian Sea Mineral Resources: Conflicting Perceptions, Clashing Interests", *Europe-Asia Studies*, 1998

¹¹² Esposito, S. "Political Islam and the West", *Joint Force Quarterly*, spring 2000

of the pipeline and road networks from Central Asia through Afghanistan to Pakistan, bypassing Iran.¹¹³

The base for the fears of Central Asia on Pakistan's intention lies in Pakistan's and Taliban's support to radical extremists groups from Central Asia in form of giving sanctuary and training. Another factor for fear has been the support of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Russia to anti-Taliban forces. In case of Taliban's victory those forces could find refuge in Central Asian states and increase the potential for the regional conflict, if Taliban crosses the Central Asian borders to fight opposing forces.

4.2 Internal challenges

Intra-regional conflict

Along with the great powers' rivalry over dominating the region, there are bases for potential inter-state conflict among the Central Asian states that could be caused by ethnic nationalism, territorial disputes and water control.

Similar to some developing countries, the boundaries in Central Asia were drawn by Moscow with the little regard to ethnic composition.¹¹⁴ The purpose for that was not to engage Central Asian states in coherent nation building, but to counter the integrative potential of Islam and pan-Turkic nationalism by creating five separate states.¹¹⁵ A by-product of this effort has become the emergence of tension between the bureaucracies interested in maintaining the *status quo* and nationalist forces. Although these tensions were contained by authoritarian rule, the end of the Moscow's control and the resurgence of nationalism created the bases for irredentism. Almost all states of the region have appealed to nationalism as a card to secure themselves from challenges posed by counter-elite based on clan, regional and religious symbols. If not balanced these sort of nationalist policies may reinforce the difference between 'us' and 'them' and undermine the stability in the region, as all regional states remain to be multinational.¹¹⁶

The potential intra-regional conflict may occur as a result of the territorial disputes between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. The Tajiks, who are close to Persians, may claim two

¹¹³ Esenov, M. "Turkmenistan's Foreign Policy and its Impact on the Regional Security System", *Central Asia and Caucasus*, Vol.7, No.1, 2001

¹¹⁴ Fuller, R.. "The New Geopolitical Order"

¹¹⁵ Rubin, B. "The Fragmentation of Tajikistan", *Survival*, Vol.35, No.4, winter 1993/94

¹¹⁶ The three most ethnically diverse of them are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Kazakhstan has 6,2 million Russians who make up 38% of population, although the immigration of Russians and higher population growth of Kazakhstan is reducing the proportion of Russians. Kyrgyzstan's Russian population constitutes 20-25%, while Uzbekistan accounts 13%. In Tajikistan the number of Russian, has been reduced but the Uzbekistan population is large both in absolute terms (1.2 million) and as a population of the total population of the country (2.4%). By contrast, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan are more homogenous, yet the power still hosts a substantial number of Tajikistan and Bukhara and Samarkand provinces. Menon, R. & Spruyt, H. "The Limits of Neorealism: Security in Central Asia", *Review of International Studies*, 1999

ancient centers of Persian culture, Samarkand and Bukhara, the provinces of Uzbekistan.¹¹⁷ For their parts Uzbekistan may claim the ownership of sections of the Khojent province in northern Tajikistan.¹¹⁸ The absence of the demarcated borders among the republics also exacerbates the territorial disputes. As a result Uzbekistan's unilateral establishment of border posts and mining the mountainous borders with Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in order to combat the problems of trafficking of drugs, weapons and terrorism, have nearly led to inter-state crisis.¹¹⁹

The most serious conflict among the Central Asian states may occur on ethnic bases, particularly in Ferghana Valley, as the experience of two tragic ethnic clashes in 1989 between Meskhetian Turks and Uzbeks and in 1990 between Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in Osh province.¹²⁰ The Valley, which is divided between Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, remains a highly fragile region because of its multi-ethnic composition, high density and scarcity of natural resources.¹²¹ As local states try to consolidate their *de jure* borders and privatize the resources, the real threat to the stability of Ferghana Valley may appear during the course of property distribution.¹²² A good case could be the land privatization process in Kyrgyzstan during which Kyrgyzstan's elite in the southern regions, including Osh province, aspired to secure the advantages for itself on the basis of ethnicity.¹²³ As a result, a considerable number of Uzbeks may be left without land of their own, even though they constitute up to 40% of the local population and is traditionally employed in agriculture.¹²⁴ This may cause either a new wave of immigration to an already overcrowded Uzbekistan or it may cause another ethnic conflict, involving Uzbekistan into it.¹²⁵

The issue of water distribution is another case to worry, since the regional states suffer a chronic shortage of the water supply for agriculture and domestic needs.¹²⁶ The regions two largest states- Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan are dependent on Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan for their water supplies, while two latter states receive much of their energy supplies from Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Upstream states believe that they have a natural entitlement to the waters that flow across their territory and they are opposed to any limitation of the amount they draw off, while downstream countries insist that water is a "common good".¹²⁷ Moreover, Kyrgyzstan and

¹¹⁷ Rubin, B. "*The Fragmentation of Tajikistan*"

¹¹⁸ It has been argued that Uzbekistan, angered with the exclusion of the Uzbek-aligned Khojent regional group from Tajik peace process, has even given a passive support to separatists. Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. "*Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia*"

¹¹⁹ "Potentsialni'e misheni Tashkenta"(The potential targets of Tashkent), *Vremya* PO, 04/03/01

¹²⁰ Brown, B. "Security Concerns of the Central Asian States"

¹²¹ Ibid

¹²² Saifullin, R. "The Ferghana Valley: A View from Uzbekistan"

¹²³ Ibid

¹²⁴ Ibid

¹²⁵ Ibid

¹²⁶ Akiner, S. "Central Asia: conflict or stability and development?", *Minority Rights Group*, 1996, pp.12-13

¹²⁷ Ibid

Tajikistan consider water as an offensive weapon against their neighbors' political or economic pressure.¹²⁸

Intra-state conflict

There are several factors that may lead to intra-state conflict within Central Asian states, which could be exacerbated if the related issues of the multi-ethnicity of the Central Asian states and mutually exclusive interests of the outside powers are combined with them. The basis for inter-state conflicts could be clan/regional rivalry, issue of political succession, economic inequality and politization of Islam.

Clan/regional rivalry

Historically none of the states in the region have had the tradition of a nation-state and all the state formation that had existed in the region until the Russian conquest was based on the dynastic or territorial principles (Emirate of Bukhara, Khanates of Khiva and Kokand).¹²⁹ Even the division of Central Asia by Moscow on nation states has not strengthened the national consciousness, as Moscow's attempt of "internationalization" had prevented national consolidation.¹³⁰ Besides, the centralized command of the economy has also reinforced the regional/clan division due to the economic favoritism of the bureaucrats to loyal groups. As a result, the interests of the certain group or clan took precedence over common good, which has increased a social tension threatening the stability.¹³¹

Although the clan interests were initially controlled and manipulated by Moscow, the removal of the "centre" resurfaced regional conflicts challenging the existing balance of power. The struggle for wealth and influence, mainly through the control of administrative apparatus and extended business interests had sometimes taken a violent form¹³². The case of Tajikistan, for instance, illustrates clearly how rapidly such rivalries can escalate into civil war, when regional fragmentation destroys the sense of national identity. Although the factions in Tajik conflict received some political labels (neocommunist, democratic, Islamic fundamentalist), the

¹²⁸ For instance, the attempts of Uzbekistan to solve the economic and political disputes by cutting of the gas supply to Kyrgyzstan forced Kyrgyz government to use winter water supplies for hydroelectric power generation. This sort of depletion of water reservoirs during the last 5 years, as argued, costed Uzbekistan's economy \$5bln.

Koichiev, A. "Water Games Could Leave Central Asia High and Dry This Summer" at www.eurasianet.org, 03/05/23

¹²⁹ Karimov, I. (1997), "Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century", Curzon Press

¹³⁰ Ibid

¹³¹ Ibid

¹³² Akiner, S. "Central Asia: Conflict or Stability and Development?"

real contestants were clan based groups, such as Khojentis of the north, the Kulyabis of the south and Tavildara – based clans of the east and some small regional groupings.¹³³

Similarly, no republic of Central Asia is free of the potential conflict of this sort. In Kyrgyzstan the tensions between the north and the south are very strong. In Kazakhstan, the regional factions intend to secure a greater autonomy. The resurgence of Horde interests is also significant given the sharp economic disparity among the industrial north, agricultural south and energy rich west.¹³⁴ In Uzbekistan, the traditional power base has always been formed under competition between Samarkand, Ferghana and Tashkent. Today, there are still strong rivalries within Uzbek administration, which is contained through increased centralization of power and frequent reshuffle of personnel.¹³⁵ In Turkmenistan, the power of the dominant group Ahal-Tekko tribe can be challenged by Goklan and Yomut tribes, especially since the ease of travel restrictions with Iran, where the majority of the population from Goklan and Yomut tribes live.¹³⁶

Political succession

The problem of succession has become a worrying factor, since the stability of the Central Asian regimes essentially depends on a single man in the centre of the political system. Given the independence is still very new the leaders have been more concerned with maintaining social and economic stability than establishing procedures for handing over power to the successors.¹³⁷ In part for this reason, the present mechanisms for smooth transfer of power remains weak, therefore, as F. Starr says, “money and violence may decide the outcome in a succession struggle; if related issues such as ethnicity or foreign meddling were involved, it could turn into civil war”.¹³⁸

Four of the current Central Asian presidents came to the power during the Soviet period and have extended their mandates through the ambiguous referendums and elections so far.¹³⁹ The president of Tajikistan was elected in war-torn country by the immense backing of Russia and Uzbekistan, and still finds himself seriously challenged by different groups.

Some presidents of the region may expect that if the benefits from the exports of resources become real by the end of their extended terms, they may use the delivery of economic benefits

¹³³ Akiner, S. “Central Asia: Conflict or Stability and Development?”

¹³⁴ Ibid

¹³⁵ Matveeva, A. “Democratisation, legitimacy and political change in Central Asia”, *International Affairs*, Vol.75, No.1, January 1999

¹³⁶ Akine, S.

¹³⁷ Matveeva, A.

¹³⁸ Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. “*Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia*”, p. 7

¹³⁹ Matveeva, A.

as a potential card to win in free elections.¹⁴⁰ However, with remote chances of immediate economic growth they rely on the policy of exclusion or repression of opposition forces to stay in power. Yet, when the times come for a transfer of power, whether through the leaders voluntary retirement or involuntary physical incapacity, this could trigger a serious struggle within the government itself.¹⁴¹ As armed forces in these republics are still very small and genuinely excluded from the politics, the decisive role for power struggle may be played by the powerful security services, similar to Russian scenario.

Economic inequality

Another danger for Central Asian stability is seen in developing social tensions between rich and poor, and a rapid polarization of incomes. Although an income inequality existed in the Soviet period, it was genuinely accepted by society, because people believed in meritocracy that high achievers regardless their ethnic or social background could enjoy the benefits.¹⁴² Besides, the most privileged members of the society used to hide their wealth from the public and there was little conscious awareness of the differentials in standards of living. But today, the drastic decline in standards of living, in contrast to the lifestyles of rich minority, is increasing the populations' sense of alienation and marginalization, thus, undermining the regimes legitimacy.¹⁴³ Besides, the soon improvements in living conditions is far from the reality, as two poor countries of the Central Asia (Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan) depend on the international assistance, while the concentration of investment in richer ones (Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan) in energy sector may generate wealth in longer term.¹⁴⁴ Therefore, the continuing rise of the inequality and poverty added to the erosion of legitimacy could produce opposition movements based on ethnic nationalism and Islam with their promise of alternative solutions to the problems.¹⁴⁵ The use of repression to such challenges could increase the danger of political instability, while efforts by ruling elite to win the opposition's electorate may push them in the direction of ethnic nationalism.¹⁴⁶ Moreover, the reforms intended to restructure the industries in which the non-titular ethnic groups are over-represented can increase ethnic tension. For instance, economic dislocation caused by the reforms in heavy and defence industries of northern Kyrgyzstan and northern Kazakhstan, which employ a disproportionate number of ethnic

¹⁴⁰ Kubicek, P. "Authoritarianism in Central Asia: Curse or Cure?", *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.19, No.1, 1998

¹⁴¹ Ibid

¹⁴² Akiner, S.

¹⁴³ Winterstein, S. "The market for Central Asian legitimacy", *Orbis*, summer 1999

¹⁴⁴ Matveeva, A.

¹⁴⁵ Olcott, M. "The Caspian's False Promise", *Foreign Policy*, summer 1998

¹⁴⁶ Matveeva, A.

Russians, may increase ethnic tension fuelling the separatist tendencies, even inviting potential Russian intervention.¹⁴⁷

Islamic radicalism

The threat of Islamic radicalism appears to be increasingly prominent in Central Asia, although the fear of Islamic extremism, or so-called 'Wahhabism' could be exaggerated. There are two schools of thought in this account. The first group suggests that there is no danger of Islamic radicalism, as it seen in small number of adherents to Islam in the region with the exception of Ferghana Valley.¹⁴⁸ On the contrary, Islam, as argued, is an integral part of the national culture and may contribute to the formation of national identity.¹⁴⁹ Furthermore, the fear of the so-called "fundamentalism" may have resulted from a lack of genuine familiarity with the religion or from the deliberate attempts of the leadership to consolidate their power, therefore, the policies of repression and exclusion may themselves generate radicalism based on Islam.¹⁵⁰

The second approach that point at the danger of Islamic extremism argues that present ideological vacuum left by Soviet system and slow and painful consolidation of the national identity added to the existing socio-economic problems may lay ground for radical Islam: "pressures of social change, which is unavoidable during the transition period, creates slogans calling for a return to Islamic statehood, which are capable of seriously undermining the public stability".¹⁵¹ Besides, the problem of radicalization of the population may be exacerbated by the high rate of population growth and urbanization.¹⁵² According to some estimates if the present trend continues, the population of Central Asia is expected to double in two or three decades¹⁵³. This may put the region under serious pressure, as the natural resources are already under severe restrain, especially water and productive land. That may cause a growth of immigration of population from poor rural areas into the large cities, where the problems of accommodation and unemployment they face may drive them to look for pseudo-solutions in radical Islam, which promises illusionary equality and social justice.¹⁵⁴

The argument put forward by the second group includes external environment as well. The support given to local radicals by Islamic fundamentalists in Afghanistan and by some groups in Pakistan and Arabic countries is seen by Central Asian states as a deliberate policy to destabilize

¹⁴⁷ Menon, R. & Spruyt, H. "The Limits of Neorealism: Security in Central Asia", *Review of International Studies*, 1999

¹⁴⁸ Akiner, S.

¹⁴⁹ Ibid

¹⁵⁰ An-Naim, A. "Human rights and Islamic identity in France and Uzbekistan: Mediation of Local and Global", *Human Rights Quarterly*, Vol.22, 2000

¹⁵¹ Saifullin, R.

¹⁵² Ibid

¹⁵³ Olcott, M. "Demographic Upheavals in Central Asia", *Orbis*, fall 1996

¹⁵⁴ Saifullin, R; Karimov, I.

the region and overthrow the secular regimes in order to force Central Asian states into political alliance with them.¹⁵⁵

4.3 Response to the Challenges

Facing the complex security threats to their stability, the Central Asian states, may respond in different ways. But the priority task for them is to define which source of threat is paramount to deal with, whether external or internal. If the Central Asian states perceive the great power rivalry is a prime destabilizing factor, there is little chance for them to prevent conflict, however, great powers themselves could mitigate their interests through concert system. If the threat to the region is posed by the hegemonic ambitions of a certain power or from another external source the Central Asian states could invite outside powers to balance or unite themselves against it. The emergence of the one or more strong centers within Central Asia could also fill the power vacuum in the region, thus eliminating rational for foreign encroachment.

Regional concert

If the primary threat is considered to be major power's rivalry, then, stability in the region could be enhanced through the development of a regional concert. The concert, as suggested, could be based on three elements:

1. An understanding among the major powers and the regional states that all seek to uphold the concert.
2. The realistic assessment of the hierarchy of interests among major powers and regional powers. The sum of interests of the major powers takes precedence over the individual interests or ambitions of regional powers.
3. Mutual self-restraint among the major powers, which requires that states should recognise the importance of overall stability and avoid activities that threaten the interests of others.¹⁵⁶

The establishment of the regional concert depends at least on solving two important issues: a peaceful solution to the Afghan civil war and a common agreement on the certain pipeline routes. The existing prerequisites for a solution of those problems could be the understanding that states have much to loose from unilateral competition than in regulated environment.¹⁵⁷

The rivalry over the pipeline routes also may not be as profitable as co-operation. Russia, for instance, may not gain a significant influence in energy market if it continues to block the

¹⁵⁵ Ignatenko, A. "Nutryanoe" i "vetryanoe". Ob analiticheskix podxodax k probleme ekstremisma v epokhu globalizatsii" (On Analytical Approaches to Islamic Extremism in the Era of Globalisation). *Russkiy jurnal*, 29/03/01

¹⁵⁶ Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. pp. 101-10

¹⁵⁷ Jervis, R. "Security Regimes", *International Organisation*, Vol.36, No.2, spring 1982

Caspian exports, as its own exports do not control world energy markets.¹⁵⁸ Instead it has more to gain from participating in the development of the resources.¹⁵⁹ The insistence of the US on Baku-Ceyhan route may further alienate Russia and prevent the possible US-Iranian rapprochement.¹⁶⁰ Therefore, the consensus on common pipeline route through Iran and Afghanistan may help reduce the major powers' rivalry over Central Asian politics.¹⁶¹

However, the solution of the both issues through regional concert seems unlikely in the near future. At present, a full co-operation of major powers is impossible because of their adversarial relations with each other at a larger scale. This is particularly attributive to US-Iranian and Russian –US-Chinese relationships.

Bandwagoning/allying with a major power

Whether all threats are real or not, they served as a powerful motive for Central Asian states to seek Russian security guarantees for the region, particularly since the start of Tajik civil conflict. In this sense, Russian dominated CIS was seen as the foundation of a regional collective security system. The 1992 Tashkent agreement on Collective Security, the agreement for the joint defence of the CIS borders and the creation of a common air defence system supported that such a corporate approach to security was evolving.¹⁶² The Russian security umbrella has also meant for Central Asian states an opportunity to postpone the development of effective national armies and reliance on Russian personnel for Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan to patrol their borders with China.¹⁶³

However, such an extensive reliance on Russia could prove that Russia itself may become the principal security threat to Central Asia and the historical record and geopolitical circumstances provide solid reason that an assumption such as CIS will restrain Russia by binding it through consensual and multilateral decision-making seems to have a little weight, as the Russian efforts to enlarge the CIS by forcing states (Azerbaijan and Georgia) and to receive UN authorization for exclusive peace-keeping rights within 'near abroad', show that Moscow prescribes a different vision for the CIS.¹⁶⁴ Consequently, many of the former Union republics were reluctant to give the CIS the mandate originally envisioned by Moscow, which drove

¹⁵⁸ Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C. "Strategic Assessment of Central Eurasia", p. 80

¹⁵⁹ Ibid

¹⁶⁰ Starr, F. "Power Failure. American Policy in the Caspian"

¹⁶¹ Esenov, M. "Central Asia on the threshold of the XXI century"

¹⁶² Menon, R. & Spruyt, H. "The Limits of Neorealism: Security in Central Asia"

¹⁶³ Splidsboel-Hansen, F. "The Official Russian Concept of Contemporary Central Asian Islam: The Security Dimension", *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.49, No.4, 1997

¹⁶⁴ Kincade, W & Melnyczuk, N. "Eurasia Letter: Unneighbourly Neighbours", *Foreign Policy*, No.94, spring 1994; Johnson, L. "In search of a doctrine: Russia interventionism in conflicts in its "Near abroad", *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Vol. 5, No.3, winter 1996; Adams, T. "Russian Peacekeeping Policy, Methods and Training". *Low Intensity Conflict & Law Enforcement*, Vol. 4, No.3, winter 1995; Goltz, T. "Letter from Eurasia: the hidden Russian hand", *Foreign Policy*, No.92, fall 1993

Russia to emphasize on bilateral agreements to protect its economic and security interests in the region.¹⁶⁵ If the US increases the capacities of its military bases, Russia could lose its influence over the region and subsequently its security protection would concede its positions as well.

As China continues its rapid economic and military growth it may contest Russian hegemony in Central Asia. In the short run this is unlikely. While China has made considerable economic inroads to Central Asia, its strategic focus is directed toward East Asia, consequently, it may play a marginal role in Central Asia.¹⁶⁶ Indeed for now Russia and China have a common fear of ethnic nationalism in Central Asia.

Turkey and Iran are often mentioned as possible contrast to Russian domination in Central Asia. While both states have increased their economic and cultural presence in the region, there is no compelling evidence that either has become “a major player in their personal security capable of negating the implications of preponderant Russian power”.¹⁶⁷ The reasons are that Iranian –Turkic rivalry makes each more suspicious of the other; each is far more economically dependent on Russia than on Central Asia; each is itself exposed to Russian power; and Iran and Russia share several common perspectives ranging from the ground rules for exploiting the energy resources of the Caspian Sea to the fear Sunni fundamentalism in Afghanistan.¹⁶⁸

The regional integration

In the absence of the adequate security guarantees from the major powers or institutions, it would be natural for Central Asian states to meet their security challenges through regional co-operation. Besides, it is the most efficient way to ease the possibility of conflicts between regional states. In fact, the basis for such a corporation was created with the establishment of the idea of Central Asian Union. The rationale for the integration within Central Asian could extend from commonality of the threat sources to common history, culture and complementary economies. The first step to integration have been the co-ordination of economic reforms and price policies and creation of multilateral institutions for monetary and investment co-operation (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan).¹⁶⁹ Besides, the discussions on trilateral military co-operation (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan) and on common market had started to “foster economic growth, security and political stability”.¹⁷⁰

¹⁶⁵ Menon, R. & Spruyt, H. “The Limits of Neorealism: Security in Central Asia”. Also the emphasis on bilateral agreement is stressed in Russia’s new Foreign Policy Doctrine, which was adopted in July 2000.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid

¹⁶⁷ Ibid

¹⁶⁸ Ibid

¹⁶⁹ Kubicek, P.

¹⁷⁰ Kubicek, P.

However, despite much enthusiasm, the idea of Central Asian confederation was laid to rest for several reasons. The split between Central Asian countries emerged regarding the nature of the integration. This is explained by the difference in wealth among its members. The richer countries such as Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan were reluctant to support poor Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. The former states showed determination to involve foreign investment for their economic development, while the latter states were left on Russian and foreign aid for their survival.¹⁷¹

The different development strategies have also inhibited integration; Uzbekistan has preserved a strong state sector and powerful state mechanisms; Kazakhstan has introduced reforms, but preserved an authoritarian state alongside the expanding private sector; Kyrgyzstan has followed the Western style liberal economy; Tajikistan and Turkmenistan has maintained old Soviet type economy.¹⁷² While these different strategies have blocked the regional integration at the economic level, the presence of authoritarian regimes has stopped a much-needed political compromise for integration.¹⁷³

Also the preponderance of Russian economic presence which still accounts for over the half of the Central Asian state's total trade and strong linkage to Russian transport infrastructure makes continued integration with Russia more perspective than any other Central Asian common market.¹⁷⁴ Finally, weak national identity of the Central Asian states has also played a negative role for integration. For instance, if Uzbekistan and Tajikistan can draw their identity upon a tradition of Islam, this approach would be divisive in multi-confessional Kazakhstan or even Kyrgyzstan. Similarly, common identity is stressed on Turkic roots would be exclusionary for Tajiks, who has Persian cultural and linguistic roots.¹⁷⁵

'Anchor' state

The emergence of a local power centre that could play the role of a stabilizer may also solve incapability of the Central Asian states to co-operate against external threats. But the question has been which country is capable for that. The most observers indicate that Kazakhstan or Uzbekistan could be a regional power to deter outside involvement in the region. Kyrgyzstan's incapability for this is explained by its small mountainous territory, inter-clan

¹⁷¹ Rumer, B.

¹⁷² Starr, F. & Fairbanks, C.

¹⁷³ Some democrats from the region argue that it is impossible to pursue a regional integration without having the democratic government in Central Asian states, as any integration at the economic level will inevitably demand integration at political level. Esenov, M. "Central Asia on the threshold of the XXI century"; Pulat, A. "Turkestan: on the Way to Integration", *Harakat*, No.2, 1996

¹⁷⁴ Kubicek, P.

¹⁷⁵ Ibid; Esenov, M. "*Central Asia...*" Esenov also argues that unless Central Asian states develop a strong national identity, it is unlikely that they can integrate into regional level and develop regional identity.

rivalries, regional division and potential ethnic tension with Russians, which comprises 20% of its population.¹⁷⁶ Turkmenistan's large desert territory with its 4 million population and its political neutrality also discounts it from regional leadership.¹⁷⁷ Tajikistan is also included to the former group because of its scarcity in resources, strong regional division and its total dependence on outside economic and military assistance for its survival. Kazakhstan is seen as a candidate for a regional leader, as its vast territory and tremendous oil reserves could serve both as a buffer for the rest of the Central Asian states against Russia, and as an attractive place for the foreign political and economic interests.¹⁷⁸ Yet, half of the Kazakhstan's population that lives in its long border with Russia is ethnic Russians, who may secede from Kazakhstan, if the latter chooses a nationalist policy that upsets Russians. The transfer of Kazakhstan's capital from South to North is explained by this concern over secessionism, advocated by Cossack groups in northern Kazakhstan.¹⁷⁹ For the same fear of disintegration, Kazakh leadership calls for an increased integration within CIS into so-called "Euro-Asian Union", obvious successor to the USSR.¹⁸⁰ Although Russia was not quite receptive for "Euro-Asian Union", it did increase its "integration" with Kazakhstan through ownership of its energy and defense – related industries.¹⁸¹

This leaves Uzbekistan as a potential regional leader. Uzbekistan has not only achieved a food and energy self-sufficiency to remain intact to outside (Russian) economic pressure, but also developed the only usable military force in the region capable to defend itself and to commit military involvement in the region.¹⁸² Uzbekistan's common border with all Central Asian states and its large and relatively homogenous population, as well as its politically active diaspora throughout the region, may also feed its regional ambitions. In fact, Uzbekistan together with Russia has secured the stability in Tajikistan by backing the neo-communist regime militarily. The ability of the Uzbek leadership to play with the security interests of the major powers like the US, Russia and China and its claim to be a buffer against Islamic fundamentalism have also increased Uzbekistan's profile as independent force in regional affairs.¹⁸³ Moreover, the US views Uzbekistan as an emerging regional power due to its large population, important energy and other resources, and political prominence, and urges it to play a stabilizing and responsible

¹⁷⁶ Starr, F. "Making Eurasia stable", *Foreign Affairs*, January/February 1996

¹⁷⁷ Ibid

¹⁷⁸ Rubenstein, A. "The Geopolitical Pull on Russia", *Orbis*, fall 1994, pp. 576-77

¹⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 578

¹⁸⁰ Olcott, M. "Sovereignty and the "Near Abroad". *Orbis*, summer 1995, p. 360

¹⁸¹ Ibid, p. 361

¹⁸² Starr, F. "Making Eurasia Stable"

¹⁸³ Cornell, S. V. "Uzbekistan: A Regional Player in Eurasian Geopolitics?", *European Security*, Vol.9, No.2, summer 2000; Brzezinski, Z. (1997), "The Grand Chessboard", NY: Basic Books

regional role.¹⁸⁴ However, the Uzbekistan's capabilities are restrained by its domestic political instability and economic crisis caused by political repression and lack of economic reforms.¹⁸⁵ Besides, the fear of Uzbek hegemony resulted in further disintegration within Central Asia, forcing Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Moscow's orbit.¹⁸⁶

5. Central Asia as an Area for the New Great Game – the US and Russian Engagement in Central Asia

It has been argued that “Central Asia, scene of the Great Game between England and Russia in nineteenth century is once more a key to the security of all Eurasia”¹⁸⁷ as Russia “is engaged in complex geopolitical maneuvers and enmeshed in geo-economic competition into its contiguous ‘Great Space’”¹⁸⁸ because “the West does not want to see any structure in Eurasia that permits Russian hegemony”¹⁸⁹ again. Since oil is a central aspect of the New Great Game,¹⁹⁰ “the struggle for Eurasian oil is a multidimensional security, geopolitical and economic game ... this Great Game is quickly becoming a paramount challenge for American policy making toward the year 2000 and beyond”.¹⁹¹ Russian attempts to restore the former leverages of influence over Central Asian states are military, political and economic aspects of the New Great Game.¹⁹² Since the collapse of the Soviet Union, there has been a strong conviction “that most geopolitical issues in the region could be reduced to either favoring or opposing Russian hegemony”.¹⁹³ It is an essential component of the New Great Game concept that all Central Asian states are a subject for a challenge between Russia and her adversaries, especially the US, with each wants to make sure to set their influence over the region, so-called “Great Power chauvinism”.¹⁹⁴ From the beginning of independence, the issue of oil and gas as a final reward in the New Great Game

¹⁸⁴ Buyers L.M. ed. (2003), “Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues”, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, p. 1

¹⁸⁵ Lieven, A. “The (not so) Great Game”, p.76

¹⁸⁶ Ibid, p. 77

¹⁸⁷ Starr, F.S., “Making Eurasia stable”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 75, No 1, 1996, p. 80

¹⁸⁸ Erickson, J., “Russia will not Be Trifled with: Geopolitical Facts and Fantasies”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 22, No 2/3, 1999, see also Gray, C.S. and Sloan, G. (1999), “Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy”, London: Frank Cass, pp. 257–258.

¹⁸⁹ Tsepikalo, V.V., “The remaking of Eurasia”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 72, No 2, 1998, p 107

¹⁹⁰ Kleveman, L. (2003), “The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia”, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, p. 6-10

¹⁹¹ Cohen, A. “The ‘New Great Game’: Pipeline Politics in Eurasia”, *Caspian Crossroads*, Vol 2, No 1, Spring – Summer 1996 on <http://ourworld.compuserve.com/homepages/usazerb/213.htm> - accessed 2004/08/23.

¹⁹² Jaffe, A.M. and Olcott, M.B. in Lynch, D. and Kalyuzhnova, Y., Eds, (2000), *Euro-Asia: A Period of Transition* London: Palgrave Macmillan, p. 68

¹⁹³ Weisbrode, K., p. 11

¹⁹⁴ Karimov, I. (1997), “Uzbekistan on the Threshold of the Twenty-First Century”, Curzon Press, p 29.

dominated the examination of Central Asia.¹⁹⁵ Initial expectations about the overall amount of oil and gas in the region were rather high; it was even assumed that Central Asian oil would extremely reshape the world oil market. But even though the overall amount of Central Asian oil is unknown yet, it is clear that initial anticipations were unjustifiably optimistic. Many transnational companies have jumped into the Game seeking for enormous profits, the question of pipelines has become acute and for many players it is a question of primary importance ever since - China, Pakistan, and Iran – just to name few. What route should pipelines take, who should build those pipelines and who should be responsible for their safety and feasibility, who organizes the project, who charges and profits from them—these range of questions are on the agenda of the concept and could be seen as an integral subsection of the New Great Game concept.¹⁹⁶ With “oil remaining a strategic commodity critical in the global balance of power”¹⁹⁷ the question of continuous oil, gas and other energy sources supplies is of major concern for regional powers, with “ex-Cold Warriors being enamored of the idea that vast oil riches could easily be snatched from the former Soviet empire”.¹⁹⁸ Both Russian and American government stressed the need to be involved in the region: the release of the Russian Security Council clearly indicates that by 2005 Russia’s dependence on Central Asian and South Caucasian energy resources will increase and the involvement was also proclaimed as an area of “vital interests” for the Russian Federation.¹⁹⁹ Bill Richardson, Secretary of Energy under Clinton’s administration revealed their strategy for Caspian oil first: “This is about America’s energy security, which depends on diversifying our sources of oil and gas worldwide. It is also about preventing strategic inroads by those who don’t share our values. We are trying to move these newly independent countries toward the West. We would like to see them reliant on Western commercial and political interests rather than going another way. We’ve made a substantial political investment in the Caspian, and it’s very important to us that both the pipeline map and the politics come out right”²⁰⁰ and Bush administration then not just supported that statement but even went further on: “America twenty years from now will import nearly two of every three barrels of oil—a condition of increased dependency on foreign powers that do not always have

¹⁹⁵ Weisbrode, K., p. 23

¹⁹⁶ Carver, J.P and Englefield, G. “Oil and Gas Pipelines from Central Asia: a New Approach”, *The World Today*, Vol 50, No 6, 1994, pp. 119–121; Maley, W. “The Perils of Pipelines”, *The World Today*, Vol 54, No 8–9, 1998, pp. 231–232; see also Rashid, A. “This Way Out”, *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 18 September 1997, pp. 60–61

¹⁹⁷ Stainslaw, J. and Yergin, D. “Oil: Reopening the Door”, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol 72, No 4, 1993, p 81.

¹⁹⁸ Jaffe, A.M. and Olcott, M.B. in Lynch, D., p. 68

¹⁹⁹ Erickson, J. “Russia will not Be Trifled with: Geopolitical Facts and Fantasies”, *Journal of Strategic Studies*, Vol 22, No 2/3, 1999, in Gray, C.S. and Sloan, G. (1999), “Geopolitics: Geography and Strategy”, London: Frank Cass, pp. 261–262

²⁰⁰ Quoted in *New York Times*, October 14, 1998

America's interests at heart",²⁰¹ urging that policy makers "devote ... much effort to securing additional foreign supplies of energy",²⁰² referring explicitly to the Caspian Sea Basin. The progress in making stronger claims by Bush's administration is obvious. While Clinton administration's words could be understood as rather theoretical and even idealistic to some extent in comparison with Bush administration's claims, interpreting words "we would like to see them" as an advice for Central Asian and South Caucasian countries, whereas Bush administration is urging for active involvement in the region "to securing additional foreign supplies of energy" which might sound rather aggressive and as a direct guide to immediate action to someone.

To complicate the issue further, the following developments should be noted. The involvement of such regional powers as China, Pakistan, India, Iran, Turkey and even Israel at governmental as well as at private (company) level moves apart the modern Great Game from the old one at first sight. But such an early conclusion could be mistaken, because of many reasons. First of all, these powers' search for strategic interests in the region do not usually contradict with two giants' – the US' and Russia's – interests in the New Great Game, but do complement their interests. While Pakistan, Turkey and Israel play on the American side; Iran, India and China²⁰³ are on the Russian side. The Chinese case is a little bit complicated in the framework of the New Great Game. Most of all, Chinese government wants to win hearts and minds of Central Asians, which in this context could be read as Chinese desire to have potential pipeline route through its territory, through economic aid, setting no political requirements in turn. But, at the same time, China, being worried about the presence of American military bases close to the Chinese province Xinjiang, and being dependent on Siberian oil,²⁰⁴ supports Russian activities in the region. Secondly, these states are not strong enough to challenge the US and Russia on an equal basis. And, last but not least, the economic benefits of the New Great Game for these states do overweigh their lust for power in Central Asia, taking into consideration the first two points.

²⁰¹ United States Department of Energy and The White House, National Energy Report, 17 May 2001. Cited in Klare, M.T. "Global Petro-Politics: the Foreign Policy Implications of the Bush Administration's Energy Plan", *Current History*, March 2002, p. 100

²⁰² *Ibid*, p. 100

²⁰³ Depending on perspective, China could be an exception from this statement

²⁰⁴ BBC World Service News Report, 4 July 2002. See also Reuters, "China Pipeline Terms Agreed", *The Moscow Times*, 26 July 2002 on <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2002/07/26/045.html>, accessed on 19 September 2003 and Reuters, "Source: \$1.7bln China Pipe Deal Close", *The Moscow Times*, 21 November 2002 on <http://www.themoscowtimes.com/stories/2002/11/21/046.html>, accessed on 20 September 2003. For further indications of Chinese involvement in the Eurasian area see Munro, R.H. "Central Asia and China", in Mandelbaum, M., ed. (1994), "Central Asia and the World: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan", NY: Council on Foreign Relations Press, pp. 225–238 and Rashid, A. and Saywell, T. "Beijing gusher", *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 26 February 1998

But the New Great Game is much broader than just economic benefits. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union it was argued that many countries want to impose cultural influence upon Central Asia; “by far the most fateful and fiercest competition on the soul of the emerging Central Asian Muslims is the one waged between Iran and Turkey”.²⁰⁵ These two regional powers were connected to the region ethnically and culturally, not to mention a religious aspect.²⁰⁶ Expansion of these ties and a gradually more visible presence of these countries in Central Asia was a natural process, taking into account the weakness of the newly independent states Turkey and Iran were seeking for domination over the region.²⁰⁷ Pakistan and India also cherished their high hopes to take over Central Asia on strong historical and cultural ties. These states have also seen the struggle for Central Asia as a continuation of their strategic competition.²⁰⁸ But it has to be mentioned that this rivalry had no serious impact on Central Asia, since “both are minor players with weak hands. And the game is picking up as the major players are moving closer”.²⁰⁹ Moreover, it was expected that the New Great Game would move even further on to the Persian Gulf and South Asia.²¹⁰

While cultural and economic aspects are essential attributes of the New Great Game, security has taken own niche in the concept apart after the notorious September 11 events.²¹¹ With American military bases dislocation in Central Asia and the US anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan, the role of Central Asia was raised. There are still tense debates about the US intervention in Afghanistan and, in this regard, the US presence in the region which was interpreted ambiguously in different sources, but it is still a strong conviction that the whole campaign had less military action than the hidden intention – energy resources; “the US’ interest in Central Asian oil is a myth. Central Asian oil is too costly for the US”²¹² and the opposite one “the Afghan war is really, somehow, about maintenance of US access to oil supplies to slake its obscene thirst. Drill deeply enough through the layers of lies, damned lies and excuses and you’ll

²⁰⁵ Israeli, R. “Return to the Source: the Republics of Central Asia and the Middle East”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 13, No 1, 1994, p. 22.

²⁰⁶ Goble, P. “Back on the Map: the Geopolitics of Central Asia”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, #2 (8) 1997, 2

²⁰⁷ Tarock, A. “Iran’s Policy in Central Asia”, *Central Asian Survey*, Vol 16, No 2, 1997, pp. 185–200; Pasha, S.A.H. “Turkey and the Republics of Central Asia: Emerging Relations and Dilemmas”, *International Studies*, Vol 34, No 3, 1997, pp. 343–357; Ozey, R. “The Geopolitical Importance and the Main Problems of the Turkic World”, *Eurasian Studies*, Vol 20, Special Issue, Summer 2001, pp. 83–94

²⁰⁸ Rashid, A. (1995), “The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism”, Oxford University Press & London & New Jersey: Zed Books, pp. 207–231

²⁰⁹ Dietl, G. “Quest for Influence in Central Asia: India and Pakistan”, *International Studies*, Vol 34, No 2, 1997, p. 143

²¹⁰ Lansford, T. “The Great Game Renewed? US–Russian Rivalry in the Arms Trade of South Asia”, *Security Dialogue*, Vol 33, No 2, 2002

²¹¹ Buzan, B. and Waever, O. (2003) “Regions and Powers: the Structure of International Security”, Cambridge University Press, pp. 423–429

²¹² speech of Kangas, R. at “Facing the Terrorist Challenge: the Role of Central Asia in Regional and International Cooperation” conference at Reichenau, Austria on 6 November, 2004

eventually hit the gusher”.²¹³ There is no single answer for this issue yet, but one thing is for sure – even if it is a real war on terror, it is also a good chance to be closer to the Central Asian energy resources and even further - lodging of direct proximity from Russian and Chinese borders, obviously, puts enormous pressure on Russia and China at the same time, other key players in the New Great Game.

Different observers label differently the extent of the US engagement in Central Asia. Some prone to see the strong tendency in enhancing linking aid to development in improving human rights or in making adequate progress in democratization and the promotion of transition to free markets. Others have argued the importance of Central Asian energy resources to US national security. While the rest point to civil and ethnic tensions in the region as potentially jeopardizing US interests and investments.²¹⁴ But in spite of all these opinions, there is a dominant conviction which is based on many premises of the American foreign policy. The US activities in Central Asia are not something new for other players of the New Great Game - Russia, Iran and China. These countries have suspected from the very outset of the anti-terrorist campaign that the Bush Administration was abusing its war on terror in Central Asia to reassert the American Cold War victory against the Soviet Union and its successor - Russia, to contain Chinese influence and involvement in the region and to tighten the noose around Iran. Faced with Bush’s well-known statement “either you are with us or against us”,²¹⁵ the regimes in Moscow, Tehran and Beijing became aware of what was perceived as an aggressive US foreign policy aimed at “full spectrum dominance”, worldwide control of political, economic and military developments. In best traditions of the famous chessboard dictum of the Lord Curzon, President Jimmy Carter’s National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, stated in 1997 that “America is now Eurasia’s arbiter, with no major Eurasian issue soluble without America’s participation or contrary to America’s interests. How the US both manipulates and accommodates the principal geostrategic players on the Eurasian chessboard and how it manages Eurasia’s key geopolitical pivots will be critical to the longevity and stability of America’s global primacy”.²¹⁶

The US long-term plans for Central Asia are not so clear yet, and barely have been finalized what provides us with a fruitful soil for various predictions and forecasts. It seems very possible that in particular the upsurge of a strong American military presence in Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Tajikistan at a time when the US campaign against the Taliban are already

²¹³ Prins, G. “Winners and Losers in the Oil War”, the Guardian, 26 November 2001

²¹⁴ Buyers L.M. ed. (2003), “Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues”, NY: Nova Science Publishers, Inc, p. 228

²¹⁵ Booth, K. & Dunne, T. (2002), “Worlds in Collision: Terror and the Future of Global Order”, Palgrave Macmillan, p. 2

²¹⁶ Brzezinski, Z. (1997), “The Grand Chessboard ”, NY: Perseus Book Group, pp. 194-195

concluded, is supposed to serve as the means of the lasting strategic leverage in the region. If our assumption is accurate, the American military presence in Central Asia may attain two significant aims: diminishing Russia's ability to affect the region through Russian support of individuals, such as local political leaders, and establishing a new, major surveillance post on China's activities in the region.²¹⁷

Russia's interests in Central Asia are easy to define. First among them is the presence of some 10 million Russian compatriots. Among political interests, Russia's economic interests in the region should not be underestimated – diversification of crude oil and natural gas, ferrous and non-ferrous metals, cotton and grain, gold and uranium; pipelines through Iran's territory as well as variety of intermediate products and manufactured goods all make Central Asia an attractive and significant commercial partner for Russia in a time when trade links throughout the former Soviet economy have been vanished and industrial production is suffering from a host of other factors.²¹⁸

From the stance of Russia, its withdrawal from Central Asia would be unthinkable and would not correspond to the most basic and general Russian security concerns. Russia's withdrawal from Central Asia would create an enormous geopolitical vacuum in the region, which would then become susceptible to the influence of hostile or potentially hostile outside powers as well as religious movements hostile to Russia, such as, for example, Islamic fundamentalism.²¹⁹

Other security issues have to be mentioned as well – arms sales and procurement to the region²²⁰ are not restricted only to the US and Russia, Israel also has its share in military cooperation with the region, namely with Uzbekistan.

If we summarize abovementioned statements, we could observe the categories of players involved in the New Great Game – state governments with their diplomatic representatives along with transnational companies tendering for regional oil, governmental organizations (such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization) in conjunction with non-governmental organizations and different religious extremist movements. Thus, coming out in 1991 and not having ended at present, the New Great Game is multifaceted, embracing various actors at different levels and ranging from economic to political, from social to cultural/ethnic, and from religious to security aspects. The end of the original Great Game commemorated with temporary interest withdrawal from the region until 1991 when the New Great Game took place.

²¹⁷ Jakypova C. "Kyrgyzstan: US Bolsters Strategic Plans for Region", IWPR's Reporting Central Asia 98, 11 January 2002.

²¹⁸ Snyder J.C. (1995), "After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia", Ft. McNair, Washington, DC: National Defense University Press, p. 58

²¹⁹ Ibid, p. 59; See also "Strategiya dlya Rossii", Nezavisimaya Gazeta, August 19, 1992

²²⁰ Lansford, T. "The Great Game Renewed? US–Russian Rivalry in the Arms Trade of South Asia"

5.1 Russia and Central Asia – Partnership or Dependent Relationship?

Russia is considered as a key player in the New Great Game. From the geographical perspective, Russia is in a more favorable position than the US, since Central Asia could be seen as a continuation of Russian southern borders. Initially, Russia had high hopes on Central Asia and the region was considered as a dependent partner of Russia because of remained leverages of pressure and strong historical and cultural ties. But Russian hopes had no soil to lean on, since the region expressed no desire to extend the relations on the same dependent level and turned its face to the West.

Russia's relationship with Central Asian republics has multifaceted and sophisticated nature because of historical background of these relations which has two planes - during the Soviet era and during the independence of Central Asian states after the dissolution of the Soviet Union. It is needless to say that Central Asian states were under close supervision of Moscow during the Soviet era and were quite dubious during the post-Soviet era. Apparently, Russia wants to restore the former relations with Central Asia using its leverages of pressure and other means to reach its aim. But this time the situation is somewhat different. Central Asia challenges to be an independent player in the New Great Game. The region has the capacity to implement this strategy and the structure of the international system nowadays could significantly help in this issue.

Russia has strong ties with Central Asian republics, most of all, in military sphere. There is a Collective Security Agreement between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Turkmenistan adheres to a course of "positive neutrality") which was signed in 1992 and, *de facto*, have no tools for its implementation. There are several treaties on cooperation, assistance, friendship and strategic partnership which strongly indicate the strategic interests of Russia in the region.²²¹

As we have already seen in the theoretical part, Central Asian states are incapable to be completely independent from Russia in military and defense spheres and create their own security umbrella yet. But being aware of that and after the Russian declaration of the former Soviet space as an area of "vital interests" for Russia, Central Asian leaders hastened to the West, especially to international organizations such as UN, NATO, OSCE etc. to ensure the security of Central Asian states. To reduce the domination of Central Asia by Russia, the Central Asian republics want to encircle the UN, NATO and OSCE to their security corridor, opposing to Russian dominance these international organizations and creating Euro-Central Asian system of security. Central Asian states actively participate in various OSCE and NATO initiatives, such

²²¹ Joshi, N. (2003), "Central Asia: the Great Game Replayed", Delhi: New Century Publications, p.28

as Partnership for Peace Program, which could serve as a strong indicator of their desire to be less dependent on Russia.

But this scenario does not meet the Russian interests in the region and after long debates and pressure on Central Asian republics Russia and Central Asian states signed the new collective agreement – Commonwealth Shield-2000, which provided Russia with more opportunities to be directly involved in Central Asia. It should be noted that this rapprochement between Russia and the region was on the wave of Central Asian's fear of closer cooperation with NATO under the above-mentioned Partnership for Peace Program in view of the NATO campaign in Kosovo in 1999 where the West supported a movement which was previously considered as a terrorist organization.²²² In general, the relationship between Central Asia and Russia has been developing on a cyclical scenario – from the coolness at the outset of 90s in XX century, when the nationalistic tendencies and a desire to get rid of Russian influence in Central Asia switching to the West were on the verge, to rather warm relations in last two years concerned with the dissatisfaction of the West, with the US ahead, on the situation on human rights and democracy in all Central Asian states, while Russia welcomed any attempt of Central Asian leaders to enhance the quality of bilateral relations, setting no requirements in turn.

Aftermath of 11 September: Changing Pattern of Russian-Central Asian Relationships

The events of 9/11 have seriously staggered Russian influence in Central Asia. The war on terror brought much change to the geopolitical environment in Central Asia, the most important of which should be considered the full-fledged US emergence in the region. The consequence of that event is a partial retreat of Russia from the region. The American military forces appeared on the territory of Central Asia, namely in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, under the campaign “Operation Enduring Freedom”. That was considered as a supplementary act to support the US economic initiatives.

Russia had no choice but to accept the fact of the US military presence in Central Asia. Moreover, Putin Administration offered support to the US to combat terrorism. That gesture had two-fold implication – on the one hand, by this act Russia explicitly admitted their infirmity to challenge the US on the Central Asian question which lied indigenously under the Russian influence and demonstrated to the world community that it has no Super Power status anymore; but on the other hand – it was a very good opportunity for Russia to change the perception of a question on Chechnya, which was immediately connected to Al-Qaeda and to the “axis of evil”. Furthermore, Russia signed one more ostentatious agreement of friendship, this time - Agreement on Strategic Partnership with the US (the previous one was signed with China) - one

²²² Joshi, N. (2003), “Central Asia: the Great Game Replayed”, pp. 29-30

step forward to rapprochement with the US after the end of the Cold War. In a nutshell, Russia used its chance for one hundred percent, winking out maximum utility from a seemingly losing situation.

But let's come back to Central Asia. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have apprehended the war on terror as a good opportunity to get rid of Russian influence and to obtain the US support, by welcoming the US military bases to their territory. Then, Tajikistan has followed its neighbors, however, with a slightly different aim – to counterbalance the dominant Russian position in Tajikistan. Kazakhstan remained loyal to Russia in this issue, but, most of all, because of deep dependency of the country from Russia - vast geographical border, huge ratio of Russian minority and intense military and trade relations with Russia have underpinned the Kazakh decision not to join physically the US campaign on terror, however the Kazakh government verbally supported the anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan and allowed over flights of US air forces through its territory. Turkmenistan has remained neutral to the war on terror, remaining somewhere in between in a famous Bush's statement: "Either you are with us or against us".

Thus, the interesting picture can be drawn – Central Asian states are divided under the spheres of influence between the US and Russia. While Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan are prone to the US patronage, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (in spite of the US engagement on Tajik territory) adhere to Russian "protectorate" and Turkmenistan remains "neutral" in many questions, but highly dependent on Russia in economic issues. These facts are the fruitful soil for various debates on the subject who has better chances to win in the New Great Game. But the picture would have not been full if we had not considered the US engagement in Central Asia.

5.2 The US Engagement in Central Asia – War on Terror or Strategic Interests?

The US is another key player in the New Great Game with its advantages and disadvantages to become an overall winner in it. If the Russian interests in the region are more or less understandable, the US interests could seem vague and unclear to many. In this regard, the following questions should be answered: Why is the US interested in Central Asia? What means do the US use in the pursuit of its interests in Central Asia?

Central Asia is considered as an area of strategic interests for the US such as, first of all, the energy resources of the region which could significantly reduce the dependency of the US on the Gulf's oil. Secondly, the geographical location of the region makes it a perfect place to conduct the global war on terror and to put some pressure on Russia and China. There are other minor interests of the US in the region such as new markets for the US goods and services as well as prevention of Central Asian states from taking the Islamic way of development rather

than secular one, but these interests have a petite value in the framework of this research, that is why it is no use in concentrating on them.

As we proceed further on, we can see that the US emergence in Central Asia has a long-term nature and it is going to increase in the foreseeable future. As it has been noted in the previous chapters (methodological and theoretical frameworks), the New Great Game is more complicated than the original one, where the parties concerned hide their true interests and means, using mass-media as a powerful tool in their aim. In this regard, as the most exponential case could be considered the words of Strobe Talbott, former American Deputy Secretary of State, who argued: *“For the last several years, it has been fashionable to proclaim, or at least to predict, a replay of the “Great Game” in Caucasus and Central Asia. The implication of course, is that the driving dynamic of the region, fueled and lubricated by oil, will be the competition of the great powers to the disadvantage of the people who live there. Our goal is to avoid, and actively to discourage that atavistic outcome. In pondering and practicing the geopolitics of oil, let’s make sure that we are thinking in terms appropriate to the XXI century and not the XIX. Let’s leave Rudyard Kipling and George McDonald Fraser where they belong – on the shelves of fiction. The Great Game which starred Kipling’s Kim and Fraser’s Flashman was very much of the zero-sum variety. What we want help bring about is just the opposite; we want to see all responsible players in the Caucasus and Central Asia be winners.”*²²³

Certainly, the US will do its best to promote the human rights and democracy in Central Asian states and, moreover, it will seek to establish a cooperative relations with other players of the New Great Game - Russia and China, but only until these intentions go in parallel with the main US interests in the region. But applying the principles of elementary logic we would see that since, obviously, nobody would want to share the natural resources of Central Asia on one’s own initiative, the constructive cooperation between the players with contradictory interests could not last for a long time, and thus, the following conclusion is undeniable – it is a game with a zero-sum scenario where Talbott’s words either idealistic or cynical.

One more aspect should be interesting in analyzing the US engagement in Central Asia, namely, how do Central Asian states perceive the emergence of the US on the geopolitics of the region. In general, Central Asian states see the US engagement in the region as a positive phenomenon. Although, there is disappointment of some Central Asian countries such as Kazakhstan in the US policy conducted in the region, because of explicit support of Uzbekistan as a potential leader in the region,²²⁴ the Central Asian states consider US involvement as useful for many reasons. Most of all, the economic benefits in the form of investments and aid they

²²³ Talbott, S. “A Farewell to Flashman: American Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia”, Speech before the Central Asia Institute, School of Advanced International Studies, The Johns Hopkins University, July 21, 1997

²²⁴ Buyers L.M. ed. (2003), “Central Asia in Focus: Political and Economic Issues”, p. 1

could obtain from these relationships. Secondly, the region has suffered from Islamic extremists many times which are financed from the abroad. Consequently, the decision to join the anti-terrorist campaign by some of Central Asian countries was dictated by the necessity to eradicate the radical Islamic groups in their own countries. And, thirdly, more players on the arena help to significantly diversify the scope of multilateral relations for Central Asian countries. In other words, as it was noted many times before, the region itself is a strategic player in the New Great Game with the possibility to end up as the only winner.

All the above-mentioned claims should push us to a hasty conclusion that the US will continue to dominate in the region, but in reality it is not as simple as it seems. The US continues to push non-democratic regimes to change, what brings much dissatisfaction among Central Asian elites. For instance, in 2004 the most loyal American ally – Uzbekistan has signed the Agreement of Strategic Partnership with Russia, being dissatisfied with constant American complaints on the questions of human rights and democracy in the country. This example clearly shows the maneuvers of Central Asian states to find the most suitable place for themselves in the New Great Game and demonstrates that everything is unstable in the question of strategic domination of the region.

6. Conclusions

6.1 Security and Strategic Importance of Central Asia

The task of this work was to assess and analyze the strategic importance of Central Asia, the role and interests of regional powers as well as the sources of threat to the security of the Central Asian states and to explore the ways to mitigate those threats. The role of great powers in the region has been analyzed in a close contact with the theoretical framework providing us with the empirical findings on the future scenarios in Central Asia. The theory of offensive realism has completely encapsulated the interests of the great powers in the region. Moreover, as we have seen in the empirical part of this work, the theoretical framework has met our expectations in all aspects, thereby demonstrating the viability of the theories chosen regarding the contemporary processes in Central Asia. Furthermore, as we have seen the region's vast natural resources and its geographical significance have increased the competition among the major powers to dominate Central Asia by using the available means. This rivalry poses a potential threat to region's stability unless major powers abandon their zero-sum politics for more co-operative ways to mitigate their interests, which seems unlikely in the near future. The possibility of the regional co-operation to solve the more direct and immediate conflict potentials that originate at regional and domestic levels is also far in the horizon, as the regional states

stress on their differences rather on their common interests. Therefore, it is left to time and to the future leaders, who would understand the problems at their root and find an adequate solution to them for the benefit of all.

In the long-run, assuming the revival of Russia as a great military and economic power, a process of reintegration between the Russian Federation and Central Asian states into a new form of super-ethnic integration cannot be ruled out, even though taking into consideration the strong reluctance of Central Asian states to jump to the scenario had already been experienced.

Also, long-term relations between Central Asian republics and Russia strongly depend on the scope and duration of US presence in the region, Russia's counterpoising activities in Central Asia and the situation in Afghanistan.

6.2 Russia and the United States in Central Asia: Cooperation or Endless Rivalry?

As a logical continuation of the previous chapter and as a final aim of this work, the following question has to be asked: Who has better chances to end the New Great Game as a winner? At the very outset, we have to make a reservation that a winner of the New Great Game is a superficial notion which could cast doubt on the answer, since different academicians and observers call for different prizes of the New Great Game. In order to avoid any ambiguity, we continue to stick to our understanding of the primary prize of the Game, namely energy resources.

In this regard, the words of Ariel Cohen can shed some light on the issue. *"If Russia pursues a co-operative engagement with the West in the Caucasus, it will strengthen its economic and political integration with the West. However, if it chooses to challenge the West and reverts its old imperial ways, Moscow likely will become increasingly hostile toward the West and other areas as well. The oil and gas reserves of the Caucasus and Central Asia are vital to Western geostrategic and economic interests in the XXI century. They have the potential to secure prosperity and economic growth bolstered by low oil prices. In addition, these resources are key to ensuring revenues and, with them, the sovereignty of the Newly Independent States. In addition, the wealth brought by oil can fuel both economic and democratic development in the Caucasus and Central Asia, fostering the independence and freedom of countries which serve in turn as an obstacle to potential Russian imperial expansion...A major campaign to assert influence in the Russian "near abroad" would be a setback for U.S. interests. In addition, control of the Caucasus and Central Asia would allow Russia geographical proximity to, and closer cooperation with, the anti-Western regimes in Tehran and Baghdad. Together, an anti-Western Russia, Iran, and Iraq, if they desired, could pursue a common interest in driving up the price of oil. To counter this prospect, the US and the West need to*

*convince the Russians to approach the oil question to Eurasia as an economic, not geopolitical, opportunity. The US should reassure Russia that its companies will be included in future economic ventures in the region. Russian companies alone do not have the technological and financial resources to develop the hydrocarbon reserves of Eurasia. They will need Western oil companies to do that. To become richer, Russia needs American and Western help. To foster peace and stability in Eurasia, America needs Russian help. A **modus vivendi** can be reached only if Russia accepts that the principles of free markets, democracy, and the state sovereignty take precedence over the outdated geopolitical practices of the past century.”*²²⁵

According to this scenario, there is no winner, since the end of this battle is in interdependency of Russia and the US. Precisely, the US views Russia as a country, being able to play a stabilizing role in Central Asia, but with one reservation – Russia should not seek to dominate the region or exclude Western and any other involvement. Yes, that is all true, but... not in the question of energy resources and as we have seen in the theoretical framework of this paper - according to the main assumption of the theory of offensive realism, the US as well as Russia would do their best to maximize their power at the expense of each other in the framework of the New Great Game. To sum up everything, the New Great Game assures to be much more complex than the original Great Game, but whether it will operate on a zero-sum basis or develop to a collaborative approach is a matter to be disclosed in the future.

Nearly a hundred years ago, on August 31, 1907, the original Great Game ended when Russian foreign minister Count Alexander Izvolsky and the British Ambassador Sir Arthur Nicholson signed a secret treaty in which both countries determined their imperial interests in Central Asia. The Russian government acknowledged that Afghanistan would be under the British sphere of influence, whereas British government pledged never to argue the Tsar's rule over Central Asia. How long the New Great Game is going to continue in the XXI century and how long it is going to occupy our minds, and is it to end the game peacefully, is anyone's guess.²²⁶

6.3 Recommendations for Further Research

The empirical findings of this work could be elaborated further on, since the New Great Game is not a conserved process and it will be continued in the future to come. More events will bring more *mental pabulum* in the field. For example, the US withdrawal from Central Asia or more active interference from China can make some serious changes. These changes could be a

²²⁵ Cohen, A. “The New Great Game: Oil Politics in the Caucasus and Central Asia” at <http://www.heritage.org/Research/RussiaandEurasia/BG1065.cfm> accessed on 2004/12/14

²²⁶ Kleveman, L. (2003), “The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia”, NY: Atlantic Monthly Press, pp. 263-264

fruitful soil for further research in order to explain how and why these processes have occurred and what would be their implications for the region as a whole and for positions of other regional powers involved in the New Great Game in particular. In a similar way, strategic importance of regional powers in Central Asia could be examined and analyzed on the basis of this research.

To provide with some hints for further research the thought-provoking questions have been included in the Appendix 2 which are based on this research and could become its logical continuation.

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Appendix 1: The Map of Central Asia

Commonwealth of Independent States - Central Asian States



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Source: www.eurasia.net

Appendix 2: The Questions for an Interview (Further Research)

1. How can external powers set the sphere of influence in Central Asia?
2. What are the interests of regional powers?
3. How many external powers meet the needs of the region?
4. Did war on terror increase the opportunity for collective security?
5. To ensure the democracy and human rights observation in Central Asia is of primary or secondary interest for regional powers?
6. How significant the role of multinational companies in Central Asia?
7. Could the Central Asian states sell the uranium to the “wrong hands” in order to pay for their import?
8. In general, the involvement of regional powers is fraught with positive or negative consequences for the region?