

CONTEMPORARY GEOSTRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT OF CENTRAL ASIA: THE US, RUSSIAN AND CHINESE PLANS OF INTEGRATION

Shabir Ahmad Khan and Suleman Yousaf***

Abstract

The idea of integration is central to the contemporary geostrategic environment of Central Asia. Each of the great powers that is Russia, China and America has been working on its plan of integration in order to give orientation to the region in own preferred direction, further her own influence and at the same time deny that to the others (rivals). Cooperation and competition is evident in the evolving contesting and competing interests of the major powers. The Central Asian Republics are playing these powers off one another to maximize their own interests and secure regime security. China vis-à-vis United States of America enjoys geographical advantage of close proximity to the region while relatively to the Russian Federation China enjoys huge economic and financial leverage. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a benchmark Project of One Belt One Road (OBOR) is closely related to this geostrategic environment of Central Asia as it would integrate the landlocked region to Arabian Sea and beyond efficiently and effectively.

Key words: *Russia, China, Central Asia, USA, CPEC, Integration*

Introduction

The breakup of former Soviet Union gave birth to a vacuum in Central Asia. The Central Asian Republics (CARs) became vulnerable to heavy pressures due to internal and external factors. At the same time major powers sought to penetrate and fill this vacuum and force the developments

* Presently serves as Professor & Director, Area Study Centre (Russia, China & Central Asia) University of Peshawar.

** Ph.D. Research Scholar, National Defense University, Islamabad.

in a direction benefiting their own economic and strategic interests. Central Asian space has been contested for influence among major powers since the nineteenth century. The intensive rivalry mainly between the Russian Empire and Great Britain during the nineteenth century for establishing influence over Central Asia is popularly known as the Great Game. The term Great Game was coined by Arthur Connolly (1807-1848) for describing diplomatic and intelligence warfare between Tsarist Russia and Great Britain for dominating Central Asia; however it was fictionalized by British Novelist Rudyard Kipling (1865-1936) in his famous novel 'Kim' (1901).¹ The renewed geo-strategic competition in Central Asia albeit with more and new players has been described as New Great Game by several analysts however it seems that the New York Times in 1996 used the term for first time.² The struggle is about winning spheres of influence for trans-continental trade-corridors, energy pipelines and military basis. The major players Russia, China and United States are forcing the developments to take shape in a direction benefiting their own interests. Each of the contesting state has its own grand strategy for regional integration and access to markets. Likewise the conflicting interests and competitive approaches are to deny access to rivals.

The Russians are old players of the game and enjoying geographical proximity along with historical leverage and influence. However in the post-Soviet era Russia has been facing economic challenges and therefore its influence in the region has somewhat diminished. The Russian plan is to integrate the region through Eurasian Union. Chinese enjoy the geographical proximity along with economic rise and is best positioned to integrate and give orientation to Central Asia. The Chinese plan is based on the One Belt One Road vision (OBOR). The American plan for the new region has been the New Silk Road initiative to integrate the region through Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). So the convergence and conflict of interests have a price. Central to the competition in Central Asia, the major powers have their own declaratory and operational policies and therefore the post-Soviet Central Asian space is exposed to a strategic game that has consequences. America views China and Russia as strategic challenges. Russia views United States of America (USA) as a strategic rival and has opted for close collaboration with China to counter USA in the region. China seeks to balance India regionally and USA globally while USA has been expanding strategic partnership with India to balance China regionally and globally. New political and geo-economic alliances,

¹ Shabir Ahmad Khan and Saima Kyani, "Pipeline Politics in Central Asia: Paradox of Competitive/Cooperative Relations between the United States, Russia and China", pp: 57-83 in *Central Asia* No. 73 (Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Winter 2013), 60.

² The Editor, "New Great Game in Asia" (New York Times, January 2, 1996), retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/01/02/opinion/the-new-great-game-in-asia.html>, (accessed April 4, 2017).

alignments and re-alignments are in gestation with aim of balancing and re-balancing major powers. The region's orientation will be mainly determined by the integration plans of USA, Russia and China.

China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is a strategic maneuver to bypass the American occupied unstable, insecure Afghanistan in access to Central Asia. CPEC adds an economic dimension to the historically strategic and nuclear cooperation and relations between Pakistan and China. The inner crescent i.e. Eurasia and Heartland i.e. Central Asia are up for grabs through OBOR and CPEC. In the contemporary geostrategic environment of Central Asia, the idea of integration is central. Any power that integrates Central Asia efficiently with the global markets will be on victory stand. The cooperative/competitive Great Powers Structural Frameworks are American New Silk Road initiative announced in 2011, Russian Eurasian Union announced in 2012 and Chinese OBOR declared in 2013, each plan is being discussed in some detail in this paper. The work also looks into the responses of CARs as their policy actions. The hypothesis is that amongst the integration plans of the troika, Chinese OBOR in which CPEC plays the role of a backbone will be successful in structuralization of the region as elaborated in later part of this particular work. It is important to discuss the USA's and Russia's plans of integration prior to OBOR and CPEC to have a clear picture for the sake of comparison and drawing conclusions.

The theoretical framework for this particular piece of work is Mackinder's Heartland theory. Halford John Mackinder (1861-1947) in his Heartland theory presented Central Asia as the pivot area of history. In 1919 Mackinder summarized his theory as "who rules Easter Europe Commands the heartland; who rules the heartland commands the world islands (i.e. Eurasia) and who rules the world islands commands the world."³ Nicholas J. Spykman modified this theory later on and stated that the Power which controls the Eurasian landmass controls the world.⁴ The former National Security Advisor to US Government from 1977 to 1981 Zbigniew Brzezinski has also emphasized the significance of Eurasia, according to his theory control over Central Asia and Afghanistan is key to control over Eurasia.⁵ It seems that USA made efforts to use Afghanistan as a springboard to enter Central Asia and ultimately establish its influence over Eurasian landmass. USA's declared agenda was against terrorism and promotion of democracy, human rights and economic reforms in Central Asia, however the operational policy seemed to minimize Russian influence and to pursue a

³ Mackinder, Halford J., "The Geographical Pivot of history (1904)", pp:298-321, in *The Geographical Journal* vol. 170, No. 4 (UK: Royal Geographical Society, December 2004), retrieved from www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131016_MackinderTheGeographicalJournal.pdf (accessed April 5, 2017).

⁴ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Dynamics of Trade Corridors and Energy Pipeline Politics", pp: 71-90 in *Pakistan's Strategic Environment; Post 2014*, ed. Mushir Anwar (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2014), 75.

⁵ Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chess Board* (New York: Basic Books, 1998), 39.

policy of non-Russian, non-Chinese and non-Iranian routes for energy pipeline.⁶

China in its Go West policy, initially settled the border issues with CARs through Shanghai Five mechanism which later on became Shanghai Cooperation Organization(SCO) and later on developed smooth energy and trade relations with Central Asia. The stability and development of Xinjiang is closely related to energy and trade relations with Central Asia. During the last decade China has replaced Russia as the major trading partner with the region. China however is careful about the security issues in the region which is a sensitive case for Russia. Importantly China is supporting local regimes in the region for the sake of security and stability.⁷ Russia on the other hand, after a span of ten years i.e. the decade of 1990s, has been resurging in the region particularly after 2001, having a set of objectives including; using the region as a buffer to Islamic South, political stability, creation of single economic space and protection of ethnic Russians in the region.⁸ Russia in comparison to USA and China is extensively linked to the region as an array of historical political, social and economic ties. Moscow still considers Central Asia as its backyard, and is in the quest for a privileged role in the region through traditional and historical linkages.

Central Asian Republics' Foreign Policy and Aspirations

Central Asia Republics, though institutionally weak and size wise tiny except Kazakhstan and having low bargaining power vis-à-vis the troika i.e. Russia, China and USA, are nonetheless aware of Central Asia's wealth and significance. They are pursuing policies of balancing and playing the great powers off one another to maximize their own national interests as well as extract benefits for the ruling class. The local rules in Central Asia according to Alexander Cooley are the regime security and personal benefits of the ruling class.⁹ In the geo-strategic Currents of Central Asia, there are several major powers particularly the troika vies for influence and consequently the authority and influence of a single power is diminished due to other balancing powers presence as available option. This 'multiple principals' problem/opportunity enables CARs to shirk their individual commitments to any patron, weakening the overall control of the objectively more powerful actors.¹⁰ This has resulted in a somewhat strong position for CARs. However

⁶ Khan and Kyani, "Pipeline Politics in Central Asia: Paradox of Competitive/Cooperative Relations between the United States, Russia and China", 80.

⁷ Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 75-95.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 51.

⁹ *Ibid.*, 16-29.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 9.

the bargaining power of CARs vis-à-vis the great powers varies from state to state depending upon institutional structures and resource endowment.

Uzbekistan has tried to pursue an independent policy during the 1990s and forged closer ties with Washington. After the ‘Tulip Revolution’ in Kyrgyzstan and the Andijon episode in Uzbekistan, Tashkent accused the American Embassy for the uprising and social unrest in Andijon region and gave a deadline of 90 days for the evacuation of American base from Karshi-Khanabad under the umbrella of SCO in 2005.¹¹ Moscow and Beijing supported the Uzbek official stance on the crises while Washington demanded a probe for the event. Uzbekistan distanced itself from Washington and embraced the Russian security role and came back to the Russian block. Kazakhstan due to its long border with Russia and its demographic and economic linkages with Russia remained closed to Moscow however it has also developed relations with other major powers pursuing a ‘multi vector’ policy i.e. having relations in many directions. During the last decade, the economic revival and political stability has enabled Kazakhstan to pursue a more prudent policy having political and economic relations in all directions. Turkmenistan in reality pursued an independent foreign policy by declaring a policy of positive neutrality. The policy has earned some concrete awards in the shape of gas pipelines to China and in the form of internal stability for Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan has kept the population of around five million satisfied with different kind of subsidies, has avoid drastic economic changes and has no ambitions for regional leadership or influence in contrast to Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Kyrgyzstan due to the lack of hydrocarbon resources and mountainous terrain not suitable for agrarian purposes embraced the directives of world financial institutions but experienced turmoil in the form of revolutions. Tajikistan the most impoverished of CARs earlier could not pursue any definable foreign policy due to civil war and still looks towards Russia for security and economic support.

CARs in the immediate post-Soviet period were looking towards the West for capital and technology in their transition towards a capitalistic economic system. During the 1990s Russia could not pay attention to the region due to her own economic and political transitional problems. Nor did Russia expect that the world will be so closely engaged in the region. China was engaged in making grounds for long-term relations with the region by resolving the borders issues. At the eve of the twenty first century, CARs had achieved economic stability by reverting the negative growths in their economies though the Central Asian local environment is full of suspicions owing to a number of factors such as border disputes, water issues, inter-ethnic issues and endemic corruption. Nevertheless the oil and particularly

¹¹ Shabir Ahmad Khan, “Tashkent in November 2005”, pp: 167-176 in *Central Asia* No. 58 (Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Summer 2006) 171.

gas pipelines from Turkmenistan via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan and via Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to China are best examples of regional cooperation. CARs also need to simplify procedures for border crossing in terms of time, service and price/cost to make continental mode of transport competitive and attract more traffic. If CARs cannot address hazards in border crossing, even the development of trade corridors may not attract significant traffic growth.

Further the colour revolutions¹² added to the suspicions of ruling class in the CARs regarding the US aims and objectives of regime changes in the region. On the other hand CARs seem to be more comfortable with Russia and China who always supported the regime security and internal stability in the region. Russia and China have real stakes in regional stability and in keeping 'their backyard' politically stable and economically developed. The Central Asian economies are heavily dependent on commodity exports, and the export basket as well as economic structures need to be diversified. Turkmenistan exports mainly gas, Kazakhstan oil and Uzbekistan exports cotton and gold. The low commodity prices make the economies vulnerable to shocks due to the lack of diversification. If gas supply from Turkmenistan to China is disrupted for any reason, the total economic performance of Turkmenistan might collapse. Likewise Tajikistan is heavily dependent on remittances from Russia and foreign aid. Kyrgyzstan is also heavily dependent on aid and loan from Russia. Drug trafficking from Afghanistan through Tajikistan's porous border is yet another problem particularly for Russia. If Tajikistan becomes instable like the 1990s the 7000 Russian troops present in Tajikistan would not stand idly. Uzbekistan would assist the north Tajikistan's people as it did during the 1990s while Iran would support the Islamists. Pakistan cannot remain aloof to that kind of situation as instability naturally spills over regionally. That is why the regional states are the real stakeholders in the regional security and peace. Therefore a regional approach is needed to address the regional security issues.

USA's Integration Plan: The New Silk Road Initiative

The American New Silk Road Initiative was announced by Hilary Clinton the then US Secretary of State in 2011 in India by declaring revitalization of the ancient Silk Route.¹³ The US initiative has been supported by Asian Development Bank (ADB) through CAREC program. The plan has been to provide assistance to Afghanistan and link it intra-regionally. The main objective of the initiative is to integrate Central and

¹² The Western backed revolutions in former Soviet States like Rose in Georgia, Orange in Ukraine and Tulip in Kyrgyzstan.

¹³ Vladimir Fedorenko, *The New Silk Road Initiative in Central Asia*, (Washington: Rethink Institution, August, 2013), retrieved from <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Fedorenko-The-New-Silk-Road.pdf>, (accessed April 3, 2017)

South Asia via Afghanistan for the benefit of US backed government in Afghanistan. An important aim of the New Silk Road initiative has been stated as an exit strategy from Afghanistan and to fill the void of departing military.¹⁴ The declaratory policy of USA has been to develop cross-border infrastructure for regional economic development and cooperation, promotion of international trade, providing space for civil society groups, human rights promotion and democracy development.¹⁵ However such supports to civil society groups on the cost of state institutions and regime change policies disguised in democracy development programs enlarged the gap between CARs and USA. Geo-politically, in the post-Soviet CARs, two prime groups have been contesting for the natural wealth of the region i.e. USA and EU (European Union) versus Sino-Russian block in the form of pipeline politics. According to Zhao Huasheng Central Asia is the only place where all great powers converge and despite declared fervor for cooperation the contest and competition is high due to strategic distrust particularly between the two groups that is US-EU and Russia-China.¹⁶

Initially under the operational policy, USA tried to diversify the EU energy supply and to reduce EU dependence on Russian energy by linking Caspian and Central Asian energy resources with Europe bypassing Russian territory.¹⁷ The US also did not support Iran and China for pipeline routes and Iran was particularly left outside of the New Silk Road initiative. The Central Asia South Asia electricity transmission project CASA 1000 and Trans-Afghan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline are projects under the New Silk Road initiative supported through the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank. But the lack of trust between USA and Pakistan and instability in Afghanistan are still the major hurdles in their materialization as both the projects have to pass through Afghanistan. The US drawdown from Afghanistan and the lack of any serious policy for the region under the new US administration of President Donald Trump adds to American difficulties in pursuit of the New Silk Road initiative effectively. Furthermore USA is a far away team, has no direct geographic link to the region in contrast to Russia and China while USA's capabilities to project itself world over is constantly diminishing due 'imperial overstretch'.¹⁸ US authority and capacity seems to be reduced to coerce or persuade other major

¹⁴ Erica Marat, *Following the New Silk Road*, The Diplomat, October 22, 2014, retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/following-the-new-silk-road/> (accessed April 19, 2017)

¹⁵ Fedorenko, *The New Silk Road Initiative in Central Asia*

¹⁶ Zhao Huasheng, "Central Asia in Chinese strategic Thinking" pp: 171-186 in., *The New Great Game: China and South and Central Asia in the Era of Reform*, ed. Thomas Fingar, (USA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 181

¹⁷ Khan and Kyani, "Pipeline Politics in Central Asia: Paradox of Competitive/Cooperative Relations between the United States, Russia and China", 77

¹⁸ Imperial Overstretch is hypothesis which suggests that when a World Power projects itself everywhere in the world beyond its capacity or tries to extend itself to maintain hegemony, expand strategic means and maintain economic commitments beyond its ability and power.

and minor players and similarly the other players have been acquiring more scope for pursuing independent foreign policies.¹⁹ The US initiative was also perceived with great skepticism in China and the broader region and Beijing doubts the US political and economic commitment to support the major projects.²⁰ It is evident from the fact that TAPI and CASA 1000 appear to be stalled projects. China also appears to see little to no benefit from coordinating its efforts in the region with those of US because Beijing perceives American political and strategic maneuvers in the region to contain China as it is demonstrated by the US-India collaboration. At the same time it is concerned about American efforts in the region to discourage its allies from joining Chinese led development bank.²¹ Critics argue that the US unnecessarily ‘geopoliticizes’ its New Silk Road initiative by deliberately excluding important regional states like Russia, China and Iran.²²

The US initiative seems to be less focused on capital-intensive projects while more attention has been given to address the regulatory and technical challenges faced by the region. For instance USA established a Border Management Staff College in Dushanbe, Tajikistan and a Custom Training Staff College in Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan as projects of the New Silk Road initiative.²³ Likewise the re-framing of Afghanistan-Pakistan Transit Trade agreement (APTTA) and providing support to Cross Border Trade Agreement between Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan are other examples under the US New Silk Road initiative. US State Department emphasizes to facilitate border crossing with reduced time and improved security by developing ‘software’ in the form of harmonized national custom policies and by bringing regional states into bilateral and multilateral trade arrangements.²⁴ The US integration plan has hardly materialized on the ground, apparently due to carrying a profound geostrategic face rather than geo-economic. According to a Eurasian expert Michal Romanovski, “the US New Silk Road initiative is a misfire because it is poorly financed and totally Afghanistan-oriented”.²⁵

¹⁹ Bobo Lo, *Axis of Convenience* (London: Chatam House, 2008), 24

²⁰ Thomas Zimmerman, *The New Silk Roads: China, the US and Future of Central Asia* (New York University: Centre on International Cooperation, October, 2015) retrieved from http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/zimmerman_new_silk_road_final_2.pdf, (accessed April 17, 2017)

²¹ Ibid.

²² Marat, *Following the New Silk Road*

²³ Fedorenko, *The New Silk Road Initiative in Central Asia*

²⁴ *U.S. Support for the New Silk Road*, US Department of State, retrieved from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/index.htm> (accessed April 23, 2017)

²⁵ Michal Romanowski, “Decoding Central Asia: What’s Next for the US Administration?”, *The Diplomat*, February 28, 2017, retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/decoding-central-asia-whats-next-for-the-us-administration/> (accessed April 19, 2017)

Russia's Eurasian Union

Russia in the immediate post-Soviet period pursued a policy of band-wagoning vis-à-vis US led West under Yeltsin. The Atlanticts were advocating close economic and political relations with the West and were dominant over the Eurasianists in the realm of foreign policy formulating. Russia was facing severe transitional issues and economically was quite weak to shape and implement any effective policy towards the region. At the same time Russia did not expect that the World will be so closely engaged in Central Asia. Further after the Washington's refusal of Yeltsin's fantasies of equality, Moscow started framing a policy of balancing the USA. The thrust for shaping a multipolar world order made China the natural option for Moscow. Likewise the US led Western physical presence in Central Asia made the region Putin's first foreign visit's destination in 2001 and a focus of foreign policy since then. Russia considers Central Asia as its backyard, its traditional zone of influence and asserting herself in the region through a number of bilateral and multilateral approaches which include 'Union Treaty' with Uzbekistan signed in 2005,²⁶ the Eurasian Economic Union, the Custom Union, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), and the SCO. The Eurasian Economic Community group was founded in the year 2000 comprising Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan as a successor to Central Asian Economic Cooperation Organization.²⁷ The Custom Union (Close Regionalism) was announced in 2010, CSTO in 2002, SCO in 2001 while the current Russian plan for regional integration is to create a common economic space in Eurasia including the CARs through the development of Eurasian Union announced in 2012. The Eurasian Economic Community was dissolved on January 1, 2015 and replaced by Eurasian Economic Union including Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.²⁸ Tajikistan has yet to join the Eurasian Economic Union.

According to Russia, main building blocks of contemporary era which the Russians call "new international architecture" are regional integration associations²⁹ or 'macro-blocks. Russia's current foreign policy objective is 'Eurasianism' and the emergence of Eurasian Union is strategically important for Russia to successfully compete globally.³⁰ Russia considers itself as a Eurasian civilization and not a western or eastern, so this Project of Eurasian Union is not important economically but also closely related to

²⁶ Khan, "Tashkent in November 2005", 173

²⁷ Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, 59

²⁸ Evgeny Vinokurov, "Eurasian Economic Union: Current state and preliminary results" *Russian Journal of Economics* Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2017, retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405473917300041> accessed May 2, 2017

²⁹ Igor Torbakov, "Managing Imperial Peripheries: Russia and China in Central Asia" in, *The New Great Game*, ed. Thomas Fingar (USA: Stanford University Press, 2016), 251

³⁰ *Ibid*, 252

Russia's identity. At the same time Russia desires to use Eurasian Union as one of the poles in the contemporary world and to become an efficient link between Europe and Asia.³¹ Eurasian Union Project is the reflection of Russia's prized geographical location and its bi-continental (Euro-Asian) dimension which is essential for Russia if it has to be reckoned as a major global power. Importantly strong influence in Central Asia will furnish Russia's political, strategic and economic objectives in rest of Asia.³² Russia's evolving strategy in Central Asia has been three folded:

- i. The perception of great powerness as historical regional leader
- ii. To use the region as a buffer and security imperative that may stem from regional volatility and instability
- iii. And to check probable massive influx of labor migrants from Central Asia as a consequence of Eurasian Union³³.

Besides, Russia desires to achieve a set of outcomes in the region i.e. a leading role with a compliant China following in its walk particularly in the security realm, absent or least interested West and no threat from Islamic fundamentalism. Russia also recognizes that there are limitations to Russian power to achieve this set of objectives vis-à-vis strength of China and its leverages in the region. Any frontal assault on China-Central Asia deals can be detrimental or counterproductive for Russo-Sino relations and Russia's relations with Central Asia. Central Asia can be a source of tension between Russia and China in long-term as Stephen Blank points out that "the signs that China is eclipsing Central Asia, Russia started its plan of Eurasian Union as a Custom Union to inhibit Chinese economic penetration and also that without these regional states who are member of Eurasian Union, Russia cannot effectively operate as a major Asian power".³⁴ Kazakhstan has become more important to Russia as it controls the southern border of Custom Union with other CARs and has become an indispensable unit of the Eurasian Union which has attracted over \$160 b in Foreign Direct Investment since 1993.³⁵ However Central Asia has also the potential to become focus of a lasting convergence of interest between Russia and China by integrating Eurasian Union and OBOR for a win win situation in all

³¹ Vladimir Putin, "Novi Integratsionnee Proektdlya Evrazii: Budushee Kotori Zozhdaetsia Cevodnia" (New Integration Project for Eurasia: Future in Making Today), published in *Izvestia*, October 3, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/press/246>, The Russian Embassy in UK, 04/10/2011, (accessed April 19, 2017)

³² Torbakov, "Managing Imperial Peripheries: Russia and China in Central Asia", 253

³³ Ibid

³⁴ Stephen Blank, "The Intellectual Orgin of the Eurasian Union" in *Putin's Grand Strategy: Eurasia and its Discontents*, ed., S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, (Washington: Central Asia-Caucasia Institute, 2014) retrieved from <https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/1409GrandStrategy.pdf>, (accessed April 3, 2017)

³⁵ Invest in Kazakhstan, 10 Reasons to Invest in Kazakhstan, (Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Canada, no date) retrieved from <http://kazembassy.ca/invest-in-kazakhstan/>, (accessed April 24, 2017)

directions. Sino-Russian partnership does carry a threat to the US led West but it is also worth mentioning here that this partnership also carries a measure of stability and predictability in form of a multipolar world order having balancing poles.

The geostrategic construct of sphere of influence in Central Asia is at the root of strategic competition between Russia and USA. Russia considers former Soviet space including Central Asia as her privileged sphere of influence while USA explicitly rejects this notion and also Russia's right to dominate the former Soviet space.³⁶ However this is not the case with Russia-China relations particularly in Central Asian context as mentioned above. It is evident from the pipeline politics in Central Asia that when Georgia helped the US led West in diversifying its energy supply by constructing more oil and gas pipelines bypassing Russian territory e.g. Baku-Tbilisi-Jehan (BTC) pipeline, it was attacked by Russia in 2008. Likewise the case of Crimea in Ukraine which is one of the main conduits of Russian energy to Western Europe, was dealt harshly by Russia. On the other hand China has already built a number of oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia which are currently operational for the last many years but Russia did not respond in that manner. There can be three probable reasons for Russia's behavior towards Chinese engagement in Central Asia:

- i. Russia has no control or not in a position to stop and counter China-Central Asia collaboration because this relationship is mutually beneficial for China and Central Asia.
- ii. Russia has chosen to collaborate with China to counter USA in the region as Russia single handedly cannot do this.
- iii. Thirdly and most importantly the eastward movement of Central Asian energy diminishes the chance of Central Asian energy competition with Russia for European market.³⁷

Further the unipolar world since the breakup of former Soviet Union has become more anarchic, instable and dangerous. In a unipolar world system a hegemon must protect and respect the sovereignty of other states and when it is not the case with in the global system then it gives birth to dissatisfaction with in the system and states try to increase their capabilities and challenges or try to replace the hegemon.³⁸ It seems the case with Sino-Russian cooperation particularly in Central Asia to counter US maneuvers in the region. Russia at the same time values Pakistan's geographical location and desires to assist Pakistan in its peaceful integration into the multipolar Eurasian framework being constructed by Russia-Chinese strategic

³⁶ Lo, *Axis of Convenience*, 97

³⁷ Khan and Kyani, "Pipeline Politics in Central Asia: Paradox of Competitive/Cooperative Relations between the United States, Russia and China", 73

³⁸ Michael O. Slobodchiko, *Strategic Cooperation: Overcoming the Barriers of Global Anarchy* (UK: Lexington Books, 2013), 6

cooperation while multimodal CPEC provides the best opportunity to link Eurasia with South Asia.³⁹

China and Central Asia in Post-Soviet Era

China being a world leading energy consumer is attracted by the region's surplus energy resources available at the doorstep. The hydrocarbon resources available at doorstep make Central Asia a natural choice for China. The Russian factor remains important in China's policy towards Central Asia as Beijing first went to Moscow and then to Central Asia i.e. China first improved its relations with Russia by recognizing Russia's historical place in the region. In trade relations China has replaced Russia as a major trading partner with the region while several gas and oil pipelines have become operational. China has so far pursued a policy of non-intervention in the region and is being playing according to the local rules i.e. regime security and personal interests of the ruling class.⁴⁰ China, therefore, has pursued a pragmatic and economic oriented policy towards Central Asia since 1991 and has been following that in its New Silk Road Project i.e. OBOR having no ideological or hidden agenda attached to its investment plans. China is very cautious to Russia's sensitivities and maintains political neutrality even amongst the CARs. China refrains from investment in any disputed project for instance China announced to not invest in Rogun Dam Project until and unless Tajikistan and Uzbekistan resolve their dispute.⁴¹ It seems that Central Asia is at core of OBOR as Central Asia provides overland connectivity to European market which is important in terms of trade.

On the other hand Central Asia as a landlocked region desperately needs investment in cross-border connectivity infrastructure development which China offers.⁴² China's strategic partnership with Russia is important to develop its cooperation with Central Asia. Further Russia acts as a security provider to Central Asia while China acts as a banker to the region's development. Chinese investment in CARs has passed over \$30.5 billion during 2005 to 2014 while Chinese trade volume with the region reached \$50 billion in 2014.⁴³ This sort of relationship between Russia and China is highly valuable to the CARs and they appreciate it through their behaviors

³⁹ Andrew Korybko, *Pakistan a Zipper to Eurasian Integration* (Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2015), retrieved from <https://en.riss.ru/analysis/18882/> (accessed April 11, 2017)

⁴⁰ Cooley, *Great Games Local Rules*, 79

⁴¹ Fedorenko, *The New Silk Road Initiative in Central Asia*

⁴² LIM Tai Wei, "China's Pivot to Central and South Asia" pp: 269-281 in *China's One Belt One Road*, ed. LIM Tai Wei, Henry CHAN Hong Lee and others (London: Imperial College Press, 2016), 272

⁴³ Tao Wang and Rachel Yampolsky, "Will China and Russia's Partnership in Central Asia Last?" *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2015 <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/will-china-and-russias-partnership-in-central-asia-last/> (accessed April 11, 2017)

towards these giant neighbours. Further China does not intend or try to impede Central Asia and neither it opposes Russia's Eurasian Union rather seeks to complement it.⁴⁴

China's One Belt One Road (OBOR)

OBOR was announced by President of China in September 2013 with the aim of developing connectivity infrastructure to integrate the Asian, African and European continents on the basis of 'Open Regionalism'. More than 68 countries of globe have shown interest in the Project, having around 4.4 billion people i.e. 70 percent of global population generating 55 percent of global GNP and hold 75 percent of known energy resources.⁴⁵ Six corridors have been planned to develop under the OBOR; CPEC, China-Mongolia-Russia, New Eurasian Land Bridge, China-Bangladesh-India-Mayanmar and China-Indochina. The Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared three interconnected geo-economic and geopolitical objectives of OBOR; to develop the western interior and turn it into a frontier for opening up to the world, secondly, to enhance the status of Asia in world through the development of connectivity infrastructure and enhanced productivity, and thirdly, to form a community of destiny for China's relations with the region.⁴⁶ OBOR has two components i.e. Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road, known as Belt and Road as shown in Figure 1. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road originates from eastern ports of China and via South China Sea-Strait of Malacca-Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf and onward up to Europe through the Suez Canal.

⁴⁴ Haasheng, "Central Asia in Chinese Strategic Thinking", 184

⁴⁵ Manzoor Ahmad, *China's Role and Interests in Central Asia*, Dawn, October 6, 2016

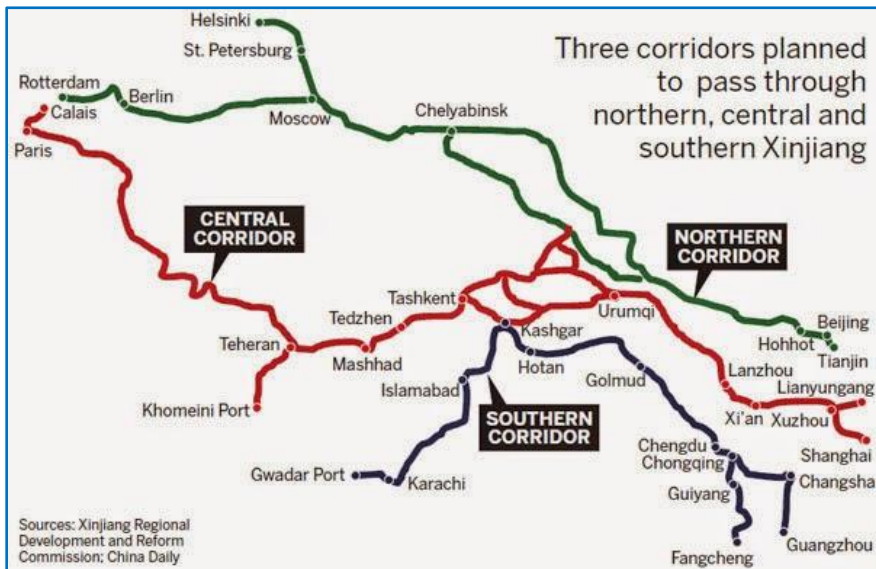
⁴⁶ Lim Wen Xin, "China's Belt and Road Initiative: A Literature Review", pp: 113-131 in *China's One Belt One Road*, ed. LIM Tai Wei, Henry CHAN King Lee and others(London: Imperial College Press, 2016), 115

Figure 1: One Belt One Road



Source: <http://insight.amcham-shanghai.org/chinas-one-belt-one-road-strategy/>

Figure 2: Three Routes of Silk Road Economic Belt



The Silk Road Economic Belt is overland connectivity from China via Kashgar through Central Asia to Europe in two corridors. The Northern Corridor starts from Beijing passes through northern Xinjiang-Kazakhstan-Russia up to Helsinki and Rotterdam. The Central Corridor passes through central Xinjiang-Tashkent-Tehran up to Paris. The Southern Corridor passes through southern Xinjiang i.e. Kashgar Special Economic Zone across Pakistan reaches to Gwadar and onward to Persian Gulf and Europe via Sea Lanes of Communication (figure 2). It is obvious that Northern and Central Corridors pass through a number of countries while the Southern Corridor i.e. China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC) involves only one country i.e. Pakistan where the trust level is much higher. The two components of OBOR fill the infrastructure gap in Asia and connect markets in Asian, African and European continents by overland as well as through Sea Lanes of Communication. The two financial institutions Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Silk Road Fund (SRF) are established by China to support the OBOR financially free from reliance on Western backed Britton Woods's institutions.

Central Asia is crucial in Chinese economic Belt plans to provide overland connectivity to African and European markets and therefore the region is important for China not only due to its energy resources but also for China's increased engagement with these parts of the world. Some observers argue that OBOR is framed to increase and augment Beijing's influence in Central Asian region.⁴⁷ OBOR is also aimed at creating opportunities for China's companies in overseas markets and access to markets for over produced steel and construction material, electronic and other consumer goods.⁴⁸ According to *The Economist* "for Chinese manufactured goods, the journey to Europe by sea takes up to 60 days while trains from Chongqing in South-West China to Duesburg in Germany, 10800 km via Kazakhstan-Russia-Poland supposedly take 14 days."⁴⁹ In this regard the special economic zones in Xinjiang i.e. Khorgos at China-Kazakh border and Kashgar on Pak-China border have to play significant roles to materialize and consolidate the OBOR initiative.

OBOR and CPEC

CPEC is a significant leg of Chinese OBOR initiative which starts from Guangzhou reaches southern Xinjiang i.e. Kashgar special economic zone and via Karakorum Highway (KKH) reaches Gwadar Sea Port in Baluchistan, Pakistan. CPEC has to play vital role in both the components of

⁴⁷ Ibid, 113

⁴⁸ Ibid, 115

⁴⁹ "The New Silk Road Hardly an Oasis", *The Economist*, November 18, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21632595-kazakhstan-turns-geography-advantage-china-builds-new-silk-road-hardly-oasis>, (accessed April 27, 2017)

OBOR i.e. in Belt via Kashgar and in Road via Gwadar. Currently 95 percent of the goods' movement between Asia and Europe take Maritime routes and leaves 2 to 3 percent of trade to continental routes.⁵⁰ In this context CPEC catches more attention as it has to play an important role in Maritime trade through Gwadar Sea Port. The following factors signify CPEC for OBOR and make it a priority for China:

- i. Through Kashgar CPEC is linked with Central Asia through the Silk Road Economic Belt while through Gwadar Sea Port, it is linked to the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road
- ii. CPEC involves the shortest distance vis-à-vis other six corridors to be developed under OBOR initiative by a cutting a distance of 13000 km from eastern China to Persian Gulf from where China imports its 80 percent of energy to 2500 km.
- iii. CPEC saves time and reduce cost of transportation from 20 days to just 48 hours from Persian Gulf to China.⁵¹
- iv. CPEC will end the Malacca Dilemma for China which is under the strategic influence of USA
- v. The trust level between Pakistan and China is relatively much higher
- vi. And CPEC makes China a two Oceans power

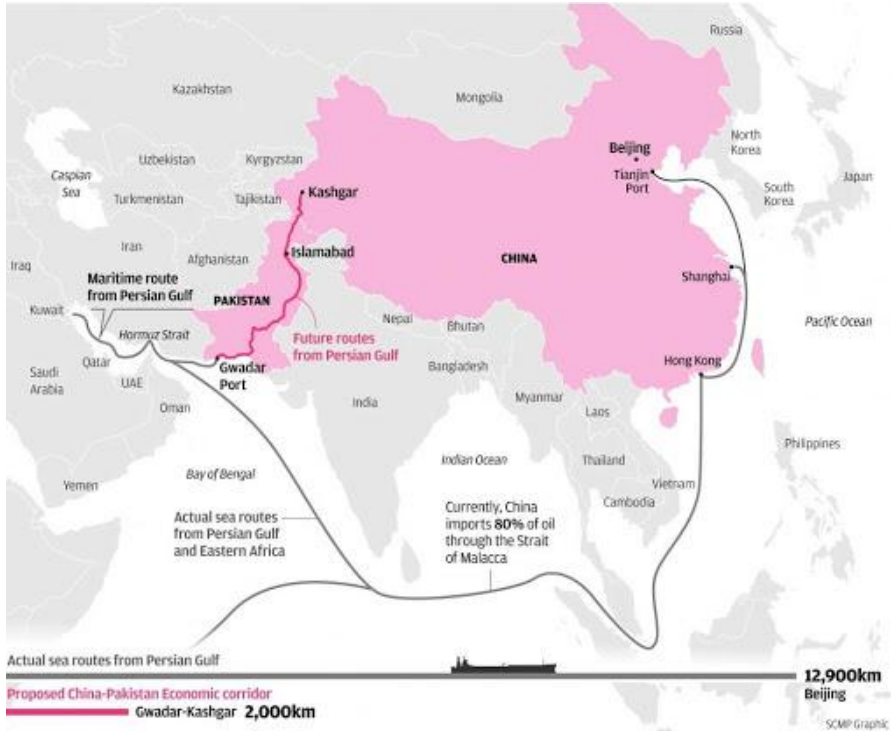
According to an Indian source the Chinese strategic interests in Central Asia and Afghanistan revolves around OBOR of which CPEC is a subsidiary project in the context of South Asia.⁵² China has been developing Silk Road high-speed railway linking the CARs with Xinjiang ultimately linking Gwadar with CARs via Kashgar. CPEC provides essential outlet to the landlocked regions of Central Asia and Western China towards Indian Ocean and beyond. Pak-China strategic cooperation centered at Gwadar has the potential to alter the entire regional geo-strategic configuration.

⁵⁰ Sebastien Peyrouse and Gael Raballand, "Central Asia: the New Silk Road Initiative's questionable economic rationality", *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, volume 56, Issue 42015, retrieved from <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/15387216.2015.1114424> (accessed April 21, 2017)

⁵¹ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "Geo-Economic Imperatives of Gwadar Sea Port and Kashgar Economic Zone for Pakistan and China" pp: 87-100, in *IPRI Journal*, Vol. III, No. 2, (Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Summer 2013), 93

⁵² Vikram Sood, *The New Great Game: An All Asian Game?*, (Observer Research Foundation, April 6, 2017) retrieved from <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/new-great-game-all-asian/> (accessed April 27, 2017)

Figure: 3. CPEC and 21st Century Maritime Silk Road⁵³



CPEC will be instrumental in accelerating the emergence of new centres of power in Asia. Surrounded by huge resource full countries on one hand and resource deficit states on the other, CPEC can be the best supply chain for resource demanding markets. Each region's growth path is a function of many factors unique to it and the resource endowment factor cannot be overlooked in case of Central Asia. The resource rich countries of Central Asia can benefit from their edge in natural resource endowment by linking efficiently to markets through overland connectivity as well as through Sea Lanes of Communication. Undoubtedly the inter and intra-regional connectivity that CPEC offers to Central Asia could expedite their economic rise. Even Indians acknowledge the geographic significance of Pakistan. According to M.K. Bhadrakumar "Pakistan, due to its strategic location, is a

⁵³ Shabir Ahmad Khan, "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in a Multipolar World", pp: 13-25, in *Pak-Army 'Green Book'* 2015, (Rawalpindi: GHQ, September 2016), 19

pivotal state which impacts the regions of Central Asia and South Asia”.⁵⁴ CPEC would also end the Malacca Dilemma for China and in the form of Gwadar provides a platform to China from where it can protect its interest in Indian Ocean. USA on the other hand is courting India by trying to assign a leading role to India in Indian Ocean and Afghanistan to disorder Pak-China naval partnership centered at Gwadar. Pak-China partnership has the potential to scuttle Indo-US ambitions of dominating Indian Ocean in the increasingly becoming multipolar world. This multipolar world has become rife with incomplete wars with unfinished agendas resulting in global instability. Therefore major threat to CPEC and Pakistan can be a possible hostile act of Indo-US alliance to destabilize Pakistan though USA has diplomatically declared that it is not against CPEC.⁵⁵

As Afghanistan remains instable, CPEC proves to be the strategic alternate to Pakistan and Central Asia for access to each other and beyond. The strategic and economic implications of the tri-partite agreement of India-Iran-Afghanistan will remain limited as neither of the state is a major player in the New Great Game for influence in Central Asia.⁵⁶ Indian plans to marginalize or sideline Pakistan in its access to Central Asia make India uncompetitive in Central Asian markets vis-à-vis China and other players like Turkey. CPEC provides the best opportunity to Central Asia for unlocking while the convergence of interests between Russia, Pakistan and China have shaped a new potential power troika that is bonded by geo-strategic and geo-economic benefits.⁵⁷

The regions of Central and South Asia are least integrated in the world and the economic weakness of regional countries is born in large part to the lack of inter and intra-regional integration mainly due to the poor cross-border connectivity infrastructure. The regions face multiple and identical economic, political and security issues. .OBOR and CPEC offer a model of integration that is based on open regionalism in contrast to closed regionalism which adopts protectionist measures against non-member or non-regional states. Open regionalism is a sectoral/project based approach to regional integration where any regional or extra regional state can join a particular bi-lateral, tri-lateral or multilateral arrangement. The developing regional countries lack the capacity to develop cross-border infrastructure by their own. China having reserves well over \$3.3 trillion, is seriously developing cross-border connectivity infrastructure in the region.

⁵⁴ M.K. Bhadrakumar “Pakistan, China, Iran and the remaking of regional security”, *Pakistan Defence*, April 18, 2015, retrieved from <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/pakistan-china-iran-and-the-remaking-of-regional-security.371759/>(accessed April 19, 2017)

⁵⁵ Munir Akram, *The New Great Game*, Dawn, June 12, 2016

⁵⁶ Ibid

⁵⁷ Sabena Siddiqi, *Reconnecting Central Asia*, KATEHON, 21.02.2017, retrieved from <http://katehon.com/article/reconnecting-central-asia> (accessed April 27, 2017)

Conclusions

Central Asia is undergoing significant geo-strategic and geo-economic changes as a consequence of the integration plans of the major powers i.e. Russia, China and USA. The operational policies of major powers carry divergent and competing interests which could be impeding factor in regional integration. Russia is more prepared to assert herself in her traditional sphere of influence after the Crimea, Chinese influence is growing while American attitude may change due to its partial retreat from the region. Russia is the major player in the hard security realm, having close defense ties particularly under the CSTO. In the post Crimea period, Russia is looking towards East and Asia particularly China for strategic and economic cooperation. Central Asia can be both a source of tension as well a source of lasting convergence of interests between Russia and China depending upon how Russia and China manage their relations vis-à-vis the region. The US New Silk Road initiative has hardly materialized on ground mainly due to the regional states' perceptions of US policies and partly due to its declining capacity to project itself more forcefully in post withdrawal period.

The anomalies of Eurasian Union and OBOR need to be addressed and can be addressed on a project/sectoral basis. As Eurasian Union seems to be a kind of closed regionalism having protectionist measures in form of uniform tariff(Custom Union)against the non-member states while OBOR and CPEC offer a kind of integration based on open regionalism. In that case Eurasian Union can have an institutional check on Chinese goods movement to Central Asian members of Eurasian Union. Likewise the Eurasian Union has been planned to govern by supra-national institutions such as Eurasian Economic Commission and Court of Eurasian Economic Union while OBOR and CPEC is based on the principles of open regionalism where governance of the sector/project is a joint responsibility of signatory group pertaining to a specific project/sector. Open regionalism in fact integrates markets with flexible relations to address the weaknesses of closed regionalism. Open regionalism is outward oriented and a country can become part or join different regional arrangement simultaneously and need not to surrender sovereignty. CPEC is crucial in making OBOR a combination of maritime and land routes. No specific amount has been marked for any other corridor under the OBOR in contrast to multi-modal CPEC where the Chinese declared investment has reached to \$60.5 billion for the short to midterm projects.

These new integration plans need to balance the multiple interests of major powers while regional states will stand victorious. CARs realize that hegemony of a single power unit over the region is detrimental to the interests of regional states and therefore they are pursuing policies of balancing and playing these powers off each other. CARs are fortunate that

they have not become prey to geography like Afghanistan. The two giant neighbours Russia and China have been integrating and unlocking it to keep their backyard stable and prosperous though for their own interests. Former Soviet CARs are being awarded for their location while Afghanistan is being punished for its geography.

The important question regarding regional integration is that whether it is geo-political or economic interests that dominate the process when national preferences of regional and extra-regional states are shaped. It means the regional states need to priorities the geo-economic interests for a win situation. One can also observe that geo-strategic interests of major powers are closely linked to their integrations plans and that can be a sort of impeding factor because of their divergent natures. Nevertheless the developed cross border infrastructure as a consequence of these integration plans in the region of Central Asia will increase CARs bargaining power and competitiveness in international markets. Whether this is OBOR or Eurasian Union or the US New Silk Road initiative, the single outcome must be the regional integration in any case and therefore shared growth and peace promotion would be guaranteed.

Bibliography

- Ahmad, Manzoor. China's Role and Interests in Central Asia. *The Daily Dawn*, October 6, 2016
- Akram, Munir. The New Great Game. *The Daily Dawn*, June 12, 2016
- Blank, Stephen. "The Intellectual Origin of the Eurasian Union." In S. Frederick Starr and Svante E. Cornell, eds. *Putin's Grand Strategy: Eurasia and its Discontents*. Washington: Central Asia-Caucasia Institute, 2014, retrieved from <https://www.silkroadstudies.org/resources/1409GrandStrategy.pdf>, accessed April 3, 2017
- Bhadrakumar, M. K. "Pakistan, China, Iran and the remaking of regional security", *Pakistan Defence*, April 18, 2015, retrieved from <https://defence.pk/pdf/threads/pakistan-china-iran-and-the-remaking-of-regional-security.371759/> accessed April 19, 2017
- Brzezinski, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chess Board*. New York: Basic Books, 1998
- Cooley, Alexander. *Great Games, Local Rules*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2012
- Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Canada. *Invest in Kazakhstan, 10 Reasons to Invest in Kazakhstan*. Canada: Embassy of the Republic of Kazakhstan to Canada, n.d., retrieved from <http://kazembassy.ca/invest-in-kazakhstan/>, accessed April 24, 2017
- Fedorenko, Vladimir. *The New Silk Road Initiative in Central Asia*. Washington: Rethink Institution, August, 2013, retrieved from

- <http://www.rethinkinstitute.org/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/Fedorenko-The-New-Silk-Road.pdf>, accessed April 3, 2017
- Huasheng, Zhao. "Central Asia in Chinese Strategic Thinking." In Thomas Fingar, ed., *The New Great Game: China and South and Central Asia in the Era of Reform*. USA: Stanford University Press, 2016
- Khan, Shabir Ahmad and Nadeem Akhtar, "China's Policy towards Central Asia since 1991: An Overview." In *Central Asia* No. 69, Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Winter 2011
- Khan, Shabir Ahmad and Saima Kyani. "Pipeline Politics in Central Asia: Paradox of Competitive/Cooperative Relations between the United States, Russia and China". *Central Asia* No. 73. Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, winter 2013
- Khan, Shabir Ahmad. "China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in a Multipolar World". In *Pak-Army 'Green Book'* 2015. Rawalpindi: GHQ, September 2016
- Khan, Shabir Ahmad. "Dynamics of Trade Corridors and Energy Pipeline Politics." In Mushir Anwar, ed. *Pakistan's Strategic Environment; Post 2014*. Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, 2014
- Khan, Shabir Ahmad. "Geo-Economic Imperatives of Gwadar Sea Port and Kashgar Economic Zone for Pakistan and China." in *IPRI Journal*, III(2), Islamabad: Islamabad Policy Research Institute, Summer 2013
- Khan, Shabir Ahmad. "Tashkent in November 2005." *Central Asia* No. 58. Peshawar: Area Study Centre, University of Peshawar, Summer 2006
- Korybko, Andrew. *Pakistan a Zipper to Eurasian Integration*. Russian Institute of Strategic Studies, 2015, retrieved from <https://en.riss.ru/analysis/18882/>, accessed April 11, 2017
- Lo, Bobo. *Axis of Convenience*. London: Chatam House, 2008
- Mackinder, Halford J., "The Geographical Pivot of history (1904)", *The Geographical Journal* vol. 170(4). UK: Royal Geographical Society, December 2004, retrieved from www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131016_MackinderTheGeographicalJournal.pdf, accessed April 5, 2017
- Marat, Erica. Following the New Silk Road, *The Diplomat*, October 22, 2014, retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2014/10/following-the-new-silk-road/>, accessed April 19, 2017
- Putin, Vladimir. "Novi Integratsionnee Proektdlya Evrazii: Budushee Kotori Zozhdaetsia Cevodnia." *Izvestia*. New Integration Project for Eurasia: Future in Making Today, October 3, 2011, retrieved from <http://www.rusemb.org.uk/press/246>, accessed April 19, 2017
- Romanowski, Michał. "Decoding Central Asia: What's Next for the US Administration?" *The Diplomat*, February 28, 2017, retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2017/02/decoding-central-asia-whats-next-for-the-us-administration/>, accessed April 19, 2017

- Siddiqi, Sabena. *Reconnecting Central Asia*, KATEHON, 21.02.2017, retrieved from <http://katehon.com/article/reconnecting-central-asia>, accessed April 27, 2017
- Slobodchiko, Michael O. *Strategic Cooperation: Overcoming the Barriers of Global Anarchy*. UK: Lexington Books, 2013
- Sood, Vikram. *The New Great Game: An All Asian Game?*, Observer Research Foundation, April 6, 2017, retrieved from <http://www.orfonline.org/expert-speaks/new-great-game-all-asian/>, accessed April 27, 2017
- The Editor, "New Great Game in Asia." *New York Times*, January 2, 1996, retrieved from <http://www.nytimes.com/1996/01/02/opinion/the-new-great-game-in-asia.html>, accessed April 4, 2017
- The New Silk Road Hardly an Oasis", *The Economist*. November 18, 2014, retrieved from <http://www.economist.com/news/asia/21632595-kazakhstan-turns-geography-advantage-china-builds-new-silk-road-hardly-oasis>, accessed April 27, 2017
- Torbakov, Igor. "Managing Imperial Peripheries: Russia and China in Central Asia" In Thomasingar, ed. *The New Great Game*. USA: Stanford University Press, 2016
- U.S. Support for the New Silk Road*, US Department of State, retrieved from <https://2009-2017.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/index.htm>, accessed April 23, 2017
- Vinokurov, Evgeny. "Eurasian Economic Union: Current state and preliminary results" *Russian Journal of Economics* Volume 3, Issue 1, March 2017, retrieved from <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S2405473917300041>, accessed May 2, 2017
- Wang, Tao and Rachel Yampolsky. "Will China and Russia's Partnership in Central Asia Last?" *The Diplomat*, September 21, 2015, retrieved from <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/will-china-and-russias-partnership-in-central-asia-last/>, accessed April 11, 2017
- Wei, LIM Tai. "China's Pivot to Central and South Asia." In LIM Tai Wei, Henry CHAN Hong Lee and others, eds. *China's One Belt One Road*. London: Imperial College Press, 2016
- Zimmerman, Thomas. *The New Silk Roads: China, the US and Future of Central Asia*. New York University: Centre on International Cooperation, October, 2015, retrieved from http://cic.nyu.edu/sites/default/files/zimmerman_new_silk_road_final_2.pdf, accessed April 17, 2017