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The Complexities of Great Power Politics in Central Asia: A Delicate Balance of Competition and Cooperation

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Abstract

Central Asia, renowned for its profound historical significance, varied cultural heritage, and strategically advantageous position, has emerged as a key area of interest in global geopolitics in the 21st century. The region's post-Soviet recovery has garnered the interest of influential nations including Russia, the United States of America, and China. These countries compete for power in Central Asia because of their substantial energy resources and geopolitical significance. The Belt and Road Initiative of China, the Eurasian Economic Union of Russia, and the efforts spearheaded by the United States underscore the intricate dynamics in action. This study examines the changing power dynamics in Central Asia, the strategic goals of important actors, and the consequences for regional stability and global politics.

Keywords: Central Asia, Russia, China, USA, Competition, Diplomacy

INTRODUCTION

Sustained attention, creativity, and sound policies will be required to achieve peace, security, and economic prosperity in this region. - Aspen Institute's "American Interests in South Asia." Central Asia is a diversified region having strategic location and vast natural resources is placing it at the center of the world politics. As a result of its prominence in geopolitics, large countries

are drawn to the region to engage in diplomacy (Bharti, 2022). Central Asia is a historically rich region with a diverse range of nationalities and ethnicities, as well as scenery and culture. The region is made up of five countries: Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan. These states are sometimes referred to as "the Stans," however this term ignores their diverse identities, histories, and cultures (Shadijanova, 2021).

Central Asia is an important region in terms of world politics and economics, and it requires full integration into international relations. Perhaps the region took time to get attention; the first of two key reasons is the collapse of the Silk Road, and the second is its absorption into the USSR.

Until the 16th century, Central Asia thrived as a result of the Silk Road, which connected Europe and Asia, allowing ideas, trade, and people to move through the region. However, colonialism opened up new trade channels, and the Silk Road Empire lost influence. The clan-based nomadic kingdoms took control of the region with little knowledge of their history, concealing themselves from the outside world. Following the fall of the Soviet Union, these five republics emerged as nation-states in contemporary global politics. During the 1990s, the region served as a metaphor for the unpredictability of global life following the Cold War. Nonetheless, state-building and democratization paradigms have stressed issues related to borders, minorities, and violent conflicts (Kavalski, 2011).

It is positioned in the heart of Eurasia, making it a major transit route for world trade (Bayarkhuu 2004). Historically, the region has been in a high-stakes game, with several empires vying for control at all times. In the twenty-first century, Central Asia is the new theater of geopolitics, and it is anticipated that Central Asia will return to the big game with new players to act (Rakhimov, 2015). Today, the region hosts the interests of major powers such as Russia, the United States, China, and India. Being its neighbors, Russia sees them as its 'Turf', whereas, the USA is engaging with them in different economic and political spheres (Brzezinski, 2001). Similarly, China is eyeing them for financial and strategic reasons. Whereas, India invited their leaders for the Republic Day parade and PM Modi was the first Indian Prime Minister to visit all five Central Asian Nations (Haidar, 2021).

The rich resources and geostrategic location of Central Asia make it inevitable to ignore while discussing diplomacy and power appetite. Their significance in the global political chessboard is beyond doubt as regional and global powers are competing for hold in Central Asia diplomatically, politically, economically, and militarily. Firstly, Russia's interest in the region is evident, as Central Asia has been its sphere of influence for decades. Central Asia is crucial in terms of location and resources, but it has always been dependent on Russia. The Russians also saw the south and east expansion as a civilizing mission, intending to bring Central Asians under their influence. Because of the several key causes, modern Central Asia is of great importance to the world. The first of these is that the region has an abundance of energy resources. Second, its proximity to important nations like Russia, China, the United States, and India strengthens its geopolitical position. Lastly, Afghanistan's political turmoil complicates matters in the region. These multilateral connections in Central Asia were traditionally contested by the British and

Russian Empires, but now the competition is principally between the United States, China, and Russia (Sandole, 2007). The region's appeal to global powers will produce opportunities and wealth, but the intricacies of their competing interests will create an environment of tension and uncertainty.

The term "Great Game" refers to major powers' political strategies for gaining geostrategic and economic benefits in Central Asia and the Caspian area. The Afghan crisis is the primary focus of the region's existing strategic and economic links. In the eighteenth century, Britain was gravely afraid that one of the European powers would take advantage of Central Asia's political downfall. Since the 18th century, prominent powers have competed for control of Central Asia. A newly emerging power, following the dissolution of the USSR, is actively seeking to establish dominance over the region of Central Asia. This economic hub is vital politically because it draws the attention of major world powers such as Britain, Russia, the United States, and China, whose interests frequently conflict. In these circumstances, regional heavyweights such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, and Turkey, as well as nuclear states like India and Pakistan, use their influence in the region to obtain major control over the massive economic resources that can transit via their borders.

This study aims to investigate the comprehensive intricacy of current strategic and economic interactions in Central Asia. Additionally, it seeks to discern the primary attributes of these relationships, as well as the key actors involved and their respective agendas (Bhat, 2020). Major governments frequently launch ambitious diplomatic and military operations in distant regions that do not directly threaten their homeland's security. These risky initiatives are motivated by leaders' fear of losing their country's relative power, international standing, or prestige. These leaders usually carry out these activities despite rising political, economic, and military costs. Furthermore, they engage in perilous tactics with regard to other major nations to persist with their unsuccessful operations. The hypotheses regarding these interventions are based on the prospect theory and defensive realist works of literature (Taliaferro, 2004). The three major players in Central Asia are discussed below, starting with the USA.

RESEARCH QUESTION

This research study will try to answer the following question.

1. How the major powers such as the USA, Russia, and China coexist in the Central Asian Republics despite their colliding interests in the region?

RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This research study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To understand the complexities of the political, economic, and strategic interests of the major powers such as the USA, China, and Russia in Central Asia.
2. To identify the opportunities and challenges for the Central Asian States that hosts the interests of the USA, Russia, and China.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This research study is conducted through the content analysis technique. The qualitative data is collected from secondary sources such as research journals, electronic media and books, etc.

The data collected is critically analyzed in order to understand the political dynamics of the Central Asian Republics and the strategic behaviors of the competing powers such as the USA, Russia, and China to achieve their national interest in the region.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This research paper analyzes the variation of the Game Theory, known as the variable sum game, which was first coined by Von Neumann and Morgenstern in 1944 (Schmidt, 1990). The variable sum game refers to a situation where the gains for the competing states can be different depending on the strategies adopted by them. In the variable sum game, it is possible for all the players of the competition to either win or lose; meaning cooperation and competition are both viable strategies (Chevalier-Roignant, 2011). The variable sum game identifies the complexity of the global power complexities in which cooperation and goodwill can result in shared benefits but the conflict is equally possible and often depends on the strategies adopted by the competing states (Morrow, 1999).

States might figure out how to work together to get results that are advantageous to both. Trade deals and alliances, for instance, can benefit all the states party to the competition. These agreements may result in a positive-sum conclusion where all parties benefit, even if their benefits are not equal. The competition or conflict might still occur, though, and that could reduce the gains or result in losses for all parties. In international relations, the competing states often resemble a variable-sum game because they have overlapping interests (for example in security, trade, and environmental concerns) and because cooperation can result in profits for both parties. But they also have conflicting interests, which could lead to rivalry or confrontation but they set aside those grudges against each other to get maximum benefit from the opportunities.

In Central Asia, a similar situation exists between the United States, Russia, and China. Central Asia's rich natural resources, such as gas and oil, as well as its location as a hub for transportation between Europe and Asia, make it strategically crucial. There is a triangular struggle for influence because China, the United States, and Russia all have substantial interests in the region. Using the perspective of variable sum games, this study will evaluate and analyze the strategic connections between the United States, Russia, and China, as well as offer insight into these states' actions in Central Asia.

Russia has a strong influence over Central Asia, especially in terms of politics and security, and has historical ties to the region that date back to the Soviet Union. One important component of Russia's plan to maintain these countries in its orbit is the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) (Abbas, 2022). Russia's strategy can be seen in terms of game theory as preserving a Nash equilibrium in which it aims to keep Central Asian countries from aligning themselves too closely with China or the USA. Trade strengthens Russia's economic ties with the region; almost 40% of the items imported by the region come from Russia, demonstrating the economic interdependence that Moscow aspires to uphold (Diesen, 2017). Therefore, it is safe to say that Russia opts for a variable sum game in which it tries to preserve the Russian interests in Central Asia and coexist with China and the USA.

China's main means of entering Central Asia is through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as the region was historically a prominent route for the Silk Route (Liao, 2021). Therefore, China is working to build infrastructure, especially transportation and energy pipelines, in order to improve its access to European markets and natural resources and revive its ancient Silk Route glory. China's approach might be interpreted as a variable-sum game from the standpoint of game theory, in which it makes large investments in return for access to resources in an effort to achieve a "win-win" scenario. With approximately \$55 billion spent in Kazakhstan's oil and gas industry, China has become the major trading partner of numerous Central Asian nations (Keun-Wook, 2015). But Russia's long-standing domination in the area is directly threatened by this expanding economic power. We know that China and Russia compete to achieve their national interests in the region but understand that conflict will harm them both equally.

As USA is one of the main contenders in Central Asia and its presence in the Central Asian region is security-related, particularly related to counterterrorism and maintaining Afghanistan's stability. The USA created military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan after 9/11, but Russian pressure forced the closure of these locations. Game theory suggests that the United States is playing a variable-sum game, trying to strike a balance in its involvement without going up against China or Russia. Washington's security goals are frequently viewed as taking precedence over its interests in advancing democracy and human rights in the region. Despite having weaker trading ties with Central Asia than with Russia and China, the United States nevertheless contributes significantly to the region—more than \$2 billion has been sent there since 2001 (Morrison, 2014). Hence, USA's presence cannot be denied but to coexist with the hegemon is in the favor of China and Russia.

Different game theory frameworks help explain how Russia, China, and the USA interact in Central Asia. China's strategy is expansionary, aiming for economic supremacy through cooperative methods, whereas Russia's is primarily defensive, striving to maintain the status quo. In the meantime, the USA steers clear of direct confrontation with the other two powers in favor of selective involvement that is mainly motivated by security considerations. Due to the delicate balance of conflicting interests, Central Asia is a dynamic arena for international relations. Any party can disturb the status quo by making strategic moves, which could change the balance of power not just in Central Asia but also in global geopolitics.

UNITED STATES IN CENTRAL ASIA: DIPLOMACY, STRATEGIC INTEREST AND CONTAINMENT

To implement political and economic reforms in the region, Central Asian countries must maintain positive relations with the United States as part of their cooperation with the West. Similarly, big powers recognize the importance of this region in terms of geopolitics and geo-economics, and to defend their interests, they are strengthening ties with Central Asian Republics through the promotion of regionalism (Rauf, 2017). The United States' pragmatic approach to the Central Asian republics is based on strategic interests and geopolitics. In the early 1990s, US-Central Asian relations were limited because the US considered the region too remote to have strategic importance in world affairs (Clarke, 2010). Later in the 1990s, the US

Congress passed the law on Freedom Support that assisted Central Asian republics focusing on economies and democratization (Tarnoff, 2007).

In continuation of the US support to Central Asian Republics, NATO also established military and political ties in the framework of the Partnership for Peace Programme (North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2016). With years passing by, the US interests in the region increased, also the Central Asian foreign policies were increasingly taking interest in the expansion of partnerships with the US and other leading states (Stoll, 2023). The US Congress eventually passed the Silk Road Law to promote Central Asian political and economic independence (GovTrack, 1999). The United States and the Central Asian Republics were on good terms when the terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, happened and the Central Asian republics enabled NATO forces to use their military infrastructure against the terrorist forces in Afghanistan. In return, the United States strengthened its support for Central Asia (Burles, 1999). The United States has rekindled interest in Central Asia as a result of the September 11 terrorist attacks and their aftermath. Contrary to the official statements, it seems probable that America will continue to be involved in military activities in that region for an extended period. To effectively handle this relationship, Washington must acquire a more comprehensive understanding of the complexities and challenges present in this region (Maynes, 2003). The United States does not view Central Asia solely through the lens of Afghanistan; rather, it is part of a larger strategy that includes the Caspian Sea, the European Union, the Middle East, and South Asia (Boyer, 2005). In order to increase their access to global markets, the US is also interested in building trans-Afghan gas pipelines and transportation corridors between Central Asian Republics; in return, the West will obtain a variety of Central Asian hydrocarbons (Holzhacker, 2021). The New Silk Road program, launched by the Obama administration in 2011, sought to further liberalize trade between South and Central Asia (Evans, 2012).

The above discussion on the relationship between the US and Central Asia gives rise to speculations and assumptions by the competing states. For instance, some Chinese analysts presume that the basic objective of US involvement in Central Asian Republics is to control the Oil Reserves and pose a threat to Russia, China, and Iran (Kerr, 2010). Other than the speculations, the US foreign policy patterns in Central Asia indicate its interests are long-term in the region. By the end of the Vietnam War, the US left Southeast Asia (Willbanks, 2008) but even after withdrawal from Afghanistan, the US engagement with Central Asia showed their presence was not only to Counter the Taliban in Afghanistan. Additionally, with the Ukraine War going on, the US needs to be engaging with this region to have a check on Russia.

The recent visit by US state secretary Antony Blinkin visited Central Asia, emphasizing that the US will continue supporting the Central Asian Republics to freely determine their future (Ali, 2023). Furthermore, the Biden Administration announced an additional \$25 million in funds to expand the already granted \$66 million under the Economic Resilience Initiative in Central Asia (US Department of State, 2023). US President Biden recently hosted all five Central Asian presidents, assuring the former Soviet Republics that the US will continue to support them to safeguard their independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity (Wood, 2023). Russia

considers the Central Asian Republics to be within its sphere of influence, as the region is physically close to its borders. As a result, the US intervention in Central Asia threatens Russia's interests. Furthermore, US engagement with Central Asia is a multilateral success for the region; but, Central Asian republics must develop a more effective foreign policy capable of engaging several big powers at the same time without resulting in war.

STRATEGIC FRONTIERS IN CENTRAL ASIA: RUSSIA’S POWER PLAY AGAINST CHINA AND THE USA IN THE REGION

The Central Asian Republic’s foreign policymakers take Russia as a major priority and recognize the Russian interests in the region. In turn, Russia also expresses the significance of the Central Asian Republics. However the Russia-Central Asia relations have witnessed some difficulties, and despite the differences, their relationship covers the political, educational, economic, and military cooperation. After the Re-election of President Putin, Russia revised its foreign policy priorities. Russia emphasized the transformation of the Eurasian Economic Integration into the Eurasian Economic Union, which will create an economic space and strengthen the Eurasian Economic Community (Abbas, 2022). To make Russia a great power again, President Putin uses every opportunity to integrate Russia into its former states. Also, after the NATO and US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Russia is determined to fill in the vacuum in the region and increase its influence in its near abroad. The given map shows the Eurasian Economic Union:



Figure 1. Showing Eurasian Union

Moreover, having a 7,591 km long border is the leading trade partner of Russia. But this doesn’t conclude the Russian interest in Central Asia. The bilateral trade between Kazakhstan and Russia reportedly was about 26 billion US Dollars in 2022 (Avdaliani, 2023) but their thriving

investment and trade ties are subject to multiple geopolitical issues such as Russia-Ukraine war. Similarly, the Russia and Uzbekistan trade in 2022 was estimated to be 12 billion US dollars (Russia Briefing, 2023). The trade ties between Central Asia and Russia has more potential but the Russian foreign policy lacks clear strategy for individual countries. Russia is responding to external developments and policies instead of having a clear vision on Central Asia.

Moreover, Russia provided major military and economic assistance to Kyrgyzstan (Kizilay, 2023). As the Kyrgyz city of Kant hosts a Russian Airbase that insures the military presence of Russia in Central Asia (Klomegah, 2023). Despite these integrations among Russia and Central Asian Republics, the relations are not at ease. The recent conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and the Russia-Ukraine crisis, the Central Asian Republics chose to be neutral in these situations rather standing on the side of Russia. The Central Asian Republics are pursuing their own geopolitics without dictations from Moscow (Karčić, 2023).

The Russia-Central Asia relation is not as simple because the migration policy among them is also not very promising. As per the data given by Russian Federal State Statistics Services, Russia allowed only 6.5 million people migrating in the country and declined about 12.7 million people between 1992 to 2010 (Ivakhnyuk, 2009). Furthermore, the Central Bank of Russia estimated about 5 billion US dollars of remittances flown from Russia to Central Asia (RATHA, 2023). But the increasing difficulties in Russia after Ukraine invasion and the international sanctions on Russia reduced the economic activities between Russia and Central Asian Republics.

The Russian approach to Central Asia has different opinions such as, at one point of view, their relations are normal international relations but on the other point of view, their relations can be analyzed as imperial ambitions. The recent activities in Ukraine and Crimea have caused insecurities in Central Asia (Jardine, 2022). The Central Asian Republics needs to have such diplomacy that can help the region to flourish by hosting external powers but at the same time does not provoke Russia to go for aggression against Central Asia. On the other hand, Uzbekistan manoeuvring between Western bloc and Russia is considered a consistent approach that maximizes freedom of action and decision making (Rakhimov, 2015).

Despite these conflicts, there are a number of related and shared issues that could endanger both regional and global security, making Russia's foreign policy toward Central Asia extremely important. For example, as both Russia and Central Asian Republics serve as transit hubs for Afghan heroin bound for Europe, illicit drug trafficking and terrorism are pertinent concerns for both countries (Roy, 2001). In order to eliminate such common threats both Russia and Central Asia needs to develop a clear vision and policy accordingly. Russia considers economic development of the Central Asian Republics a strategic imperative, and for that matter Chinese investment is also important. The economic stability in region will strengthen their position against terrorism but will also indebt the region to China and eventually the Chinese influence will be another threat to Russia. Moreover, the Russian aggression in Ukraine and Crimea has engaged the state on western border. Therefore, Russia is losing its grip on the Central Asian Republics.

GEOPOLITICS OF CONNECTIVITY: CHINA'S BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE NAVIGATING US AND RUSSIAN PRESSURES IN CENTRAL ASIA

China's ambitions to build a challenger to the US-led liberal system, which is controlled by Beijing, rely heavily on Central Asia (Hindustan Times, 2023). Organizing a summit comprising Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan marks a new phase in Beijing's involvement in the region, in contrast to the Group of Seven meeting in Hiroshima, Japan, which took place last week (Nayal, 2012). Because of Russia's armed confrontation in Ukraine, Moscow is no longer able to fulfill its traditional role as a regional guardian of internal stability. As a result, Central Asian countries are aggressively seeking a new ally to help secure their security from internal disturbances (Freeman, 2023). Central Asia holds strategic significance for China due to its importance in energy, transportation, and the fight against extremism, separatism, and terrorism, which are together known as the "three evils" by Beijing. China surpassed Europe as the primary trading partner of Central Asia as early as 2010 (Hoh, 2019).

In 2012, China made a strategic decision called the "March West" to move its attention towards Central Asia. This decision was a response to the US's "Pivot to Asia" policy, which involved a change in US foreign policy priority from the Middle East to East Asia, during the Obama administration. Since the early 1990s, China has shifted from being a supplier of buses and tractors to becoming a more supportive friend that provides financial and military assistance, as well as builds infrastructure. By the end of the 2000s, China overtook Russia as the leading trading partner in the region. This was mostly due to significant investments made in crucial sectors such as manufacturing, infrastructure, energy, and extractive industries (Ocakli, 2023). China is therefore seen as having the capacity to bridge the Central Asian gap. Instead of aiming for supremacy, Beijing's main goal in its ties with its Western neighbors is to impede US influence (GUO, 2023). Undoubtedly, China's growing economic ties with Central Asian countries, together with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), have laid the groundwork for collaboration in areas like commerce, infrastructure, and energy. The following given map portrays how China is tightening its grip over Central Asia:

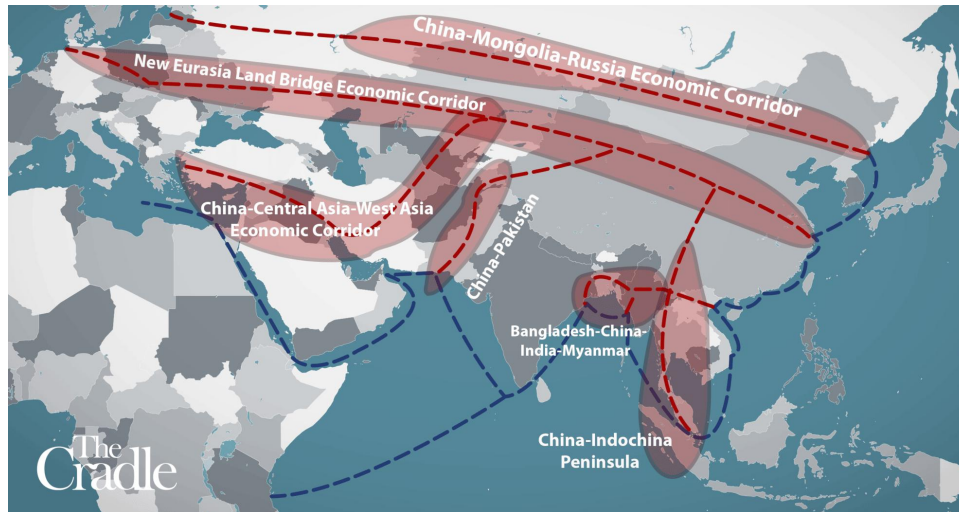


Figure 2. The Six Main Economic Corridors under China's BRI, some completed, others hindered by geopolitical conflicts, as in Myanmar, Kazakhstan, Iraq, South China Sea. (Rising Tide Foundation, n.d.).

The apprehension is intensified by the commitments made during the China-Central Asia Summit, which vowed major financial assistance amounting to 26 billion yuan, equivalent to around US\$3.8 billion, signaling serious economic involvement (Liao, 2021). This worry is intensified by Russia's evident deterioration in power and influence following its invasion of Ukraine. Nevertheless, despite obvious signs of China's growing collaboration with the Central Asian countries of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, the country's policy toward this region has not changed significantly.

China does not aspire to assume dominance or establish a position of superiority in Central Asia. Instead, China appears to be prioritizing the preservation of stability on its western frontier by enhancing its connections with neighboring countries. As a result, this would make it easier to create a protective area in the Asia-Pacific region, allowing it to effectively deal with current security risks in the eastern part. Even after the Cold War ended and the Soviet Union disintegrated, Central Asia remains an important part of China's security strategy. After the new republics attained independence, this policy, which was initially intended to affect the region, evolved into a period of practical adaptation to changes in the global landscape following the September 11th terrorist attacks (Mary L., 2003). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has developed a mechanism for implementing this adaptable strategy, with energy and economic components becoming increasingly important (Niquet, 2006).

China's engagement has strategically placed it at the forefront of the struggle for political influence and access to energy resources in the highly resource-abundant region. Amid Russia's focus on the crisis in Ukraine and the United States diminishing influence in the region following the departure of its forces from Afghanistan, China has emerged as the leading contender in the race for political influence and access to energy resources in the resource-abundant area (Hayley, 2023).

Central Asian leaders have fully supported China's planned endeavors for global development, security, and civilization (Khan, 2023). Central Asian countries have different views on the Washington Consensus approach than Western governments and organizations. Central Asian countries prioritize stability and growth, whereas Western governments and organizations emphasize democratization and liberal economic reforms in their engagement with the region. Concurrently, China has increased its efforts in recent years to strengthen security and economic connections with Central Asian countries and earlier efforts are yielding beneficial benefits (Jiang, 2022).

Central Asia holds strategic significance for China due to its importance in energy, transportation, and the fight against extremism, separatism, and terrorism, which are together known as the "three evils" by Beijing. China surpassed Europe as the primary trading partner of Central Asia as early as 2010 (Hoh, 2019). In 2012, China made a strategic decision called the "March West" to move its attention towards Central Asia. This decision was a response to the US's "Pivot to Asia" policy, which involved a change in US foreign policy priority from the Middle East to East Asia, during the Obama administration. Since the early 1990s, China has shifted from being a supplier of buses and tractors to becoming a more supportive friend that provides financial and military assistance, as well as builds infrastructure. By the end of the 2000s, China overtook Russia as the leading trading partner in the region. This was mostly due to significant investments made in crucial sectors such as manufacturing, infrastructure, energy, and extractive industries (Ocaklı, 2023).

CONCLUSION

Rising global temperatures are having a considerable influence on the former Soviet republics, which are considered Russia's surrounding territory. Following the breakup of the Soviet Union in 1991, these republics gained independence and now have the unique flexibility to determine their own political and economic destinies. Nonetheless, Russia is currently using its political might to exert influence over Western and European involvement in central Soviet-Asian problems. Central Asia's strategic location near the Middle East, Russia, China, the Caucasus, the Caspian Region, and the Caspian Sea has made it a major player in both regional and global energy markets. The Central Asian producers' chosen strategy to improve their hydrocarbon resources and export infrastructure would have a huge impact on Russia's energy exports to Europe, as well as the ambitions of Europe, China, and India to diversify their oil and gas supply. At this moment, it is too early to tell if the political and economic reasons will effectively promote cooperation among the many players, or whether these influential external countries' competing energy ambitions will lead to violence in Central Asia (Yenikeyeff, 2011).

Central Asia's geographic prominence in the world is mostly attributed to its strategic geopolitical location, abundant natural resources, and considerable geoeconomic potential. The region is pleased that major external players such as Russia, the US, the EU, and China have shown their endorsement of regional collaboration and the maintenance of peace and stability in Central Asia. Nevertheless, there are sporadic disputes among these actors too. China acknowledges and appreciates Russia's significant influence in the region and favors the

deployment of Russian military forces over those of the United States. China sees the US presence as a potential threat to the security of its northwestern area. Russia has long seen It opposes substantial US or EU participation in the region and views Central Asian republics as being within its sphere of influence. The United States backs the endeavors of Central Asian nations to pursue a diverse and all-encompassing foreign and economic agenda. While the European Union holds considerable economic power in the region, the key European governments' goals in Central Asia diverge. The deteriorating situation in Ukraine has sparked a geopolitical conflict between Western countries and Russia, with the potential to affect Central Asia.

The Central Asian viewpoint places high importance on developing strong and favorable bilateral and multilateral partnerships with all of these countries. In addition to these dominant nations, Central Asian republics have formed alliances with several regional and international organizations, including the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Effective collaboration in both bilateral and multilateral institutions is critical for the region, even if interests diverge and occasionally clash. All involved parties' primary goals continue to be Afghanistan's political and economic stability. However, due to their diverse perspectives and understandings of the Afghan situation, the various actors in Central Asia and Afghanistan face several challenges.

The Central Asian republics have indicated their intention to create mutually advantageous relationships with various Asian countries, such as the Republic of Korea, Japan, and India. There is a possibility of collaboration with countries in East Asia, the Middle East, and South Asia, notwithstanding certain challenges. Central Asian nations can derive significant advantages from prominent Asian allies, including China, India, Korea, and Japan, who possess extensive knowledge and experience in political and economic change. Enhancing collaboration between Central Asia and other Asian nations, together with regional institutions, has the potential to enhance regional stability across the broader Asian region.

The ongoing debate about China and Russia's strategic relationship in Central Asia is far from over. The bilateral connection between the two regional states has been referred to as a "division of labor" or "cooperative hegemony." China is a major economic powerhouse that actively invests in infrastructure development, but Russia plays an important role as a political and military force in Central Asia, according to the regional division of labor. Since the commencement of the Russia-Ukraine crisis, there has been a developing narrative claiming that China is gaining headway in Central Asia at the expense of Russia.

The narrative suggests that Moscow's dominant position in politics, military affairs, and economy is facing growing challenges due to the conflict in Ukraine. As a result, it is gradually losing influence to the former Soviet governments in Central Asia. Advocates of the narrative argue that Beijing is prepared to take advantage of the upcoming power vacuum in the region and is becoming more willing to protect its interests, even if it means undermining Moscow's authority.

Several instances indicate Russia's waning power in Central Asia. The political impartiality of Central Asian states throughout the Russia-Ukraine conflict reflects the Kremlin's decreasing influence in the region. None of Central Asia's countries recognized Russia's annexation of sections of Ukraine. Presidents Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan and Shavkat Mirziyoyev of Uzbekistan spoke out vehemently against Soviet influence at the St. Petersburg Economic Forum, rejecting Russia's suggestions to recognize pro-Moscow separatists in eastern Ukraine. Furthermore, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan's recognition of Ukraine's territorial integrity, as well as their commitment to providing humanitarian help, can be interpreted as evidence of Russia's decreasing political influence in Central Asian countries. This paper employs thorough research and literature analysis to examine the prevailing views on China's rise among popular and elite opinion in Russia and the Central Asian states, with a specific focus on Kazakhstan (Sharifli, 2023).

The research paper lays out a framework for analyzing China's rise, emphasizing a trilateral dynamic that includes the US's dominating position in Asia, strategic decisions made by China's neighbors, and the use of strategic regionalism to assert control over regional areas. By utilizing the Commonwealth of Independent States as an example, it claims that relationships between China, Russia, and the United States are still adaptive, particularly when it comes to "re-setting" the relationship between the two. This underlines the importance of regional circumstances and promotes Central Asia as a critical new strategic zone for easing strained relations between the United States, China, and Russia through engagement with neighboring countries.

The second part of the article looked at how Russia and Central Asia reacted to China's rise to global dominance. This analysis delves into three key factors that drive China's regionalism: its pursuit of growth through accumulation, security issues and a lack of constitutional strength in its western regions, and concerns about US/NATO influence along its western border and attempts to persuade Central Asian elites to abandon their traditional allegiance. The final portion looked at China's support for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a way to achieve strategic regionalism in Central Asia.

The study concludes that China will become an unconventional superpower, displaying various features of its might depending on the regional context. China's ascent in the global economy will not rely on a single plan, but rather on a combination of innovation and adaptation. China's plan poses concerns for Russia and Central Asia as it seeks to construct a strategic region that is predominantly independent from the West, rather than one that directly confronts the West. With China's rising influence blurring the lines between East and West, Russia has the crucial task of deciding whether it can maintain its current state of autonomy as a bridge between Europe and Asia.

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