



THE NEW GREAT GAME: CENTRAL ASIA BETWEEN THE US, RUSSIA, AND CHINA

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Abstract

The main purpose of this research to explore the dominance of great players like Russia, China and US in the region of Central Asia. Determine the focus of world politics by using the term of “New Great Game”. In 1904, British geographer Sir Halford John Mackinder proposed a theory which is named as “Heartland Theory”. In which he tells about the struggle of great powers to occupy more and more world’s natural resources. Basically it is a tug of war between super powers. This study uses a qualitative approach, analyzing data from various sources, including books, articles, and electronic media. The research is descriptive and explanatory. This study shows the results in the form of China’s predominance, US strategy, Russian influence, economic and political competitions and regional dynamics in Central Asia.

Key words: Central Asia, New Great Game, Natural resources, Regional dominance

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INTRODUCTION

The term "the Great Game" was initially used in the 1830s, it wasn't until the early 1900s that Rudyard Kipling's novel *Kim* made it widely and popular. The "shadowy struggle for political ascendancy" between the British and Russian empires over Central Asia that lasted for the most of the 19th and early 20th centuries served as the basis for the events and happenings that were portrayed in this fictitious work, despite its fabrication. It was obvious what the Great Game was about. Two Imperial powers fought for political domination, authority, and security over territory and people whose worth came from their position between the British and Russian Empires. There were three stages to what was called the Great Game (EDWARDS, 2003).

The first started when the East India Company, the de facto ruler in India, became alarmed by the Russian Empire's advance into the Caucasus and Central Asia in the late 18th and early 19th centuries. The Company dispatched officers to investigate the overland routes to India's northern frontiers because of concerns about Russian ambitions. The Great Game evolved from a private endeavor to a component of imperial defense, foreign policy, and colonial policy as the British government's involvement grew over the 19th century. Secret operatives were employed, occasionally in conjunction with overt military operations. With the signing of the Anglo-Russian Convention in 1907, the Great Game's initial phase came to an end (EDWARDS, 2003).

Wilhelmine Germany's *Drang nach Osten* comprised the second part of the project. Secret operatives used the same operational strategy as in the first phase, trying to rule India and influence indigenous tribes and peoples. The Bolsheviks, led by Lenin, set out "by means of armed uprisings, to liberate the whole of Asia from imperialist domination" in the wake of the 1917 Russian Revolution, marking the beginning of the third phase. The consolidation of Bolshevik authority over the former Tsarist territories was the ultimate outcome of this third round. With imperial dominance at risk, territorial control or at the very least, sovereignty over territory was essential to the Great Game's objectives. The basic goal imperial stability and power remained the same regardless of the actors' varying fortunes and personal goals.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The exploration of the geopolitical landscape in Central Asia, where global powers' interests intersect over the region's vast oil and gas reserves. The book demonstrates how the Cold War legacy and energy resource competition have shaped the dynamics between countries like Russia, China, the United States, and Central Asian states. Klinkhammer's writing is both informative and engaging, highlighting the implications of resource competition for global stability and the lives of ordinary people caught in the crossfire. (Kleveman, 2003)

The region's economic transformation amid the "New Great Game" of global power struggles. The book examines how external pressures from major powers like Russia, China, and the West intersect with local initiatives to promote economic development. It highlights the need for regional cooperation and resilient economic strategies that prioritize local needs over foreign interests. The book is essential for scholars and policymakers to understand the delicate balance Central Asia must strike in its quest for economic revival (Otorbaev, 2016).

The emergence of regional powers and the development of intricate interconnectedness, the world is changing from a unipolar to a multipolar one. It is becoming impossible for a single state to remain in isolation as long-standing rivals form

friendships and alliances. This paper examines the power dynamics of the twenty-first century and the prospects for global politics. The end of US hegemony, China's peaceful ascent, and the changing character of the power structure are all associated with the growing trends of multipolarity. China's peaceful ascent as the dominant emerging power is one of the arguments developed and supported by the study, which employs qualitative and analytical prediction approaches. (Muzaffar, Yaseen, & Rahim, 2017)

China's hegemonic ambitions include economic power and impact on international institutions, making it Asia's first tier hegemon. However, influence over the global institutional framework is still ongoing. China's Pax Americana eradication must be gradual, following Beijing's practices of avoiding confrontation. Success in bringing friends and allies could lead to Pax Sinica, but alliances may not align with China's foreign policy principles (Muzaffar, Shah, & Yaseen, , 2018).

Power has shifted from the west to the east in the twenty-first century, sparking a fresh discussion over China's peaceful ascent to prominence in the global economy. There are no true friends or enemies in international relations, as evidenced by the fact that major nations like the USA and Russia are looking for new areas of cooperation with China. Despite their close diplomatic and defense ties, this is also the case with China and Pakistan. The leadership of both states must resolve these differences (Yaseen, Muzaffar, & Afridi, 2017).

American strategic interests, Greater Central Asia which includes Central Asian republics, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Xinjiang, and Afghanistan has seen significant change. While Russia is worried about the deployment of American soldiers, authoritarian governments in the region are looking to increase American participation to defend against Russian hegemony and extremist Islam (Menon, 2011).

The growing rivalry between major political players in Central Asia on a global scale, demonstrating that it promotes both foreign rivalry and domestic security. Central Asian nations look for resources to strengthen their independence, while China and Russia aim to increase their dominance. Rivalry grows as the US leaves Afghanistan, with China establishing its commercial hegemony and Moscow vying for military installations. The situation is made worse by worries about succession, the Arab Spring, and Afghanistan's unclear future (Blank, 2012). The internal and local issues, political and economic concerns, and future hopes, the resurgence of close collaboration between China and Central Asia. China's reliance on Central Asian nations for gas and oil as well as internal security is still intriguing despite its increasing influence (SWANSTRÖM, 2007).

Russia, China, the United States, and the European Union are engaged in a "New Great Game" for regional hegemony in Central Asia, which is situated at the intersection of the Silk Road. In the past, a "axis of convenience" was formed by China and Russia to oppose Western influence. China's domination or a Chinese-Russian modus vivendi is suggested by the Power Transition Theory (Pizzolo & Carteny, 2022). Internal problems in Central Asian nations cause terrorism, radicalization of crime, state fragmentation, and refugee migrations. The competition between China, Russia, and the United States for control of the economy and energy is another factor drawing attention to the area on a global scale. The security risks that weak, fragile states face are ignored in this power struggle, endangering regional stability. In the fight against terrorism, Central Asian nations play a vital role by providing collaboration to security agencies like ISAF and NATO, which the United States and its allies first wanted. (Fatima & Zafar, 2014)

Energy is a key symbol of 21st-century geopolitics, with Asia being the ground zero for consumption. China, India, Japan, and South Korea consume a quarter of the world's liquid hydrocarbons. Over the next 20 years, 85% of energy consumption will come from the Indo-Pacific region. China will account for 40% of growing consumption until 2025, followed by India. The Indo-Pacific region will increasingly rely on oil from the Middle East and Central Asia. This article contextualizes the geopolitics of energy in Central Asia and highlights its importance for global energy security (Pradhan, 2021).

Strategic rivalry, economic challenges, poverty, corruption, lack of democracy, environmental pollution, and border disputes, Domino theories forecast instability and possible conflicts in Central Asia. The area is nonetheless comparatively stable in spite of these difficulties. Controlling the production, transportation, and export of oil and gas to global markets is the goal of competing agendas in Central Asia. China and Russia want to keep their influence in the region, while the United States wants to increase it. China and Russia will compete for control of energy resources, and Russia will have difficulties countering China's economic might, which in turn leads to political dominance. Nonetheless, China and Russia are still working together and strengthening their ties with the United States. In this strategy game, two weaker sides must work together to defeat a stronger force (Kurečić, 2010).

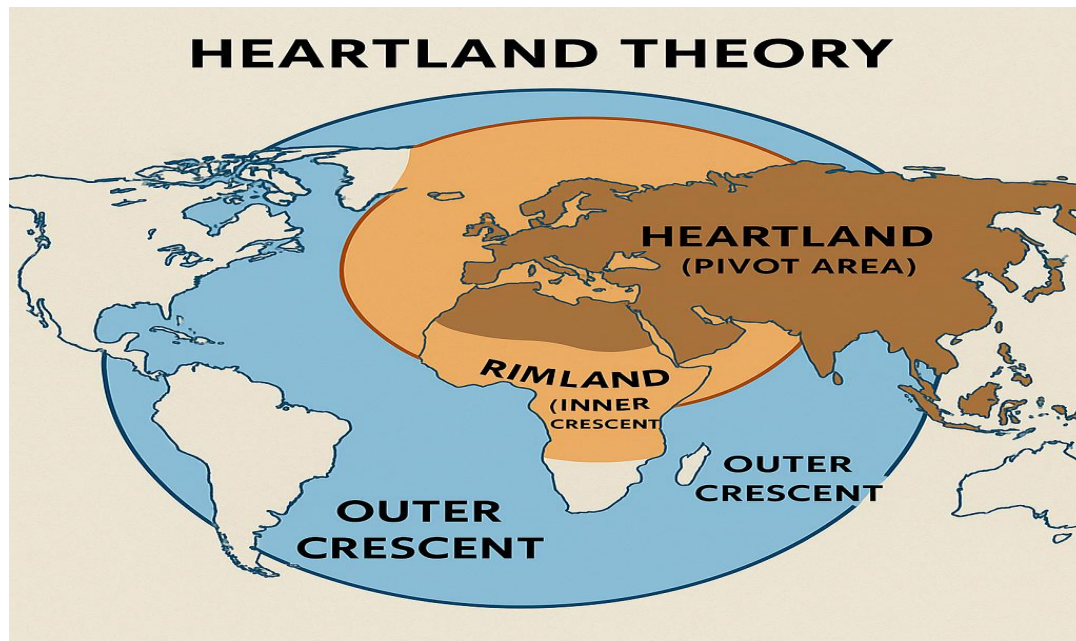
RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a qualitative approach, analysing data from various sources, including books, articles, and electronic media. The research is descriptive and explanatory. This study's goal is to examine the strategic goals and geopolitical dynamics of the major Central Asian countries, with a particular emphasis on the "New Great Game" between the US, China, and Russia. Understanding the effects of this rivalry on the area and the world order is the goal of the study.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

HEARTLAND THEORY

The British Navy's growth and the emergence of Pax Britannica in the nineteenth century appeared to be related, and American naval commander Alfred Thayer Mahan made a strong case that naval prowess was a prerequisite for national strength. But when British dominance waned, technical advancements in land transportation put this paradigm to the test. In the twentieth century, land power would take center stage with the development of railroads and internal combustion engines. The three continuous continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa made up two-thirds of the planet's solid surface, according to British geographer Halford Mackinder, even though only 25% of the planet's surface was land. This continent was called the "World Island" by Mackinder. According to his vision, the "heartland," which is the region of Eurasia made up of sections of modern-day Russia, the Caucasus, and Central Asia, was the key to strategic dominance. Mackinder believed that the World Island would hold large amounts of the energy resources needed for strategic dominance, which included exclusive access to those resources (Hess, 2004).



<https://edurev.in/t/213235/Rimland-Theories>

AMERICA'S INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA

American involvement in Central Asia is primarily strategic in nature, i.e., not primarily associated with access to energy or an attempt to democratize the region. Stated differently, US policy should not be primarily driven by energy access, despite its importance. Instead, it is only a tool to achieve a goal. Enabling Central Asian states to access international markets while also granting energy businesses reciprocal access will allow regional governments to expand their clientele and reach markets where they can provide their goods at competitive costs. In actuality, American officials frequently warn that Central Asia shouldn't turn into a battlefield for great power rivalry with the related alliances and blocs. These procedures lessen the likelihood of real regional collaboration and acts that allow for the unrestricted exercise of national sovereignty. (Blank, 2008)

RUSSIA'S INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA

Every Central Asian nation acknowledges Russia's involvement in the region and views it as a top foreign policy priority. In turn, the Russian Federation emphasizes the value of fostering ties with the nations in the area. However, there are certain challenges in the relationship between Russia and the Central Asian republics because of a variety of objective and subjective causes. Nevertheless, the connection between Russia and Central Asia is rather practical and encompasses political, economic, military, educational, and cultural cooperation, even though there are some disagreements in their opinions and viewpoints. Putin takes advantage of every chance to declare his intention to restore Russia to its position as a major power, and he is remarkably silent about the intricate and well-coordinated strategies required to do this. In 2015, the Kyrgyz Republic and Armenia joined Russia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan, the founding members of the Eurasian Economic Union. In May 2015, Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping signed a collaboration agreement between the Eurasian Economic Union and the Chinese project Silk Road Economic Belt, marking the 70th anniversary of the Great Patriotic War's triumph. (Rakhimov, 2015)

CHINA'S INTEREST IN CENTRAL ASIA

The People's Republic of China has always had an interest in Central Asia. It has always had something to do with the country's territorial security and the expansion and management of its territory. Following Prime Minister Li Peng's initial journey in 1994, official visits to the Central Asian republics have been coming one after the other steadily since their independence, indicating this nuanced interest.

Thus, "stability," the leitmotiv of the current political authority, is the main tenet of Chinese policy with regard to Central Asia. This tenet extends from internal stability, which is the case in historically restless regions like Xinjiang, to the stability of the frontier zones and the periphery, from which a whole new range of risks may arise since the end of the Cold War. (Niquet, 2006)

NEW GREAT GAME IN CENTRAL ASIA

Due to its proximity to Russia, China, Europe, India, and the Middle East, Central Asia has evolved into a battlefield not only for geopolitical conflicts but also for multinational corporations with significant interests in what many authors are referring to as "the New Great Game for Oil," which is a reference to the "Great Game" between Russia and Britain in their rivalry for influence in Central Asia in the 1800s. China and India have emerged as key competitors in the petroleum market due to their unparalleled levels of growth, development, and petroleum consumption. Due to its closeness to the Middle East and some of the world's greatest petroleum reserves, Central Asia has emerged as a venue for this battle. Examples of the worldwide trend toward poverty and environmental degradation brought on by the expansion of oil and gas reserves in developing countries may be seen in Central Asia. Compared to non-resource-rich countries, resource-rich countries are far more prone to face internal conflict and bloodshed. (Chapman, 2006)

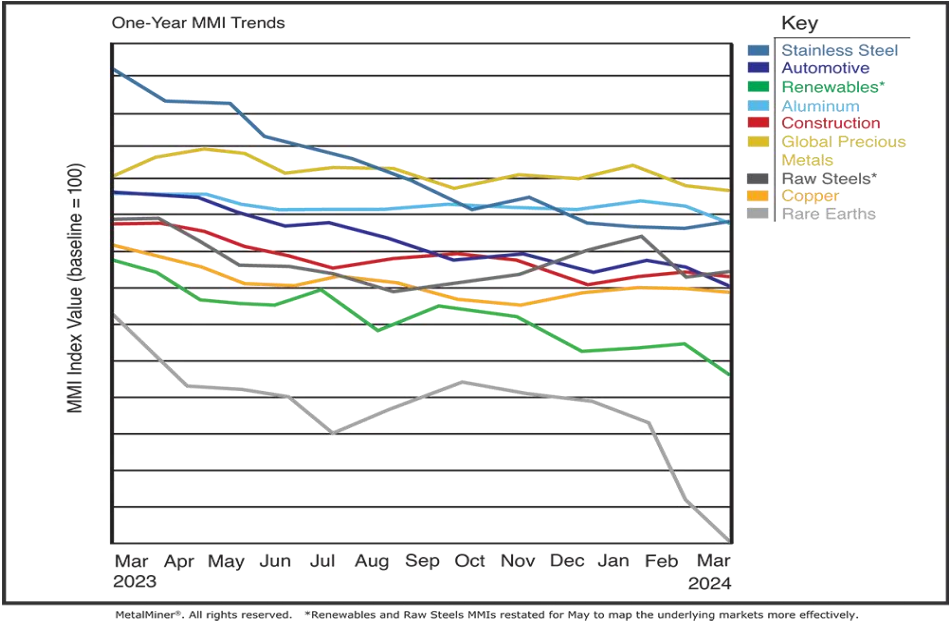
The former Soviet nations of Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, and Turkmenistan have all seen increases in poverty following the fall of the Soviet Union, despite the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund increasing their help to them. Although the petroleum and gas industry in the Caspian Basin accounts for the majority of outside investment, the relationship between corruption and finances is dubious in terms of where investment money is going and how it is being used. Poverty levels are a complicated issue associated with the transition from the Soviet Union to independence. (Collier & Hoeffler, 2000)

Corruption and a lack of transparency at the corporate and political levels are hallmarks of the politics of oil, which include international governments and businesses. Increasing global demand and competition for dwindling oil resources are frequently the causes of this. Even though these defects might only be present in specific aspects of the petroleum industry, they are frequently enough to have an impact on sizable populations involved in the production and transportation. Civilians who seldom ever profit monetarily from the trade of local natural resources bear the costs in the form of environmental damage, political hegemony, and even war.

The United States, represented militarily, and many foreign oil firms began to show a greater interest in Central Asia following the fall of the Soviet Union. For the first time in recent history, foreign countries and businesses were able to play a major part in the extraction, refinement, shipment, and resale of petroleum in the Caspian Basin when Moscow's formal political involvement was removed. Other military goals in the area included establishing a U.S. presence in Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Pakistan near the Russian-Chinese border. One of the world's greatest oil reservoirs is at risk in

Central Asia for both military and civilian purposes. Numerous reasons that have also affected the Persian Gulf business make it difficult to secure petroleum exchange in Central Asia, particularly in the Caspian Basin. Such as "contested boundaries and territorial disputes, the prevalence of authoritarian regimes, severe economic disparities, longstanding regional rivalries and a cauldron of ethnic and religious strife." (Coffer, 1999)

Natural resources in Central Asia:



Source: (Gusseinov, 2024)

Among the most prevalent rare metals and minerals in Central Asia are monazite, zircon, apatite, xenotime, pyrochlore, allanite, and columbite. 384 REE occurrences were reported in the area by the U.S. Geological Survey in 2016: two in Turkmenistan, 60 in Tajikistan, 75 in Kyrgyzstan, 87 in Uzbekistan, and 160 in Kazakhstan. (Imamova, 2024)

CONCLUSION

China is already a major force in Central Asia, especially because to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). As a result, China's influence in the region has increased and Central Asia is now seen as a vital hub for commerce, investment, and infrastructure development. To strengthen its position in Central Asia, the United States has adopted the "New Silk Road" policy. But the outcomes have been uneven, and there have been difficulties for the US presence in the area. Through a variety of strategies, including as political and economic connections, Russia continues to play a significant role in Central Asia. Russia continues to have a strong interest in the region. Competition in the political, diplomatic, and economic spheres has spread throughout Central Asia. Due to the region's strategic significance, several international countries have intensified their involvement, each competing for dominance. Central Asian countries themselves are navigating the complexities of balancing the interests of multiple major powers. This has led to a multivectoral approach in their foreign policies, attempting to benefit from the competition without becoming overly dependent on any single power.

RECOMMENDATIONS

DEVELOP REGIONAL COOPERATION: Central Asian countries ought to collaborate more within the region and become less dependent on foreign powers, in order to pool its resources across the region in geopolitical negotiations.

DIVERSIFY FOREIGN RELATIONS: Instead of being totally dependent on one major global power, the Central Asian nations should adopt a multi-vector foreign policy, which involves striking a balance between the US, Russia and China, Washington, the European Union (EU) and budding powers elsewhere in the world.

BUILD INSTITUTIONAL CAPACITY: Investment in governance, transparency, and infrastructure will provide Central Asian states the capacity to better participate in foreign diplomacy and economic cooperation.

FOCUS ON REGIONAL STABILITY: Addressing border conflicts, ethnic animosities and sociopolitical problems with regional countries can discourage external powers from taking advantage of internal differences.

EXPLOIT LOCATION: Central Asia should make the best use of its location by developing connectivity (e.g. transportation corridors, energy supply routes) that serve its needs in the long run.

PARTICIPATE IN MULTILATERAL ORGANIZATIONS: By taking part in multilateral organizations (SCO, EAEU, and UN), Central Asian states can vent grievances and influence regional policy discussions.

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