

FOREIGN RELATIONS IN CENTRAL ASIA: A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE SOVIET AND POST-SOVIET ERA

Enayatollah Yazdani

Sun Yat-sen University, P.R. China

<p>Article history:</p> <p><i>Received:</i> 15.08.2021</p> <p><i>Accepted:</i> 13.09.2021</p>	<p>Abstract: Central Asia's pivotal geographical position allowed it to play an essential role in relations among nations of Eurasia in the Middle Ages as the bridge between China and Europe. Yet, during the Russian and then the Soviet rule in Central Asia, the region's republics had no independent position in international relations as foreign affairs was formed and managed by the central government in Moscow. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 made salient the geopolitical, economic, and cultural importance of the five former Soviet Central Asian republics. They reemerged as independent actors in the global interstate system and could have played a significant role in international affairs during the last three decades.</p> <p>The article aims to discuss the Central Asian region's position in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. It explores how Central Asia as a "closed" region during the Soviet period changed its geopolitical position and became an influential actor in global affairs. In addition, the article addresses factors that have played important role in globalizing Central Asia.</p>
<p>About the author:</p> <p>Ph.D., Associate Professor of International Relations, School of International Studies, Sun Yat-sen University, Zhuhai Campus</p> <p>e-mail: yazdani@mail.sysu.edu.cn</p>	
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Central Asia, consisting of five republics – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan, – as a geopolitical region has had a long history, whose legacy after three decades is still felt and continues to influence its politico-economic life and particularly its relations with the global community. Yet, for about 150 years the region's history has been associated with Russian and particularly Soviet history. Indeed, the Central Asia region had become part of the USSR. As a result, the region's republics had no independent position in the international community as they did not have the right to establish relations with other countries: foreign affairs were managed by the central government in Moscow.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 the situation changed. The Central Asian republics again rose to prominence in geopolitical and strategic calculations. The republics reemerged as independent actors in the global interstate system. In addition to the region's geopolitical changes, some factors also contributed to the more visible role of the

republics in international politics and outside powers' influence and competition in the region.

The article aims to discuss the Central Asian region's position in the Soviet and post-Soviet eras. It explores how Central Asia as a "closed" region during the Soviet period changed its geopolitical position and became an influential actor in global affairs. In addition, the paper addresses factors that have played important role in globalizing Central Asia.

Geopolitics of Central Asia: preliminary observations

Central Asia is a part of the "Heartland" (in Mackinder's theory) and its pivotal geographical position allowed it to play an essential role in relations among nations of Eurasia in the Middle Ages, as the bridge between China and Europe.¹ In modern history,

¹ MacKinder, H.J. *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction*. London: Constable and Co. Ltd, 1919.

its importance grew as the great powers of the time (Russia and Britain) sought power and influence along its borders.² In the Bolshevik revolution of 1917 and subsequent 70 years of Soviet rule the republics did not play any role in international relations. With the Soviet Union's collapse in December 1991 the Central Asian republics again rose to prominence in geopolitical and strategic calculations. Indeed, in the post-Cold War era, Central Asia's geostrategic importance and natural resource potential have made it a focus of attention in Eurasian geopolitics.³ Any consideration of its republics' international politics has to be based on geopolitical, religious, economic, and regional realities.

The emergence of independent states in Central Asia has both literally and figuratively changed the map of Asia and affected the world, particularly the surrounding regions, especially the Middle East, South, and West Asia. The region borders Russia in the north, Iran, and Afghanistan in the south, China in the east, and the Caspian Sea in the west (see Pic. 1). This geographical location has made it strategically important. Furthermore, it is located at the center of Eurasia, connecting Eurasia not only from East to West but also from South to North. More importantly, it is surrounded by four major world civilizations: Christian, Confucian, Islamic and Hindu, and Asian powers, Russia, China, and India. In addition, the region lies at the strategic juncture among four nuclear powers, Russia, China, India, and Pakistan. In the meantime, another aspect of the region's geopolitical importance should not be overlooked i.e. the rise of political and commercial competition over the energy resources, namely oil and natural gas, and particularly the routes for export pipelines.⁴

Such a geopolitical position (see Pic. 1)

is a significant factor that has not only made the region attractive to the outside world but also placed it at the global challenge, especially after the 9/11 events. In particular, if the clash of civilizations foretold by S.P. Huntington materializes as the latest phase in the evolution of conflict in the modern world, the role this region could play is undeniable due to its special location.⁵

Picture 1.

Central Asia's Geopolitical Position Map⁶



Central Asia is a "closed region": no foreign relations

The Central Asian region has had a long history, whose legacy after three decades is still felt and continues to influence its politico-economic life and particularly its relations with the outside world. For more than three thousand years this region has been a crossroads for major ethnic migrations. Central Asia was predominantly inhabited by nomadic and sedentary tribes, composed of a variety of ethnic groups. The Tajiks are closely related to the Persians, Kazaks are of Turkic-Mongol origin, and also the Uzbeks who also spread across the virtually nonexistent border into northern Afghanistan; the Turkmens and Kyrgyz were also Turkic, and all could reasonably be described as 'backward', especially technologically, compared to their

² Rahimov, R. Geopolitics and Conflict Potential in Central Asia and South Caucasus / *Geopolitical Monitor*, May 25, 2018. Mode of access: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/geopolitics>

³ Fuller, G.E. Central Asia's geopolitical future // *Post Soviet Prospects*, 1994, Vol. II, No. 8, pp. 56-60.

⁴ Tokaev, K. The major Geopolitical Challenges of Central Asia Today / Palais d'Egmont, Brussels, October 30, 2003; Arvanitopoulos, C. The Geopolitics of Oil in Central Asia // *Thesis*, 1997/1998, Vol. 1, No. 4, pp. 18-27.

⁵ Huntington, S.P. The Clash of Civilizations // *Foreign Affairs*, 1993, Vol. 72, No. 3, pp. 22-28; Kadivar, J. Iran and Its Region Post-11 September. Mode of access: <http://www.asialink.unimelb.edu.au/cpp/transcripts/kadivar200203.html>

⁶ Mode of access: http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/caucasus_cntrl_asia_pol_95.jpg

Russian conquerors.⁷ In such circumstances, it was not easy for them to develop a counterpart to European nationalism. The entire region was run as two governments, with roughly the present-day Kazakhstan being the 'steppe' governorate, and the rest – 'Turkestan' – under the influence of the main oasis states, namely Merv (Turkmen), Khiva (mostly Turkmen and Uzbek), Bukhara (including Samarkand, a synthesis of Uzbeks and Tajiks), and Kokand (including Tashkent, mainly Uzbek). Among them, the Emirates of Bukhara and Khiva were the major political and cultural centers, both were established in the early 16th century.⁸ Turkestan society was feudal, overwhelmingly illiterate, and backward in its agricultural practices. Warfare between the nomadic tribes over grazing land, and between the nomads and the settled areas was endemic. Slavery was institutional, the Turkmens, in particular, made a living by robbing trading caravans and raiding adjacent areas, especially northern Iran, to abduct travelers and inhabitants and sell them in the slave markets of Bukhara and elsewhere. From the religious point of view, as discussed below, apart from the Pamiris, who were mostly Ismaili Shiite, the great majority of Central Asians were Sunni Muslims of the *Hanafi* School of Islamic law (*madhhab*), one of four such schools within Sunni Islam.⁹

Furthermore, the region was a meeting place for the great civilizations of the ancient world and Middle Ages – Persian, Indian,

Chinese, and Islamic. After the diffusion of civilization westward and eastward, the most convenient overland routes linking the Mediterranean world, India, Persia, and China led through Central Asia. As long as these routes remained the principal arteries of trade and communication among the four major centers of civilized life, Central Asia was assured a leading role in world history.¹⁰ The area has also long been an arena of great-power rivalry at various times involving the Persian, Arab, Mongol, Ottoman, and Russian empires, and also China along its eastern margins.¹¹

For more than one and half centuries Central Asia was predominantly under Russian and then Soviet rule. In fact, for most of Central Asia's history, its politics have been shaped by Russia and the Soviet Union, at least as much as by internal forces. Russia has had a long history of contact with Central Asia and the cultural, social, economic, and political characteristics of the region were greatly influenced by Russian politics, economy, and culture.

Russian rule in Central Asia was based on specific strategic, economic, political, and cultural imperatives. Strategically, Central Asia became important during the 19th century. Indeed, in that period the conquest of the region took place in the context of wider international struggles.¹² The occupation of Central Asia brought Russia closer to India, a British colony, a land of enormous economic potential, and a corridor towards the world market. This southward advance alarmed the British government, so some British politicians began to speak of a Russian threat to India, while Russia in turn characterized Britain as a real threat to its interests in the area.¹³ This

⁷ Baumer, C. *History of Central Asia*, I.B. Tauris, 2018; Jukes, G. *The Soviet Union in Asia*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973. P. 35; Becker, S. *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968. Pp. 67-83.

⁸ Jukes, G. *The Soviet Union in Asia*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973. P. 35.

⁹ Stacey, A. *Islam in Central Asia, The Religion of Islam*. September 2019. Mode of access: <https://www.islamreligion.com/articles/11398/viewall/islam-in-central-asia>; Jordan, P. *Islam in Central Asia: A Religion and a Heritage / Young Historians Conference*. 3, February 21, 2012. Mode of access: <https://pdxscholar.library.pdx.edu/younghistorians/2012/oralpres/3/>; Black, A. *The History of Islamic Political Thought: From the Prophet to the Present*, New York: Routledge, 2001. Pp. 33-37. The other three schools of Sunni Islam are the Shafai, the Hanbali and the Maliki.

¹⁰ Becker, S. *Russia's Protectorates in Central Asia: Bukhara and Khiva, 1865-1924*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968. Pp. 3-24.

¹¹ Hunter, S.T. *Central Asia since Independence*, London: Praeger, 1996. Pp. 3-19.

¹² Becker, S. *The Muslim East in Nineteenth Century Russian Popular Historiography // Central Asian Survey*, 1986, Vol.5, No. 3/4, pp. 25-47.

¹³ Boulger, D.C. *England and Russia in Central Asia*, 2 Vols, London: W.H. Allen and Co., 1879; Anwar Khan, M. *England, Russia and Central Asia: A Study in Diplomacy 1857-1878*, Peshawar: University Book Agency, 1963; Johnson, R.A. *Russians at the Gates of India: Planning the Defence of India, 1885-1900 // The*

situation led both powers toward conflict. In this connection, Central Asia played a strategic role for each to counter the other's perceived threat by creating a form of strategic diversion associated with cross-border subversion; this Anglo-Russian competition was known as the 'Great Game'.¹⁴

The Russian revolution of October 1917 occurred within an ideological framework that opened the way for new local elites and political bodies to emerge. The Central Asians had received the revolution with mixed sentiments. Nationalist Muslims tried to use this opportunity to gain independence, but moderate Muslim groups preferred to have the support of the new Soviet regime.¹⁵

Politically, the republic's communist party was part of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union and the republics were ruled by the political and financial power of the center. None of the Central Asian Republics until 1991 has experienced sovereignty neither these states had a background of independent nationhood. The republics' economic structure was determined by centralized Soviet planning. The region's economy was tied to Moscow because the USSR was a single economic space, in which all Soviet republics were to a greater or lesser extent dependent on each other. Parts and raw materials for Central Asia's industries were imported from elsewhere in the USSR. The Soviet era also brought forced collectivization and migration that deeply changed Central Asian

ways of life. Soviet resettlement programs and political expulsions brought large numbers of non-indigenes to the region, while collective farming and agricultural quotas initially came close to destroying the local economies and land. However, Soviet rule of Central Asia also brought some considerable progress, including the development of agriculture and to some degree industry, and significant achievements in culture, science, education, and public health, as discussed below (see Figure 1), and in addition, provided some access to wider markets for Central Asian products.¹⁶ Askar Akayev, former president of Kyrgyzstan, had said in this respect: "Those citizens of the Central Asian countries who possess good common sense and are free from nationalistic prejudices are well aware of Russia's positive role in developing the region. The Soviet epoch was a sort of Renaissance for Central Asia in terms of public health services, culture, education, and science."¹⁷

Figure 1.

Growth of Industrial Activity in the Central Asian Republics, 1960-1969 (1940=100)¹⁸



Journal of Military History, 2003, Vol. 67, No. 3, pp. 697-743.

¹⁴ The term 'Great Game' was coined by an official in the nineteenth-century British Indian Empire, referring to the major regional powers' competition to dominate Central Asia, where empires historically have rubbed together at the center of Eurasia. It was a struggle for dominance over land and populations whose value lay in their location between the Russian and British Empires. See: Hopkirk, P. *The Great Game: The Struggle for Empire in Central Asia*, New York: Kodansha International, 1994.

¹⁵ Morrison, A. "Central Asia and the Bolshevik Revolution: A Look at the Balance Sheet at the Centennial". *EurasiaNet* October 26, 2017. Mode of access: <https://eurasianet.org/central-asia-and-the-bolshevik-revolution>; Miller, M.A. ed. *The Russian Revolution: The Essential Readings*, New York: Blackwell, 2001.

Russian and Soviet rule in Central Asia widely affected the region's culture, economics, and politics, and created a relationship of strong dependency between the local nations and the Russian/Soviet state. The region's politico-

¹⁶ Freni, S.J. *The Soviet Nationality Policy in Central Asia* // *Inquiries Journal/Student Pulse* 5.03.2013. Mode of access: <http://www.inquiriesjournal.com/a?id=731>; Kasenov, U. *Post-Soviet Modernization in Central Asia: Realities and prospects*. In B. Rumer and S. Zhukov, eds., *Central Asia: The Challenges of Independence*, New York: M E Sharpe, 1998. Pp. 28-53.

¹⁷ Akayev, A. *Whither Central Asia* // *Russia in Global Affairs*, No. 4, October/December 2003.

¹⁸ Data source: Jukes, G. *The Soviet Union in Asia*, Sydney: Angus and Robertson, 1973. P. 40.

economic and social structure was shaped in a centrist manner. Therefore, one can assume that Central Asia was in fact, a “closed region”, with no position and no role to play in international relations.

The post-Soviet Central Asia: a move towards global connectivity

The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 made salient the geopolitical, economic, and cultural importance of the five former Soviet Central Asian republics. As a result, Central Asia, a closed and hard-to-reach region of Eurasia, once again achieved a significant position on Eurasia's map, with an increased geopolitical and strategic weight of the region. The independence of the republics and Russia's partial withdrawal from Central Asia changed the geopolitics of the region from a closed area to one opening up to other interested foreign actors. Accordingly, as mentioned earlier, a region that in the Cold War era remained in the background of international politics after independent Central Asia attracted the attention of the global and regional powers. On the other hand, the Soviet Union's breakdown changed the geopolitics of Central Asia, placing it firmly in a new geopolitical and geo-economic context. Accordingly, it started to gain prominence in the strategic objectives and politico-economic ambitions of many extra-regional powers.¹⁹ Indeed, Central Asia's new environment, its strategic location, and enormous natural resources made it an area where some other states, such as the Russian Federation, China, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, India, Saudi Arabia, Japan, Israel, and the European Union (EU) could compete.

The republics became free to “pursue their own individual policy lines towards religion, politics, the economy and anything else for that matter.”²⁰ Geopolitically, Central

Asia is important due to its strategic position. Economically, as mentioned earlier, some of the republics, notably Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and to some extent Uzbekistan, sit on vast natural resources, notably oil and gas, as well as gold and uranium are also present. These two important characteristics have impelled regional and international powers to seek roles in the region's republics, and exploit their economic and political problems to gain influence. Consequently, these republics have become a new strategic area in post-Cold War international politics and economics.²¹

Independence brought the formal establishment of foreign embassies along with rapid development of communication between the republics and the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Western Europe, and the United States. The rivalry between various forces in the region added to friction and historical grievances within the CIS.²²

The Central Asian republics' orientation to the outside world greatly affects the power and national security planning of neighboring and other states, principally the United States, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, India, and Pakistan. How these actors have acted in Central Asia can influence geopolitical alignments in the region. It is also important to grasp, how these states and others whose interest is acute though less direct, (for example, the EU, Japan, Israel, and Saudi Arabia), position Central Asia into their strategic thinking.²³ The initial power vacuum created by the collapse of the Soviet Union has pulled regional states and some international

²¹ Ze, S. Situation in Central Asia and Transcaucasia and Its Prospect at Threshold of the New Century // *Marco Polo Magazine*, 1998, No. 3, pp. 1-6.

²² Russia, China Share Positions on CIS Relations // BBC Monitoring Former Soviet Union, London, 23 March 2004. P. 1; Gladkyy, O. American Foreign Policy and US Relations with Russia and China after 11 September // *World Affairs*, 2003, Vol. 166, No. 1, pp. 3-24; Menon, R. *The New Great Game in Central Asia* // *Survival*, 2003, Vol. 45, No. 2, London, pp. 187-210; Hunter, S.T. *Iran's Pragmatic Regional Policy* // *Journal of International Affairs*, 2003, Vol. 56, No. 2, pp. 133-147.

²³ Bharti, S.S. Central Asia as a Region in International Relations, September 2020.

actors into an intensive competition for power and influence in the area. Each has had specific objectives and the competition has economic, political, ideological, and religious dimensions.

The Central Asian leaders strongly believed that they were part of a Eurasian macroregion, geographically in Asia, but culturally, politically, and economically part of Eastern Europe, and realized that they needed to redefine their identity when the USSR ceased to exist, to position themselves in the global community and develop their relations with it.²⁴

To promote these objectives they needed to strengthen their independence, maintain sovereignty, and give high priority to national consolidation and security.²⁵ Their priorities have appeared to be regime survival and economic restructuring, with foreign policy considerations relevant only if they support these objectives.²⁶ Their poor economic performance, particularly in the early years of independence, progressively convinced them that they needed help wherever they could get it.²⁷ Furthermore, securing foreign investment to develop their oil and gas industries was an important foreign policy issue, particularly for Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. To overcome their economic problems and reduce politico-economic and military dependence on Russia, they opened doors for extra-regional states.²⁸

In this connection, former Uzbek President Karimov stated: "Relying on their internal resources and possibilities, [the republics] are searching for a solution to these problems with the support of interested parties in the world community."²⁹ At the same time, the region's economic and market potential has attracted the outside world's attention, especially the energy resources of the Caspian Sea. M.B. Olcott in the early 1990s pointed out: "Now the outside world could be let in, and each of the leaders saw the arrival of the international community as his salvation. Foreigners would help generate the capital that economic development required, through the purchase of energy and other valuable raw materials, through international funding (in part through joint ventures) Soviet-era plans for resource extraction as well as through the further expansion of these projects, and through the use of foreign aid, international credits, and joint ventures to reform agriculture and to modernize and expand the industrial base."³⁰

Since 1991 the Central Asian states have established diplomatic relations with many countries. In 1992 they all joined the UN, the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO), while Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan also joined the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC), with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan following in 1995.³¹ In 1994 all

²⁴ Ayoob, M.; Ismayilov, M. *Identity and Politics in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, London: Routledge, 2017; Jo-Ann, G. ed.. *Muslims in Central Asia: Expressions of Identity and Change*, Durham: Duke University Press, 1992.

²⁵ Vassiliev, A. ed. *Central Asia: Political and Economic Challenges in the Post-Soviet Era*, London: Saqi Books, 2001. Pp. 31-37.

²⁶ Tulyakov E.; Khakimov, F. *Friendly Cooperation with Central Asian States: A Priority Direction of Uzbekistan's Foreign Policy // Caspian Policy Center*, March 29, 2021.

²⁷ Qazi, M.Sh. *Central Asia: Crossroads for Global Economic Stratagem // Journal of Political Studies*, 2015, Vol. 22, pp. 289-301.

²⁸ Kakharov, J. *Uzbek-Russian Economic Relations and the Impact of the Russian Economic Performance on Uzbekistan's Growth and Foreign Trade // Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2004, Vol. 25, No. 5, pp. 167-172; Kliashorniy, J.V.S. *Russia and Kazakhstan: Geopolitical Alternatives and Civilization // Central Asia and the Caucasus*,

2003, Vol. 24, No. 6, pp. 112-119; Anderson, The *International Politics of Central Asia*, Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997.

²⁹ Karimov, I. *Uzbekistan on the Threshold of Twenty-First Century*, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1997. P. 29.

³⁰ Olcott, M.B. *Central Asia's New States: Independence, Foreign Policy, and Regional Security*, Washington: United States Institute of Peace, 1996. P. 5.

³¹ ECO is an inter-governmental regional organization, which was established in 1985 by Iran, Pakistan and Turkey for the purpose of sustainable socio-economic development of the Member States. The Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was formed in 1969 after the burning of the al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem, with the idea that Islamic governments should 'consult together with a view to promoting close cooperation and mutual assistance in the economic, scientific, cultural and spiritual fields, inspired by teachings of Islam.'

Table 1.

Participation of Central Asian Countries in Organisations for Regional Cooperation, 2002*							
Country	SCO	EEC	CSTO	CICA	ECO	CACO	PfP
Kazakhstan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Kyrgyzstan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Tajikistan	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Turkmenistan**					X		X
Uzbekistan	X			X	X	X	X

* Strategy Paper 2002-2006 and Indicative Program 2002-2004 for Central Asia, European Commission, 30 October 2002. P. 5.

SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (with Russia and China).

EEC: Eurasian Economic Community, ex Customs Union (with Russia and Belarus).

CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organisation.

CICA: Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (with Afghanistan, China, Egypt, Iran, Israel, India, Pakistan, Palestine National Administration, Russia, and Turkey).

CACO: Central Asian Cooperation Organisation, ex Central Asian Economic Community.

** Due to its policy of neutrality, Turkmenistan has participated in few regional organizations such as PfP Partnership for Peace (with NATO).

joined the NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) (see Table 1).³²

However, during the last three decades, the close link between the individual states' domestic policies and foreign relations has also led each down different paths in international relations. For example, Kazakhstan's long border with Russia (6,846 km) and large Russian population, and Tajikistan's dependence on Russian military assistance during and after its civil war, have resulted in considerable interaction with Russia. Instead, Uzbekistan has tried to distance itself from Russia, and Turkmenistan has pursued neutrality.³³ Nevertheless, the republics have devoted and continue to devote considerable effort to forming and implementing their foreign policies. For various reasons, Central Asia has been also of increased importance to a considerable number of regional and extra-regional powers.

Indeed, for the post-Soviet Central Asian

republics, one of the most important issues was to form their foreign relations.³⁴ Immediately after achieving independence, they were concerned to establish a positive image in the eyes of the global community and to promote their self-identity in the international arena, attain membership of regional and international organizations, particularly the UN, establish relations with the outside world, and gain political and financial support to consolidate their independence and reconstruct their economies.

At the same time, some other factors also contributed to the expansion of powers influence and competition in the region.

1) The region has enormous of oil and natural gas, as mentioned earlier, particularly in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, and to some extent Uzbekistan. Due to their "energy wealth", Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have got a prominent space on the global hydrocarbon map. Kazakhstan has proven reserves estimated at 30.0 thousand million barrels (3.9 thousand million tons) of oil and proven natural gas reserves of 35.0 trillion cubic feet (1.3 trillion cubic meters), which constitutes 1.7% and 0.5% of global proven reserves with a reserve to production

³² Tajikistan joined the program in 2001, the 27th country, and the last former Soviet republic, to sign up for NATO's Partnership for Peace program in a ceremony on 20 February 2002. RFE/RL, Prague, 25 February 2002; Akiner, S. Emerging Political Order in the New Caspian States. In: Crossroads and Conflict: Security and Foreign Policy in the Caucasus and Central Asia. Ed. by G.K. Bertsch, C.B. Craft, S.A. Jones, M. Beck. New York: Routledge, 2000. Pp. 90-128.

³³ Gusev, L. The Importance of Central Asia for Russia's Foreign Policy / Italian Institute for International Political Studies, October 3, 2019. Mode of access: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publicazione>

³⁴ Bremmer, I. The Post-Soviet Nations after Independence. In Lowell W. Barrington, After Independence: Making and Protecting the Nation in Postcolonial and Postcommunist States, Michigan: University of Michigan Press, 2006.

ratio (R/P) of 42.7 years and 40.7 years respectively. Turkmenistan has proven reserves estimated at 0.6 thousand million barrels (0.1 thousand million tons) of oil and proven natural gas reserves of 688.1 trillion cubic feet (19.5 trillion cubic meters), which constitutes 0.05% and 9.9% of global proven reserves respectively with a reserve to production ratio (R/P) of 7.4 years and more than 316.8 years. Uzbekistan has proven reserves estimated at 0.6 thousand million barrels (0.1 thousand million tons) of oil and proven natural gas reserves of 42.7 trillion cubic feet (1.2 trillion cubic meters), which constitutes 0.05% and 0.6% of global proven reserves respectively with a reserve to production ratio(R/P) of 25.4 years and 21.4 years.³⁵

With the region's great natural and human resources and its central location in the rapidly integrating Eurasian economic space, all neighboring countries, but also Europe and the US, share common interests. Nonetheless, interests also diverge, for example, intense attention is now focused on developing and creating access to the energy resources of the region, especially the oil and gas reserves of the Caspian Basin. Russia is interested in maintaining its transport monopoly and preferential access to Central Asia's oil and gas. The EU and the United States want to see more diversified energy transport routes towards the West. China has been looking to develop the pipeline infrastructure towards the East, and India and Pakistan are eager to tap Central Asia's energy resources towards the south.³⁶ Such interest and competition over the region's energy have possibly made Central Asia a new hub for global integration. On the other hand, with agreements on oil and gas extraction, production, and export, the Central Asian countries have succeeded in gaining political visibility on the international stage,

and in improving their position in the global economy.

2) Tajikistan Civil war. In May 1992 political and social tensions in Tajikistan escalated to a devastating civil war.³⁷ Indeed, in 1992, Tajikistan was engulfed in civil war, with different interest groups vying for control of the state. The civil war lasted for about 5 years until June 1997. Russia considered Tajikistan's civil war a direct threat to Russia's national security and intervened. To the press and public, Moscow's officials spoke of fears that an opposition victory in Tajikistan would lead to the spread of instability all over Central Asia. To prevent the spread of civil war to the rest of the area, Russia got directly involved in the conflict, believing that if Russia were to "pull out from Tajikistan, a wave of destabilization may sweep through the whole of Central Asia, which [was] the underbelly of Russia."³⁸ Furthermore, the Kremlin was worried about Tajikistan's long border with Afghanistan (1,206 km) and signed an agreement with the Tajik government, by which Russia would provide border guard in Tajikistan.

3) Central Asia as a part of the Islamic World. When the Central Asian republics became independent, it was widely expected that their isolation from the Islamic World would end, and they would rapidly develop multilateral relations.³⁹ But it soon appeared that, although the region's states have sought to expand relations with some Islamic countries, they have not tried to play the "Islam card" in their foreign relations.⁴⁰

³⁵ Wani, M.I. Central Asia: Locus of World Energy Resources, Greater Kashmir. October 13, 2020. Mode of access: <https://www.greaterkashmir.com/todays-paper/central-asia-locus-of-world-energy-resources>

³⁶ Linn, J.F. Central Asia: A New Hub of Global Integration. Brookings, November 29, 2017. Mode of access: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/central-asia-a-new-hub-of-global-integration>

³⁷ Epkenhans, T. The Origins of the Civil War in Tajikistan: Nationalism, Islamism, and Violent Conflict in Post-Soviet Space, London and New York: Lexington Books, 2016. Pp.19-22.

³⁸ Foreign Broadcast Information Service Daily Report: Central Eurasia / FBIS: FSU, January 30, 1996. P. 17. Jonson, L. The Tajik War: A Challenge to Russian Policy / Discussion Paper 74, Royal Institute of International Affairs, London, 1998. P. 54.

³⁹ Voll, J.O. Central Asia as a Part of the Modern Islamic World. In Central Asia in Historical Perspective. Ed. by B.F. Manz. Boulder: Westview Press, 1994. Pp. 62-81.

⁴⁰ Mirovalev, M. Why Can't Central Asia "reunite" with the Muslim world? TRT WORLD, December 9, 2020. Mode of access: <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/why-can-t-central-asia->

The Muslim world's interests in Central Asia can be divided into three categories: political, ideological, and economic.⁴¹ The motivations of Muslim countries in exploring the potential for new relations with the Central Asian republics are mainly political, though Central Asia's potential as a market and its resources of oil and gas have also played a part. Some Islamic states have attempted to deal with the region through their ideological model; and there has been a kind of ideological competition between their political establishments, Turkey emphasizing its secular model, Saudi Arabia supporting strict Wahhabism, and Iran showing little interest in political Islam.⁴²

The leading Muslim countries vying to maximize their influence in the region are Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Turkey, and to a lesser extent, Pakistan, and Afghanistan.

4) The events of September 2001 and the war on terror. The 9/11 events, the subsequent anti-terrorist campaign in Afghanistan, and US military deployment in Central Asia had attached a new geopolitical and geostrategic importance to the region. Although Washington was attempting to extend its military influence in the region long before September, 11 it became a strategic platform for the projection of US military power in 'Operation Enduring Freedom' elevating its strategic significance in the new post-9/11 security paradigm.⁴³

Indeed, one can assume that the terrorist attacks and the subsequent war in Afghanistan brought the world's attention to Central Asia. These events had a significant effect on the political landscape of the Central Asian states, which to varying degrees became Washington's allies against Taliban rule in Afghanistan and the Al-Qaeda terrorist network. The US

military presence in the 'heart of Asia' has renewed interest in its geostrategic importance.⁴⁴ Washington saw vital national security and economic interests in the region. Meanwhile, the region's geopolitics was transformed by the stationing of the US military near the borders of China, Russia, and Iran. The war led to the establishment of two US military bases in the region: Khanabad in Uzbekistan and Manas in Kyrgyzstan.

5) Initiating regional organizations and programs. Regional organizations are established to foster mechanisms of cooperation among states willing to develop their common belonging to a geographical space, a geopolitical entity, or an economic bloc and enhanced their global position.⁴⁵ The Central Asian republic have been and still are members of several regional organizations, including the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), The Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the International Fund for Saving the Aral Sea (IFAS), NATO Partnership for Peace (PfP) Programme, the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEc), The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO), Central Asian Nuclear Weapon Free Zone (CANWFZ), the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB).

In the framework of the abovementioned organizations, a fundamental step towards Central Asia globalization has been taken. Indeed, the membership in these organizations has provided an opportunity for the region's republics to shore up their legitimacy on both the domestic and international fronts.⁴⁶

reunite-with-the-muslim-world-42210; Akiner, S. Islam in the Newly Independent Central Asian States in the 1990s // *Harvard International Review*, Spring 2000, pp.62-65.

⁴¹ Robins, P. The Middle East and Central Asia. In: *The New Central Asia and Its Neighbours*. Ed. by P. Ferdinand. London: Pinter Publishers, 1994. Pp. 123-141.

⁴² Ibid.

⁴³ Giragosian R.; McDermott, R.N. US Military Engagement in Central Asia: Great Game or Great Gain? // *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 2004, Vol. 25, No. 1, pp. 53-61.

⁴⁴ Mackinnon, A. Central Asia Braces for Fallout of U.S. Pullout from Afghanistan // *Foreign Policy*, July 16, 2021.

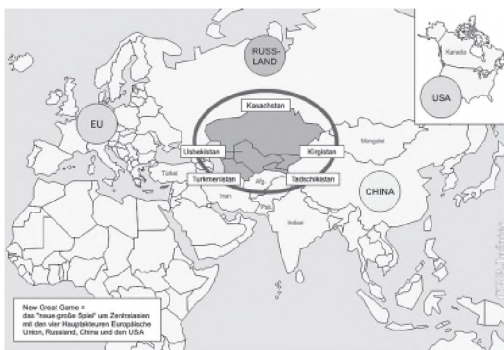
⁴⁵ Laruelle M.; Peyrouse, S. Regional Organisations in Central Asia: Patterns of Interaction, Dilemmas of Efficiency Marlene Laruelle and Sebastien Peyrouse, Central Asia University, Working Paper, 2012, No. 10, 2012. P. 5.

⁴⁶ Moylan, T. Regionalism in Central Asia / *E-International Relations*, July 28, 2013. Mode of access: <https://www.e-ir.info/2013/07/28/regionalism-in-central-asia>

6) The role of globalization. With the leading nature of economic, technological, and cultural components, globalization has gradually deepened mutual interdependence between the nations.⁴⁷ In the late 1990s, observers believed that globalization could offer the Central Asian republics “numerous benefits” in terms of economic, social, political, and international development.⁴⁸ Globalization indeed has provided a better opportunity for the Central Asian republic to integrate into regional and global affairs.

Picture 2.

The New Great Game Map⁴⁹



Consequently, the region opened up to international politics. This situation provided an opportunity for the region's republics to gain a position in the international arena and establish relationships with the majority of the states. In addition, Central Asia republics became members of many regional and global organizations. Such membership has provided the republics with an opportunity to get politico-economic help and assistance to resolve their internal problems. At the same time, due to Central Asia's geopolitical

and geostrategic position and its enormous energy resources, the region has gained a vital place in the regional and global power's foreign policy begetting a “New Great Game”. The New Great Game refers to the conceptualization of modern geopolitics in post-Soviet Central Asia. This is characterized by the competition between regional and global powers in Central Asia and involves countries such as Russia, the United States, China, India, EU, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and some other states (see Pic. 2).

Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that during the Soviet Union the Central Asian republics never gained a chance to establish a relationship with the outside world. More importantly, Central Asia was a “closed region” and had no place on the Eurasia geopolitical map. The Soviet Union's disintegration provided the Central Asian republics with opportunities to establish their foreign relations. The paper argued that in the post-Soviet era, due to the need for nation-state-building, international legitimacy, technical and economic assistance, and security, the states have been attempting to join the international community through establishing relationships with a broad spectrum of countries and joining international and regional organizations.

In addition, the growing international attention to the area shows that it has gained new geostrategic importance. The article also explored how the region's geopolitical importance, energy resources, economic and political problems have made the outside world pay attention to it and rush to establish relations with the independent republics during the latest three decades. As a result, Central Asia has become an area of geopolitical competition for regional and international powers which is known as the “New Great Game”. This has contributed to the globalizing of Central Asia in the post-Soviet era. In addition, Central Asia became a place where several regional and global powers engage simultaneously and for a variety of reasons. Therefore, Central Asia which once was closed and an unreachable region opened up and integrated with the international community.

⁴⁷ Council for European Studies (CES), Central Asia in the Age of Connectivity, Europe Now Journal, June 2018. Mode of access: <https://www.europenowjournal.org/2018/06/04/central-asia-in-the-age-of-connectivity/>; Elma F.; Gurbanov, S. Central Asia in the Globalization Process: Comparative Analysis of Human Development and Socio-Economic Situation // SSRN Electronic Journal, January 2012.

⁴⁸ Jafalian, A. Globalization through Oil and Gas: Central Asia's Predicament // *Tla-melau*, 2020, Vol. 13, No. 47, October 7.

⁴⁹ Mode of access: <http://crp-infotec.de/asien-geopolitische-paramete>

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МЕЖДУНАРОДНЫЕ ОТНОШЕНИЯ В ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ: СРАВНЕНИЕ СОВЕТСКОЙ И ПОСТСОВЕТСКОЙ ЭПОХ

Энайятолах Яздани

Университет Сунь Ятсена,
Китайская Народная Республика

<p>Информация о статье:</p> <p><i>Поступила в редакцию:</i></p> <p>15 августа 2021</p> <p><i>Принята к печати:</i></p> <p>13 сентября 2021</p>	<p>Аннотация: Особое географическое положение Центральной Азии позволяло ей играть особую роль в отношениях между народами Евразии в средние века в качестве моста между Китаем и Европой. Во время российского, а затем и советского контроля Средней Азии республики региона не обладали независимостью в осуществлении иностранных дел. Распад Советского Союза в 1991 году позволил странам региона играть новую, важную геополитическую, экономическую и культурную роль в мире. Они возродились как независимые игроки в глобальной межгосударственной системе и смогли играть значительную роль в международных делах в течение последних трех десятилетий. Статья направлена на анализ положения регионов Центральной Азии в советское и постсоветское время. В ней исследуется, каким образом Центральная Азия как «закрытый» регион в советский период изменила свое геополитическое положение и стала влиятельным игроком в международных делах. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются факторы, которые имели ключевое значение в глобализации Центральной Азии.</p>
<p>Об авторе:</p> <p>PhD, доцент кафедры международных отношений, Университет Сунь Ятсена, кампус Чжухай</p> <p>e-mail: yazdani@mail.sysu.edu.cn</p>	
<p>Ключевые слова:</p> <p>международные отношения; Центральная Азия; СССР; Китай</p>	

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