



RESEARCH PAPER

China's New Great Game in Central Asia: Its Interest and Development

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ABSTRACT

Central Asia is rich in hydrocarbon resources. Its geostrategic, geopolitical, and geo-economic significance has grasped the attention of multiple actors such as China, the USA, Russia, Turkey, the European Union, Pakistan, Afghanistan, and India. Due to its location, the Central Asian region appeared as a strategic hub. In the present scenario, China's strategy is massive economic development, energy interest, peace, and stability. This article highlights China's interest, political and economic development, and its role as a major player in the New Great Game in Central Asia. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which presents as a platform where China is playing an active role in political, economic, and security concerns for achieving its objectives in Central Asia. The new step of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) sheds light on China's progressive move in this region via land and sea routes, which creates opportunities for globalization.

Introduction

The New Great Game is a geopolitical, geo-economic, and geostrategic game based on the energy reserves of the Central Asian and Caspian Basin region (Khan,2017). This is the complicated aspects of relations in the economic and strategic domains (Duggan, Sherman, Carbery & McDonnell,2020). Central Asian region is rich in vast natural resources, the analogy is that the region appeared the auditorium of world competition which is called the New Great Game executed after the end of the cold war (Fatima & Zafar,2014).The concept of the New Great Game defines a competition for power, influence, hegemony, and profits that refers to the oil and gas industries and resources in Central Asia and the Transcaucasus (Sadiyey, Nasirov, Iskandarov & Simons,2020).

The main emphasis has been on energy politics and the battling for the oil and gas of the region, therefore political domination and economic domination are often connected (Morse & Rashid,2002).Major powers like Russia, USA, and China, the neighboring countries, Pakistan, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan, the Central Asian states themselves and the most influential oil firms, contest in what is called in 1997 original magazine paper, "The New Great Game" (Posen,2003).

The collapse of the Soviet Union generated a power vacuum in Central Asia boosted with a hydrocarbon that is oil and gas resources and other valuable mineral resources (Pomfret,2019).In world politics, great powers such as China, the USA, and Russia hurriedly move to fill the vacuum left by the Soviet Union (Davidson,2018).Power politics initiated between them for power in the region applying conflicting strategies to attain their aims in the region called as New Great Game (Iqbal & Afridi,2017).

The major power of China's engagement in the region began initially after the disintegration of the USSR. On 27th December 1991, China is the first state to recognize the newly independent five states namely Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. Just after a week from 2nd January to 6th, 1992 China officially developed diplomatic relations with these states. In the beginning, China was shy and emerged unsure of engaging in the region, which is well-known due to its geopolitical significance and energy resources. During the visit of Li Ping's tour, the agreement was signed between China and Kazakhstan for the division of their joint border. The other states of the region also contributed effectively and it brings fruit-bearing consequences. China's National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) oil firm made a deal with the Turkmen Ministry of Petroleum for building gas channels across the border towards China pipeline. The biggest Kashagan oil field that was the origination of Kazakhstan was another dimension that enabled the leadership of China's view of Caspian and Central Asia. The oil field situated in the Caspian Sea (northern part) is the largest in the world and declared as the biggest discovery of oil in the globe than anywhere in the last twenty years(Nakano & Pumphrey, Price Jr, & Walton, 2012).

Thus the New Great Game appearing in the early 1990s and go on with until today, is miscellaneous, wrapping a range of sections from economic to social and cultural as well as the challenge of hard security, with several players playing the game in various geographical zones (Morris,2005). This whole description defines that the original Great Game has ended, and a New Great Game has taken a seat in the present modern-day (Edwards,2003).

Hydrocarbon Resources of Central Asia: It's Significance for China

The significance of hydrocarbon resources, specifically oil and gas has represented the international political economy of the past century and will still play an important role in the present scenario (Barreto, Makihira & Riahi,2003). In terms of having vast unexplored energy resources and also being located in closeness to the future large buyer markets of oil and gas, the Central Asian region takes on gigantic importance (Abbasi,2013).

About 23 billion tons of oil and 3 trillion cubic meters of gas reserves are evaluated to the substratum of the Central Asian states (Ahmad, 2017). The region having a good quality of massive oil reserves estimated to be 15-30 billion barrels while natural gas resources are 230-360 trillion cubic feet (Sarwar & Khan, 2016). Some estimate that oil reserves in Central Asia and with Caspian Sea coastal region quantity of 17 to 33 billion barrels per day which are equivalent to that of Qatar (Fazilov & Chen, 2013).

Kazakhstan is the ninth in the world reserves having 40 billion barrels, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan jointly having almost 600 million barrels of proven oil resources (Levine & Wallace,2006).Kyrgyzstan with 12 million barrels and Tajikistan's proven oil resources with 40 million barrels.The proven gas resources of Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan having equaled more than 236 trillion cubic feet. Total oil resources of the region may move more than 60 billion barrels of oil, other evaluate are as greater than 200 billion barrels (Rivlin,2004).

China's energy interests in five Central Asian states, China and its companies are highly interested in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan's oil and gas sector, the hydrocarbon and export capability of which look more desirable. The oil and gas sector stays the heart of China's economic and energy regional strategies, however, China is showing much greater interest than before in other economic aspects (Naughton,2003). Recently, China has been showing much more interest in Kazakhstan in terms of nuclear energy, power manufacturing in terms of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kazakhstan, and in Kyrgyzstan in terms of coal mining. China is slowly increasing its economic influence to Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, two states with no sizeable hydrocarbon resources, while there is a large amount of oil and gas resources in Uzbekistan (so far not exported on a macro-level) (Paramonov & Stokov,2010). Huge reserves of hydrocarbon resources are found in China's oil fields in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region which has oil amassing evaluated at 20.86 billion tons and natural gas accumulation evaluated at 10.3 trillion cubic meters. The region consists of crude oil reserves of 30 percent and natural gas 34 percent (Veil, Puder, Elcock & Redweik, 2004). Xinjiang is the biggest province in China awning almost one-sixth of China's entire area (Du & Hesp, 2020). Fifteen large Chinese firms are efficient in Kazakhstan (plankton, Tang, Ghorbani, Northey, Yellishetty, Deng & McBride, 2018). These firms extricate almost 800 million tons of Kazakhstan oil per year, of which approximately 25 million tons are sent to China (Plating, 2011).

Growingly China is becoming a potential hostile to Russia in the energy areas of Central Asian states (Burles,1999). China has the largest hold up in the energy sector of Kazakhstan as compared to Russia. 2009 is the year, when China imported 18 million tons of Kazakhstan's oil, whereas Russian companies extricated 6.4 million tons (Egenhofer, Grigoriey, Socor & Riley, 2006).

In decades, Kashagan is the biggest new oil invention and increases the size of the North Sea. Now China is among Kazakhstan's huge target markets (Iseri, 2009). The new China conduit moves 962 kilometers (598 miles) and will grasp China a third of the passage to Kashagan in the Caspian Sea. Kazakhstan's oil is sent to the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China (PRC) via pipelines. A conduit from Kazakhstan is linked with a conduit in Xinjiang and from the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region of China, a conduit nearly 5000 km in length is being built up to Shanghai (Sering,2012). Also, China is extending its ties with Turkmenistan. China provided Turkmenistan a \$3 billion to progress the South Yolotan gas accumulation in 2009 (Higashi, 2009). By 2020, China would require 200 billion meters of gas per year, whereas its own national (domestic) manufacturing will be almost 120 billion cubic meters (Ma, Geng, Li, Liu & Li, 2013). China anticipates that by then Turkmenistan would be able to build up the deficiency (Cutler, 2000). The bilateral ties between China and Kyrgyzstan have extended in the post-Cold war period. China views

Kyrgyzstan as a strategic zone for trade extension across Central Asia and the earlier Soviet area (Karrar, 2010). Kyrgyzstan is in the quest to maximize its financial gains from the re-exportation of China's products (Duarte, 2014). That trade is valued at approximately US\$ 250 million annually for Kyrgyzstan (Abate, Alene, Bergvinson, Shiferaw, Silim, Orr & Asfaw, 2012). China has accord Kyrgyzstan a loan of US\$ 5.7 million and Tajikistan US\$ 5 million to buy Chinese goods (Katzman, 2008).

China's Interests in Central Asia

China is a substantial regional and emerging economic power in the global system (Liebenberg & van der Merwe, 2020). China's interests in the Central Asian region includes

- China desires peace and stability with the regional states which include Russia and Central Asian states along with peaceful and stable borders to rule the condition in Xinjiang western province (Parizek & Stephen, 2020).
- China's security interest is emphasized on the dimension to hold the nationalist factors in Xinjiang (Klimes, 2020).
- China being an economic giant, energy demands are escalating day by day. Also, it's an energy-hungry county (Li & Shapiro, 2020). Based on these reasons, frequent energy supply is vital regarding China's economic development in the prospective scenario (Elavarasan, Afridhis, Vijayaraghavan, Subramaniam & Nurunnabi, 2020). This requirement is a crucial facet of China's interests. China always desires to influence the energy resources of Central Asia for making sure about its future energy demands with clear aims to exploit the energy resources and the region's location for determining her role external to this region (Tashjian, 2020).
- The expanding hold of the Central Asian region will provide a chance for China to protect a geopolitical status (Ibrahim, 2020).
- China inclines to develop multilateral ties with the Central Asian Republics (CARs). Like to establish companionship with CARs energy, trade, and transit sector (Nsour, 2010).
- China's energy stratagem consists of two features. Firstly to emphasize oil resources of the Central Asian region. For satisfying this need, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation signed accords with Kazakhstan which controls the biggest oil reserves in Central Asia. For this China objectives to perform her role in other oil deals in Kazakhstan and then enables her path towards the Caspian energy reserves. Secondly, China's energy strategy is to keep an eye on the gas reserves (Kubicek, 2013).
- China is also playing a great role in other areas such as trade, security, and economy. Its policy goals economic integration of the Central Asian region via diverse regional institutions. For this motive, China is playing a zestful role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) (Rosenberg, 2008).

- The five states of Central Asia changed the region into an empty, unoccupied, and smoothly reachable market for products of China and a source of lower raw materials. Land transfer connections provided more beneficial situations for China's exports (Yun-Casalilla, 2019).
- The independent Central Asian states can today build direct relations with the Asia-Pacific-Region (APR). For example, South Korea and Japan are the first to come. In such situations, China-linked with Central Asia by a railroad and highways has appeared the most suitable and well-built connection between Central Asia and the Asia-Pacific Region (APR) that receives it more money (Yilmaz & Changming, 2020).

Central Asia's Interest in China

The goals of the foreign policy of Central Asia towards China are following:

- To secure them from China's expansionism, a major dimension of which has been the boundary issue, that is countering or limiting China's territorial arguments.
- To establish in a managed way the political and economic collaboration originated by China.
- Simultaneously, collaboration is the aspect that expands individual states and governments at home as well as on the global stage (also in making dealings with Russia), while permitting them to keep away from becoming dependent on China.
- To boost the profits of economic and infrastructural collaboration with China for example by turning Central Asia into a transfer belt for China's products exported to Europe and the Middle East countries (Jarosiewicz & Strachota, 2013).

China obtained domination in the region because of its huge economic development and the lengthy land boundary with the states of Central Asia. The diplomatic ties between China and CARs were established in 1992. From this time, China's complete trade with the region's states has escalated over numerous times. The weighty source of foreign investment and China is now the utmost popular economic player in the region. As a consequence, China has been capable to influence Central Asia against other competitors mainly Russia and the USA through constructing transportation, infrastructure connections, possession of energy, trade, and investment. In 2012, the complete volume of trade in China with Central Asia accounts for nearly 46\$ billion (Ali, Khan & Gul, 2019).

China's Role in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is a multilateral intergovernmental organization that initially consists of China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan. It was formed in 2001 and expanded in 2017 by including Pakistan and India (Nizamani, 2018). The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) can advantage in numerous ways, and assisting China to play a part in Central Asian matters, boost its Belt

and Road Initiative (BRI), and maintain security in northwestern China, as reported by Chinese analysts (Lei,2018).

The SCO expand from the “Shanghai Five” instrument, has been playing vital roles in China’s ties with its nearby countries, including Russia and some of the former Soviet Union republics in Central Asia. SCO is the primary international organization initiated from negotiations to settle border disputes. The SCO is also the primary international organization promoted by values like a mutual benefit, mutual trust, justness, negotiations, respect for multiple civilizations, and pursuit of shared development called the Shanghai Spirit (Hanks, 2009). SCO is the only stable and mature multinational cooperation platform via which China could play a part in Central Asian matters, this platform is an important mechanism for China’s diplomacy with its nearby states (Khan, Sandano, Pratt & Farid, 2018).

Mutual trust has been gathered over the years between China and other members of the SCO are assisting their collaboration over Belt and Road projects. Second, as a regional collaboration instrument, the SCO can give a variety of cooperation platforms for debating and applying projects of Belt and Road. Third, additionally its eight member countries, the SCO also has six dialogue companions and four observer states, all of which could play a part in constructing the Belt and Road. The SCO could perform as a manifesto for China to place its Belt and Road Initiative with development policies of other member countries like Eurasia Economic Union and Greater Eurasian Partnership programs of Russia, Strategic Development Plan 2025 and Bright Path program of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan’s project for Modernization and Diversification of Production in 2015-2019 (Fallon, 2015).

Importance of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI): A Step to Globalization

Globalization is the increasing integration, interconnectedness, and inter-influence in terms of political, economic, social, cultural, and technological spheres. Some analysts define globalization “as a description of existing conditions or reality, others describe the term “as a slogan or discourse sold by liberal and radical analysts. In case if globalization is defined “as the widening, deepening and speeding up of worldwide interconnected”, (Xu,2019) marked by see-saw, unequal, and multiple processes and composed by various representatives at various levels, it is suitable to take the Belt and Road Initiative as an essential section of the globalization process, though if it begins chiefly by China. Though the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a strategic action started by the government of China, it has world influence, its concerns are agreeing with the structural proneness of the globalization process, and its tools have taken into an explanation of the interests, concerns, actions, and interconnection of various representatives at various levels and domains. Through actions and visions, the BRI moves via continents of Asia, Europe, and Africa linking the lively East Asian economic wheel at one side and developed European economic wheel at the other side, and surrounding countries with a large capacity for economic development.

The Silk Road Economic Belt focuses on connecting China, Central Asia, Europe (the Baltic), and Russia, connecting China with the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea via

Central Asia and West Asia, and linking China with Southeast Asia, the Indian Ocean, and South Asia. The 21st Century Maritime Silk Road is planned to move from China's seashore to Europe via the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean in a single route, and from China's seashore via the South China Sea to the South Pacific in the other route (Ploberger, 2017). Therefore, the geographic scope of the BRI involves more than 65 countries. Therefore, the domination of the Initiative appears much aspiring because it would influence all countries around the globe via the networks that have been developed through the former globalization process (Derudder, Liu & Kunaka, 2018).

In the context of Belt and Road, globalization can be viewed from the political sphere like expanding policy systematization is taken as a promise for applying the initiative. Policy systematization search to recognize and strengthen common interests, expand joint political trust, access new cooperation agreement, and integration of economic development policies and strategies. This would be gained by inter-governmental cooperation via multi-level inter-governmental macro strategy interchange and connection tools. In the economic sphere, trade and investment are two ways by which the people in multiple parts of the globe are connected. The BRI also in the quest to facilitate trade and investment by eliminating trade and investment barriers, inclusive of by opening free trade zones, expanding customs cooperation, bettering bilateral and multilateral cooperation, applying World Trade Facilitation Agreement, ameliorate, customs clearance capacity, making the batter the systematization of the cross-border supervision process, lowering non-tariff barriers, increasing investment collaboration, strengthening shared investment zones, expanding investment in manufacturing as well as emerging industries, investment in energy (oil and gas) sector (Lall & Streeten, 1977).

The BRI make efforts to advance intergovernmental cooperation, construct a multi-level intergovernmental large strategy exchange and interconnected tool, strengthen mutual interests, expand shared political trust, and access new cooperation agreement. Economic companies would be the foremost forces for attaining the economic aims of the Initiative, whereas the government's role is to a great extent to ease and encourage economic actors by giving a much favorable atmosphere (Chadwick & May 2003).

Conclusion

In all, China is playing an efficient and major role in the New Great Game in Central Asia. Today the Central Asian region has become a battleground of multiple actors though mainly the competition between the three major powers Russia, China, and the USA is most significant. As far as China is concerned, it is the most prominent actor regarding its economic concerns, political matters, and security reasons in this region. China is a major power, major trader, and major investor in the region. China which is an energy-hungry country aims to grasp the region's oil and gas resources for achieving its national interest. Through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, it is highly participating and making profitable developments in the region. While also because of the Belt and Road Initiative which is chiefly inaugurated by China for increasing its access in the region for oil and gas resources, for opening new markets, for road, railways connections, broaden its land and sea routes transportation as well as for peace and stability in the Xinjiang province.

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