



# **Spatial-economic and Geopolitical Interests of Russia, The USA and China in Central Asia: Competition, Coincidence of Wants and Strategies in a Changing World**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Central Asia is potential support being some sort of the global region-donor for restructure and expansion of economy of the Russian Federation, the United States and China. One of the purposes which the Russian Federation constantly pursues is the creation and preservation of unified economic space of the Common Information Space. However, in spite of the fact that trade, economic and social relations of the Russian Federation with the countries of Central Asia have greatly weakened more than in 10 years, they are still more structured on their contents than similar ones, for example, of the European countries or the USA. The Central Asian region is rich in natural resources and mineral reserves. There are large volumes of oil, natural gas, gold, cotton production. Central Asia is also a sales market of the Russian equipment and industrial goods and also a source of some resources which Russia comes short of such as food, vegetables, cotton, and so on. The Central Asian region is quite rich in oil resources and natural gas, but earlier the ways of their transportation were under the full control of Russia. Taking advantages of a geographical location and control over capital construction projects, Russia has almost completely monopolized the transportation of energy carriers from Central Asia that provides the great influence on policy of the countries of the region and great economic benefit.

**Keywords:** Geopolitics, Commodity Turnover, Resources, World Powers

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## **1. INTRODUCTION**

In the countries of Central Asia, the vectors of geopolitical attraction are not still defined. Here there is a mixture of interests of a number of the countries. They are Russia, the USA, and China. At the turn of the third Millennium the fight for target audience became global. The great states have strategically faced in Central Asia.

The interaction of Russia, the USA and China in target audience is a complicated competition of "super" ones for the influence over "small" ones: Both coincidence of wants of these states,

insuperable contradictions and elaboration of the general strategy in a changing world. Recently, Europe also shows increasing interest in target audience. Perhaps, after a while the European Union (EU) will become the fourth force in the relations of superpowers in the region.

Recently, China shows not only increasing interest in raw material resources and receptive markets of the region, but also obvious political and economic influence claims, first of all, through the structures of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

## 2. SPATIAL-ECONOMIC AND GEOPOLITICAL INTERESTS OF THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE CENTRAL ASIAN REGION

Traditionally Central Asia is a part of interests of the Russian Federation (Ayushieva, 2003), which priority and hierarchy of importance at certain stages was defined by various circumstances. In all geopolitical, economic and military interests the key directions of the Russian policy in the region are based on the following factors of a long-term character:

- Central Asia is considered as a traditional “buffer” or a belt of safety for Russia in the context of safety of the Southern borders
- An oil factor and desire of Russia to keep influence on the Caspian Sea determines special importance of the region for Russia
- The territory of the region as a zone of power resources basing for the acceptance of appropriate measures in case of the emergence full-scale conflicts including nuclear ones in nearby regions is of great importance for Russia
- Control over the main transport and communication ways and pipelines of the region is of great has great foreign policy and economic value for the Russian Federation
- For Russia the region is a “responsibility zone” for the Russian and Russian-speaking population, the preservation of the significant political role of the Russian language and culture.

Thus, aspiration to realize these five dominating interests in general has defined a common character of the Russian strategy in Central Asia during the period from 1991 to 2016.

However, it should be noted that until more recent times Russia has not developed meaningful policy (Kobersy et al., 2015) which was understood as a chain of consecutive steps aimed at the achievement of accurately formulated strategic objectives concerning the Central Asian region. The central Asian policy of Russia had mainly a reactive character and was undergone the influence of a number of the factors causing these or those directions at different stages. In this regard the systemic representation of the dynamics of development of the Russian policy in the region demands to carry out designation of its periodization with an emphasis of attention on a number of the nodal aspects defining it.

In our opinion, in contemporary history the Russian policy in the Central Asian region has passed some stages which can conditionally be designated as follows:

- 1992-1995 - Support of limited presence in the region
- 1996-1998 - Definition of policy contours and return to the region
- 1999-2001 - Formulation of the main approaches to construct the system of relationship with the states of the Central Asian region and strengthening of the vectors of bilateral relations
- 2001 - Transformation of foreign policy directions in changing forces in the region

- 2002 - Formulation of the foreign policy model in Central Asia from the point of view of the presence in the USA
- 2005 - Till present-changing foreign policy in Central Asia according to the last political transformations. After the cessation of existence of the USSR on December 1991 the process of self-determination of Russian political elite has led to a tendency to be self-isolated from many directions of foreign policy of the former Union.

In fact, nowadays Russia is only at the initial stage of a new step in foreign policy in the region (Gurieva, 2015). Thus, it is untimely to estimate prospects of its development, but with that the identification of tendencies which, our look, will define deployment of events, is possible.

In this context, first of all, it should be noted that current new partnership between the USA and Russia creates possibilities of cooperation, and not confrontation in Asia. The USA cannot pay attention to the fact that Russia has its own interests in the region (Nikolaeva et al. 2015), namely, in economic and political areas, and also in safety.

With that a strategic alliance “Washington-Moscow,” if it will be created, will have a set of essential disadvantages. Firstly, it will have an unequal character as Russia will be a sub-partner. Secondly, the USA and Russia here, being the “allies,” are suspicious of each other. Thirdly, sooner or later geostrategic contradictions and opposite national interests of two states will lead to strengthening of frictions between partners.

In our opinion, policy of a so-called “regional par of exchange” can promote elimination of such disadvantages (Zaman, 2016; Frolova et al. 2016), The USA cannot understand that after the termination of a military option of the appropriate issue in the region of Central Asia in Transcaucasia, strategic and political tasks which will be conducted with the use of other methods as ideological, political informational will step forward in Asia in general. Russian has the full system of management of intraregional processes and corresponding experience, and the Americans in many aspects cannot complete these tasks.

Thus, the policy content of “the regional par of exchange” consists in the fact that Russia in certain regions of Eurasia and in some situations would be an equal geopolitical force to the USA and the West and in some cases will represent the common Russian-American interests as the USA will for a long accumulate the experience that Russia has concerning Asia in general.

Of course, there is sufficient asymmetry between Russia and the USA almost for many factors. Existing distinctions not only in objectives and approaches to policy in the region, in vision of the future, but also asymmetry in the fact how the countries need each other, do not allow to tell about full consolidation of these countries on the whole complex of existing issues. With that there is a wide sphere of coincidence of wants in Central Asia and in the issues concerning increasing political stability, the fight with illegal drug trafficking, prevention of large-scale regional conflicts especially those where the use of weapons of annihilation is quite possible.

Using the policy of “the regional par of exchange” (Rylov et al., 2016), Russia and the USA could make special treaties and agreements on cooperation in Central Asia and other regions.

In the midterm another main direction of the Russian policy in the context of the presence of the USA in the region will be the destiny of Caspian oil and pipelines. A situation shows that real economic cooperation with the states of the Caspian region and Central Asia and with the USA is more important for Moscow than confrontation prospects an unknown outcome. Thus, the Russian policy in the region will be developed as follows: Oil and gas fields will be completely operated, Russia will get considerable profits, and Russian companies will take part in the pipeline construction Baku-Ceyhan. However, this in the future this scenario does not exclude conflicts in the region as its destiny will mostly depend on Russian-American relations.

### 3. OBJECTIVES AND STRATEGIES OF THE USA IN CENTRAL ASIA

After a collapse of the USSR the positions of the United States (US) of America the Central Asian region greatly increased. Especially for some 1<sup>st</sup> years after independence acquisition by the Central Asian republics were characterized by more active fence-mending of the states of the region with the USA and the West European countries. In turn the US interest in Central Asia was caused by the region importance being strategically located between Russia, China and the states of “The Islamic arch” and possessing rich natural resources especially hydro-carbonic ones.

In this regard the US foreign-policy strategy concerning Central Asia (Zaviyalova et al. 2015) was mainly based on geopolitical reasons and a pragmatic approach considering its own strategic priorities and interests. The main US interests in the region can be in general determined by the following aspects:

- Attribution and expansion of the presence in the region is an element of the US common strategy to consolidation of the leadership in the long-term;
- Interest of the USA in guaranteed access to natural resources of the Caspian region in implementation of its energy policy, namely, decreasing dependence on energy carrier deliveries from the Arab oil countries and in resource bases and routes which are as far as possible free from the influence of current and possible in the future opponents and their allies.
- Aspiration of the USA to provide access political and to the capacity of the states of Asia in carrying out policy of China and to Iran, act as opponents of the States on world and problems (Cui et al., 2016);
- Aspiration of the USA by means of their increasing influence on the Central Asian region not to allow the case when one of the superpowers or a group of superpowers such as Russia and the People’s Republic of China will be the leaders in the region so without America;
- Interest of the USA in use of the Central Asian region for the reserve location formation, on one hand, for the creation of potential threat to so-called “problematic states” among the USA claims North Korea, Iraq, Iran, and on the other hand, for support of their allies.

- Interest of the USA in a qualitatively new and quiet receptive sales market of industrial articles from Western Europe and the US as the Central Asian countries (Caporale and Sousa, 2016);
- Interest of the US in the Euro-Asian strategic transport hub (the transport corridor North Europe-India, West Europe-China-Japan, various gas and oil pipelines).

According to these interests the main vector of the US policy in the region is, firstly, directed on decreasing economic and political presence of Russia in the region and the conditions providing impossibility of the restoration of its influence. The second components of this vector is discharge from “The Big geopolitical game” of such potential players as China and Iran and the creation of the conditions providing possibility for the USA to make an economic and political impact on these countries from the territory of Central Asia.

From the point of view of chronology, the USA policy in Central Asia has the following four periods:

- 1991: This period in the Central Asian policy of the USA was characterized by uncertainty. Under the conditions of the objective need to happened geopolitical changes after a collapse of the USSR Washington had no the consistent and complete policy concerning the countries of the region. The USA had only showed diplomatic recognition of the new states and confirmation of the former administrative borders between the Soviet Central Asian republics as international.

Washington conducted a common political line concerning all states including Central Asian ones, paying attention to the development of processes of democratization and carrying out of market transformations.

- 1992-1995: During this period an economic component came to the fore in the USA policy. Advance of the USA interests in the Central Asian region was conducted by means of economic mechanisms and consolidation of positions in strategic economic spheres, first of all, in the oil-and-gas one. Thus, the USA have mostly showed interests in the questions connected with production and export of hydro-carbonic raw materials. Their main goal was in construction of gas and oil pipelines round about the territory of Russia, Iran, and China. In the 1<sup>st</sup> year after attainment of independence of the countries of the region the large Western companies have got a foothold in the local market having greatly reduced the economic presence of Russia.

During this period military-political tides between the countries of the region (first of all, between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) and the NATO within “Partnership for peace” have started developing (Zvyagelskaya, 2009).

- 1996-2000: During the period there was a cooling in relationship between the USA and Russia where Washington continued to recognize its special role in the region. In their Central Asian policy, the USA have decided to concentrate key efforts on the development of relations with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. In turn Uzbekistan tried to conduct policy independent from Russia and looked for an external partner

which ideally, as Uzbek politicians thought, Washington could be. However, the development of relations was slow and only on a limited set of the questions.

- 2001 - nowadays: The beginning of this period as a result of a combination of geopolitical factors has showed that the USA had almost no real opponent on influence in the region: Russian had much lost its political and economic levels of influence; Iran and China have not tried to establish control over the region; the EU has claimed to strengthen its influence in the region only in the long-term. Thus, to the period of power of G. Bush administration it was obvious that former plans of Clinton administration on carrying out the long multidimensional tactical fight were already not urgent. New administration has pointed quite dynamic pragmatic plan concerning Central Asia. The establishment of the steady American military-political and economic presence and economic control in the region was only a matter of time. The events on September 2001 and the anti-terrorist operation of the USA gave occasion to it (Karabulatova et al., 2016).

Thus, at the beginning of the XXI century the USA policy in the Central Asian region has entered a new phase that was characterized by an aspiration to establish political, military and economic control of the USA over it.

By the end of 2001 the USA have almost finished the main part of their military against the Taliban movement, to establish international control over this country and to create transitional government. And at the beginning of 2002 there was the question of the military-political presence of America in the region of Central Asia with the purpose of the guarantees of stability preservation in Afghanistan. Washington saw these guarantees in the creation of its military bases within the countries of the region. It was quite controversial step on its consequences which caused the foundation to military-political penetration and strengthening in Central Asia.

According to the experts' estimated, the American military presence in Central Asia must solve another objective important for national security of the USA except the Afghan problem, namely:

- To have forces of fast reaction in the region which can be wanted in case of internal political destabilization in Pakistan and especially in case of escalation of the Indo-Pakistani conflict
- To have the infrastructure for active policy concerning Iran and its nuclear program in the region
- To project the American military presence on energy sources at the Caspian Sea
- To control the territory of the People's Republic of China, especially those regions where there are missile launchers, and in some degree the further growth of China.

An attempt to form the strategy of the USA concerning Central Asia at the conceptual level was made by the assistant of the Secretary of State Lynn Pasko in speech at Yale University. Pasko has noted that the USA "must set more ambitious objectives and be engaged in solution of fundamental problems in Central Asia." As the main problems of the region Pasko has pointed out

"corruption, frankpledge, violation of human rights and principles of democracy" by local authorities. At the same time, he has dismissed charges at the feet of Washington that it "clothes eyes on violation, to be supported."

In general, the statement of the US Secretary of State can be considered as the keynote of the policy of Washington: Central Asia and Caucasus are quite complicated call of the USA, but they must (owing to 11 September) answer this call.

Decreasing conflict potential and the fight with potential threats was proclaimed by the government of the USA as one of the main foreign policy objectives and purposes of the policy in the sphere of security. Within this preventive policy Washington has carried out the distribution of its contingents in some states of Central Asia. However, the main threat for the states of the region consists in the fact that they are involved in possible confrontation of the USA with other superpowers (Russia, the People's Republic of China, Iran). At the same time during the last years there is a steady tendency on decreasing level of participation of American troops in peacekeeping operations. Concerning the situation in Afghanistan it means that Washington will as much as possible galvanize its allies and the regional government to participate in the distribution of peacekeeping parts.

Cooperation in the sphere of security is closely connected with the previous direction. Carrying out of international peacekeeping doctrines "Tsentrzbat" (the Central Asian battalion) within the NATO program "Partnership for peace" was one of the key cooperation forms in the sphere of security of the USA with Kazakhstan. Washington has in every possible way supported the activity of "Tsentrzbat" and cooperation of the Central Asian states with the NATO (Scott, 2016).

#### **4. INTERESTS OF CHINA IN CENTRAL ASIA**

Strategic interests of China in the Central Asian region are as follows:

Only at such things stand Central Asia really will be a steady rearward area of China and will to the full correspond to strategic interests of China.

1. Control of separatist forces of "East Turkestan." Since the 90s years in the face of growing international terrorism the activity of "East Turkestan" has increased, now it is a big terrorist, separatist, and extremist group which became the threat to state unity of China and social stability in the North-western part of the country. By national, cultural, and religious reasons the "East Turkestan" movement has close links in the countries of Central Asia. On one hand, Central Asia is one the major foreign pegs connecting the "East Turkestan" movement with international terrorism forces, and thus, the key direction of its penetration to China. In this regard, one of the main objectives of foreign policy of China concerning Central Asia is prevention of the activity that puts territorial unity of the People's Republic of China at threat and that all Central Asian countries have refused Chinese separatists' support, limited and forbidden the activity of "East

Turkestan,” prevented penetration of international terrorism forces from their territory to China.

2. Guarantees of security of Central Asia promoting an authoritative strategic rearward of China. Central Asia comes onto contact with the North-west part of China. Here there is a long span of the border. It is quite independent geopolitical region near China, and it forms the main component of the North-west strategic direction of the People’s Republic of China. According to peculiarities of the strategic interests and a geopolitical situation of the Central Asian region the last one can be considered as a strategic rearward of the People’s Republic of China. Against this background when Central Asia really will be a steady rearward area of China and will to the full correspond to strategic interests of the People’s Republic of China.
3. Development of economic cooperation with the countries of Central Asia its transformation into one of the key sources of energy import. Power economy is a key component of economic cooperation of China with the countries of Central Asia. Assurance with reliable power supply of the quickly developing People’s Republic of China is the long-term objective that has strategic importance. If the annual volume oil import from the region was 10-20 million tons, its share was about 10%. Having provided stable oil supply from Russia and the countries of Asia, China could consider the problem of diversification of long-term energy source supply as mostly resolved, having considerably decreased the dependence on risks connected with instability of an international situation.

## 5. CONCLUSION

New geopolitical region that Central Asia is appears at the beginning of the 90<sup>th</sup> of the XX century after a collapse of the USSR. It is at an intersection of the ways from Russia to Asia, from China to Europe and South Asia. Such middle location in the center of Eurasia promotes increasing interest in it of all leading world and regional key players. In spite of geographical isolation of Central Asia and the lack of enough communications necessary for full-scale entry into the world economic system, it possesses such quantity of mineral reserves that cannot but be the center of attention of the leading superpowers of the world. The greatest interest is caused by Central Asian hydrocarbons which reserves has only recently started being developed unlike other centers of production. Gold, uranium, rare-earth metals and other natural richness of Central Asia are not in such interest.

Another reason of attention is its neighborhood with the unstable Islamic states which are a source of religious extremism and terrorism.

Central Asia is at an intersection of geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economics’ interests of three largest states of the world today-Russia, the USA and China. If for the Russian Federation and China the countries of Central Asia are the neighbors and a part of the megaregion which is formed in the SCO format, for the USA with its global interests it is the possibility of penetration into internal Asia earlier inaccessible for them.

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