

## **"CHINA - CENTRAL ASIA RELATIONS"**

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The paper analyzes China's objectives after territorial changes on its western border. The vacuum of power created by the demise of Soviet Union has put Mackinder's world in flux. China is conscious of changing political scenario in the Central Asia. The new great game is underway to shape the political discourse to the whims of great powers.

The size of Chinese economy and its rapid growth in recent years is an indicator that China is bound to play a assertive role in world affairs. Beside Taiwan and East Asia, Central Asia is crucial in making of China's foreign policy. The threat of ethnicity and Islamic resurgence in Central Asia remains the core issue in China's Security Planning. China is destined to play prominent role in Central Asia to arrest the wave of ethno-nationalism spreading across the border. How China manages its relations with Central Asia will have a profound significance for security within China. To what extent Central Asian States will contributes in managing security concerns of China and how will Russia react toward the penetration of Chin's influence will determine the new patterns of interactions in this volatile region.

This paper is an attempt to understand the new policy mechanism adopted by China in its relations will Central Asia. And identify different areas of convergence & divergence in Sino-Russian approaches to Central Asia.

### **CHINA'S OBJECTIVES**

China's policy toward Central Asia is designed to achieve these objectives. To maintain frontier security; enhance trade cooperation; secure access to energy resources; strengthen its relative position in global politics by developing strategic relations; and neutralizing the Russian opposition to Chinese influence.

## FRONTIER SECURITY

Central Asia can't threaten China in a conventional military sense. However, they can pose threats inside China in a much more direct and dangerous manner than Soviet Union could have done. The demographic similarities and overlapping between Central Asia States and China's Xinjiang uighur region is pregnant with catalyst effects. The potential threat to the domestic stability of China comes from the uighur Autonomous Region Located in Xinjiang Provinces. About 60 percent population of this province consist of ethnic minorities which have strong affiliation with Central Asia States. The largest ethnic group is called uighurs. Some separatist groups, especially the uighuristan liberation front are fighting for Secession. It may be noted that in 1994 an independent states called East Turkistan was established but it was incorporated into the Peoples Republic of China in 1950<sup>1</sup>.

Since the late 1980s, uighur separatist forces have waged a campaign of sporadic violence against ethnic Chinese. These separatist groups have a base in neighbouring Kazakhstan where about 200,000 uighurs live. They have been involved in a number of violent acts including bombing. It may be mentioned that about 30,000 uighurs lie in Kyrgystan & Uzbekistan<sup>2</sup>. In Tajikistan, the growing unrest in the Fergana valley with direct geographical access to China's Muslim outreaches has intensified Chinese concerns<sup>3</sup>. Any potential subversive activities on the part of these Centrifugal forces in this region is likely to create political instability and could undermined its position as a monolithic state. The leadership in China is apprehensive that such a development could encourage separatist tendencies in other non-Chinese regions like Tibet or inner Maongolia. It could certainly tarnish China's image to world community on intolerance to its own people. Unrest in Central Asia hold a much greater potential for affecting China's own internal stability. China's growing military presence in Central Asia may be indicative of its urge to stabilize frontier,



## DOMESTIC IMPERATIVES

The geo-economic significance of its western part is realized by China. As Xinjiang province is assumed to have much potential for natural resources. For example out of 147 minerals located in China, 115 are found in this province. The most important resource is oil, which is found in three basins namely Turpan, Junggar and Tarim. The latter basin is reportedly the largest unexplored basin in the world with estimated reserves of 147 billion barrels... Chinese leadership consider Xinjiang oil resources to be vital for China's future energy needs as Mr. Lipeng in a recent article stated that the increase in domestic production in the future would come from western China<sup>4</sup>.

In order to check/mate secession forces, China has designed to maintain political stability through economic development. In this regard, Central Committee of Xinjiang's provincial communist party stated in 1996 that, "we must seize the opportunity to improve the living standard of various nationalities"<sup>5</sup>. In lieu of that policy China decided to invest \$ 370 million in some 40-infrastructure projects. This was done with the view to attack Islamists and uighur nationalists<sup>6</sup>.

## NEW CURRENTS IN CENTRAL ASIAN POLITICS

Nationalism and ethnicity are potentially explosive forces in the region. As put by an eminent expert on Central Asia Dr. Danni: "The Central Asian States are born within the conceptual framework of ethnic nationalism. It was therefore natural that nationalism should be motivating force in these Republic. Such nationalism is backed by their national culture and supported by their particular history. Religion is question of spiritual motivation but is political economy that is engaging the attention of present leaders<sup>7</sup>. And Beijing is convinced that increasing cooperation with Central Asian Countries will bolster the position of Government's in curbing the religious militancy in the region. China has a great stakes in promoting constructive engagement with Central Asia. To put in different way, there is linkage between turmoil in Central Asia and unrest in China. That is reason China attach much focus

on developing friendly relations with these states.

Another important factor motivating China to develop relations with Central Asian States relates with trade which China view could uplift the economic of the most backward and remote region -Xinjiang. Since its natural resources are not yet exploited, Xingiang has always been one of the poorer region of China. The collapse of the Soviet Union and opening of the frontier made business in Xinjiang look northward; they found demand for consumer goods. In 1990s, Chinese export and import-through formal channel has been multiplied on a wider scale. Market in Almaty and Taskent have become more well stocked with Chinese consumer products.

### ENERGY AND COMMUNICATION COOPERATION

There are more chances for trade expansions, particularly in the field of Oil and Gas. Kazakhstan has proven recoverable crude oil reserves. Turkmenistan is the 4th largest producer of gas in the world<sup>8</sup>. Energy – hungry China will look towards Persian Gulf and Central Asia for its energy requirements. For that purpose China have heavily invested in Kazaks oil industry. In 1997, China's National Petroleum Corporation entered into an agreement with Kazakhstan to invest \$4 billion in the oil field. The same year, a number of other agreements worth \$ 9.6 billion were signed during Deputy Prime Minister Le langing's visit to Kazakhstan, including a pipeline from Kazakhstan to Western China<sup>9</sup>. Central Asian States especially Kazakhstan can reciprocate by exporting oil exploration equipment and could meet energy needs of fast growing Chinese economy.

China is interested to revive the Silk route to use Central Asian market for the economic prosperity of Xinjiang. On October 29, 1994, China, Russia and the five Central Asian States Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan signed an agreement to improve the effectiveness of the rail roads known as the second Eurasian Continental Bridge spanning two continents between Rotterdam and China's port of Liangungang on the yellow sea.<sup>10</sup>



## OBSTACLES IN RELATION'S

Though China is working to facilitate means of transportation in the region China's investment in the energy and communication is considerable, especially in Kazakhstan. And is likely to be enhanced in future but it is, yet at rudimentary stage. It is thought that Chinese influence would be limited because of the presence of a large ethnic minority in this country; Close integration of the Russian and Kazakhstan economies between southern Siberia and northern Kazakhstan; and the growing presence of a number of multinational from the western world.

As many analysts considered Krygyzstan and Tajikistan will move from Russian sphere of influence to the Chinese influence. But as these states lack oil and gas resources; Chinese interest will be focused on geo-politics rather than on geo-economy in this part of region. In contrast, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan have no physical connection with China. And latter enjoy less leverage on their national policies. Nevertheless in 1998, China, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan agreed to open a new high way from Kashgar through Kyrgyzstan to Tashkent in Uzbekistan. According to Xinhua, the roads intended to increase trade among these countries and lay they foundation for the eventual construction of a new railway along the same route<sup>11</sup>.

Another hurdle in trade between China and Central Asia is the low quality of Chinese export products and failure to effectively develop more advance non-barter trading system because most of trade between them is on barter system. Apart or it, another factor giving rise to mutual distrust is launching of Chinese nuclear tests on Central Asian borders and presence of Chinese's missile sites in Xinjiang province make these republics vulnerable to Chinese target. Chinas relation with Central Asia are not without sore points. Water and environmental issues also exit<sup>12</sup>. Kazakhstanian concern, both private and public, over the impact of radiation drifting in to Kazakhstan has also been quite vocal... Kazakhstan have strongly criticized China for its continuing under ground nuclear test program<sup>13</sup>. Most of Chinese Territories were occupied by Tsars in the 1880s. Nevertheless China

has refrained from reclaiming those areas.

## RUSSIAN FACTOR

Since Russia consider Central Asia its "near abroad" by which former still lay claim to interfere in the region for the protection of ethnic minorities. As China has shown increased interest on ethnic; energy and trade issues in Central Asia, some observers warn growing Chinese influence could turn inimical to Russian interests while others discount these factors, stressing on new configuration of power. How Russia's approach will have implication for China's policy toward Central Asia is yet murky. Most of pundits opine that in the long run, Central Asia could turn a tinderbox in creating a new rivalry between China and Russia. However, it should not be ignored that their interests converge on controlling the Islamic militancy in the region.

As a matter of fact China, Russia has found some common ground for cooperation in countering western influences in the Central Asia. Some Central Asian States have also joined the ranks, In 1996, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgystan and Tajikistan signed the 'Shanghai treaty' with China pledging the sancity of mutual borders<sup>14</sup>. By this agreement China has achieved the commitment of these republic to deter their ethnic uighure minorities from supporting separatism in Xinjiang province. In late February 1997, the Defense Ministers of Russia, Uzbekistan, Kyrghzestan and Kazakhstan discussed border security in view of continuing civil war in Afghanistan and possibility of spill over effects into neighboring states<sup>15</sup>. There is growing concerns that cross border activities in the region as well as in the Xinjiang province of China is generated by orthodox Islamic elements. And it is encouraging militancy, which may not be inconsonant with their national interests, in this regard, in July 1999, the foreign Ministers of Russia Tajikistan and Uzbekistan met in Tashkent and pledged cooperation in combating Islamic extremism in Central Asia<sup>16</sup>.

As long as resurgence of ethnic and religious forces continue, Russia and China will feel heat, in Chechnya and Xinjiang respectively, The Taliban model governance put a



common challenge for China and Russia. Thus, they will continue cooperation in combating these forces.

## CONCLUSION

After disintegration of Soviet Union, China's western border are vulnerable to the cumulative effects of new qualitative changes in Central Asia. China is sensitive to any appearance of external support for linghur movements. To Address domestic unrest in Xinjiang, economic development is a rational way to reconcile the force of resistance and bring political stability. To seek frontier security China has sought cooperation from Central Asian States. China has got positive response from these states and they have demonstrated willingness to not promote any anti-Chinese activities on their soil. Sino-Central Asian States declaration uniformly stress to put militant forces under control.

China hopes to achieve its objectives by developing a logistic line through road highways and pipelines. However, that is a cumbersome task requiring sufficient resources and conducive political environment. Nevertheless, breakup of communist Russia has provided China a breathing space to transfer its military expenditure to economic development in western China. Thus, China would continue to pursue to the policy of developing good-neighboring relations with emphasis on promotion of energy and trade.

In post-cold war period, new realignment of power is likely to emerge to counter the outcome of unipolarity. Russia and China for their own national interests would like to maneuver the scheme of thing in Central Asia to their mutual interests by taking in account cognizance of their positions. Thus, China will use Russian Channel to seek the political cooperation from Central Asian States.

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