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MYTH & REALITY REGARDING RUSSIAN POLICY TOWARD & CHALLENGES IN THE CENTRAL ASIA REGION IN THE CONTEXT OF GLOBAL POWERSⁱ

The demise of the USSR prompted global changes; established 15 new states; and led Moscow to reassess ties with Central Asia or the Near Aboard region. Suddenly, the Central Asians were brought to the global attention, due to their geostrategic location, natural resources, and security/political settings. This led to the revival of “the Great Game”—referring to the rivalry among the Global Powers for establishing sphere of influence.

The relations of each Great Power with the Central Asians are uniquely different. The diversity of their policy goals, means and challenges with this region paints a complex mosaic of international relations. This work considers the impact of Great Powers, but focuses on the relations between Russia and the region.

The Great Powers mainly differ regarding the type of political systems that they promote. Russia has no problem building relationships with authoritarian leaders since Moscow separates business from politics. Nevertheless, the USA tries to promote democratic political systems in the region. However, such differences among Great Powers do not impede a multilateral effort to eradicate common concerns from Jihadist political Islam to drug trafficking. Cooperative diplomacy among Russia and other Great Powers can be utilized to manage their common goals.

Keywords: Russia, Central Asia, USA, relations, political Islam, drug trafficking, ethnic conflict, economic resources, development.

Introduction

The fall of the USSR prompted global political change; when the bipolar structure suddenly disappeared. Following this structural shift, the former Soviet Republics gained independence—along with its merits and challenges. Great Powers were forced to reassess their ties.

Meanwhile, the newly formed Central Asian Republics were brought to the forefront of global attention. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan’s developmental journey is not simply regionally significant, but globally. Geographical, economic, and political factors make the region pivotal for all Great Powers. Faced with challenges like ethnic, religious, and political conflict; Great Powers have competed to gain influence in the region. This sense of competition has included both soft and hard power tactics.

The relationship of Russia, China, the US, and the EU with the Central Asian states are uniquely different in their own ways. The diversity of their foreign policy goals, capabilities, and challenges toward Central Asia paint a complex mosaic of international relations. However, there are regional political realities that Russia and other Great Powers perceive in similar ways. In fact, they are concerned about sources of regional threats that have been underestimated for long.

Although this work considers the role and impact of all Great Powers in the region, the scope of this work is limited to the relations between the Russian Federation and the Central Asia region. These new republics share similarities in terms of their challenges and opportunities. This analysis will illustrate that Russia and other Great Power have a common base for cooperation which does not seem to capture the media headlines, as much as their rivalries do. In the same light, the Russians and Central Asians have a good deal of common interests and more opportunities for cooperation than conflict.

Significance of Central Asia

The importance of the Central Asian region has exponentially increased since the collapse of the Soviet Union. The region, along with all its assets, gained new access to the international political arena. Great

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Powers like Russia, China, the US, and the EU have carried out ambitious foreign policies in the area for several reasons. The geography and natural resources in Central Asia make it a paramount developmental area. However, destabilizing internal factors like the growth of radical Islam and ethnic clashes have made the Great Powers cautious with their approach. These destabilizing factors are largely the symptoms of modern development.

Geopolitical value: As the hub of the ancient Silk Road, the Central Asian states have had a historically advantageous location. With Russia to the north, Asia to the east, the Middle East to the south, and Eastern Europe to the west; Central Asia serves as a strategic gateway between worlds [28, P. 37]. Consequently, the region is placed in the middle of international conflicts, primarily in the Middle East. The Northern Distribution Network (NDN) is a trade route built on the old Soviet infrastructure by the US in 2009. It had been created as a strategic route for the transfer of supplies and troops to the Middle East. The NDN highlights the significance of the Central Asian geography [24, P. 1]. China is also engaged in creating strategic routes. Theirs, on the other hand, have soft power implications. By the new Silk Road policy, China has invested \$124 billion in transportation routes through Central Asia to reach other Asian and European states [38, P. 7]. Be it commerce or combat, the Central Asian region is pivotal.

Oil & Natural Gas: Not only are the Central Asian states attributed geographic importance, mineral reserves and oil basins have gifted the region with well fought over natural resources. The states in the region are endowed with 1.6 % of the world's crude oil and 10.6 % of the world's gas reserves [2, P. 597]. While 1.6 % of the world's crude oil doesn't seem like an enormous amount, any grip on the market is vital. The prices and output of natural resources from Central Asia affects the world energy economy. Great Powers have enormous incentive to control the region's energy assets. Most of the oil reserves are towards the north while gas reserves are prevalent in the south, leaving the east-most states (Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) relatively poor in natural resources [2, P. 597]. It should be mentioned that other regions, like the Middle East, surpass Central Asia in supply of these resources. However, unstable political factors in the Middle East makes Central Asia more attractive to states like China, who wish to invest their capital more safely [2, P. 597].

Growth of Radical Islam: Great Powers are concerned about the growth of radical Islam in Central Asia. These groups instigated violent rebellions throughout the region and jeopardized stability. Furthermore, there is fear of Central Asian connections to radical jihadist groups in the Middle East [29]. Agitations from groups like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) pose a security threat to Central Asian states and Great Powers alike. Although rebellions have been from radical Islamic groups, observers have found that the faith serves more as a secondary factor than a true causation [29]. Negative Western discourse related to the Muslim faith affected Central Asian's view of their religion. Plus, attempting to repress the radical movements serves as a greater catalyst for violence [29].

Identities & Ethnic conflict: As Central Asia's location is a hub to numerous countries; they have culminated a large degree of ethnic diversity. Apart from Kazakhs, Uzbeks, Tajiks, Kyrgyz, and Turks (residing outside and within the borders of their respectful nation-states), numerous Germans, Koreans, Caucasians, Dzungars, Uyghurs, Russians, Ukrainians, Poles, Slavs, and Indians reside in the region. Kazakhstan is remarkable for having over 100 different ethnicities, albeit the majority is Kazak. Such diversity sometimes harbors ethnic conflict, especially in economically difficult times [16].

This diversity eventuated in identity politics and ethnic conflicts in the region after the remaking of the borders. Although the borders of the new-born republics were not totally new, their relationship with the rest of the world was new indeed. For instance; Slavic Russian population, once the majority, has become minorities in new countries after the demise. Not only Slavic Russian population has become the minorities, but also the Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan experienced the same. There, they ended up demanding recognition of their language by the Kyrgyzstan.

An example for the ethnic conflict after the border work is the Ferghana Valley. The Ferghana Valley is a region of Central Asia that has been teeming with ethnic conflict. The valley encompasses the borders of Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan [15, P. 1]. The southern region of Kyrgyzstan maintains a large degree of Uzbeks, who clash with the Kyrgyz over life necessities like water. In 2010, the Uzbeks mobilized themselves while demanding their language be officially recognized in Kyrgyzstan. The Uzbek communities in southern Kyrgyzstan soon after became hot beds of ethnic tension and violence. The Kyrgyz authorities blame this kind of violence on the radical Islam associated with the IMU and poor access to life necessities [5, PP. 21-24].

Historical Background

The common Russian and Chinese cultural identities are important when assessing relations with Central Asian states. Having newly formed independence, their Soviet history has largely affected their language, infrastructure, and ethnic demography. Central Asian culturally identity is also closely related to Chinese culture, due to geographic and nomadic factors. Lack of common cultural identities have setback the US and EU diplomatically. Besides, EU was searching for a strategy for the region [17, P. 51]. Even though Central Asian countries were recognized by the US and EU, their existence and voices were often heard by the help of Turkey in OECD [7, P. 45]. However, these factors have not deterred Great Powers like the US and the EU from forming meaningful relationships in the twenty-first century.

Soviet: Central Asia's history as part of the USSR has had an enormous impact on their development as nation states. Prior to World War II, the region experienced a great degree of autonomy and seclusion from a Soviet identity. The Russian language was not prevalent in the region and inhabitants identified themselves by their respective ethnicities [9, PP. 622-623]. The war forced young Central Asian men to meet Russians in the Red Army and consequently learn the language. The language was brought home after the war and as the Soviets became more economically involved [9, PP. 622-623]. The implementation of the Soviet-Communist economy also impacted the region.

As Moscow and Leningrad began to transform into industrial cities, there became a need for Soviets from the republics to migrate and work in the factories. This promoted the spread of Russian language and culture further through these Central Asian factory workers. Literature from mid twentieth century Central Asian economists suggest an argument for establishing factories in the region [9, P. 626]. Industrializing the region would allow less inhabitants to migrate such long distances and diversify the economy. Developing these republics into industrial capitals was not a priority to the USSR. In turn, these arguments were ignored and it became clear that the role of Central Asia was to serve the Soviet Republic [9, P. 627].

Post-Soviet: Immediately after the fall of the USSR, the states in the region had not transformed into completely independent states. The state borders reflect borders drawn by the Soviets in the 1920's. They loosely drew the lines between different ethnicities in an effort to build nations. The difficult task became creating states out of these nations [13, PP. 372-373]. Still part of the "ruble-zone", they shared the same economy, language, and physical infrastructure as Russia while having no respective militaries to protect themselves. Many programs were in place that allotted citizens to move around the region without requiring a visa [45]. It was not until the 1990's that the region began to transform.

The "ruble-zone" decayed in 1993 as each country began to print their own currency. A Russian proposal for dual-citizenship benefits with Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan was denied as they began to negotiate with China and the CNPC over future investments. Nation building process in Central Asia, which affected the citizenship policies, often followed de-Russification in this period. Russia began to lose its hegemony in the region as it became preoccupied with threats from Afghanistan [45].

The region's economic ties with the US; and allowing airbases during Operation Enduring Freedom strengthened their US ties further, while distancing themselves from Russia [45]. Today, Central Asians engages with a variety of major powers. If Moscow aims to regain its former regional hegemony, it must reassess its ties with the region, the relationship of other Great Powers with the Central Asia republics, and the gaps between Russian goals and means.

Global Rivalry

The Great Powers are all interested in creating trade relationships with the Central Asian states. Competing for influence, they have used a variety of soft and hard power tactics to influence the region. Although concerns about instability are present, the Great Powers have continued to build relationships with these states since their creation.

Establishing airbases was one of the first tactics employed by the US and Russia in the post 9/11 era. While this move might not have directly been to balance Russia in the region, the threat was felt. The US and Russia have installed military bases to physically project their influence and offer security to the hosting country in the wake of the Afghan war [28, P. 37]. However, only Moscow has been successful in retaining and maintaining their bases [37, P. 84].

Russia has also employed means of to gain influence with international organizations like the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). Likewise,

China's foreign policy in the region has been one of economic and infrastructural development to aid in the excretion of the region's valuable natural resources [28, PP. 37-38]. The China Natural Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has significantly aided the establishment of several pipelines, funded research projects, and built infrastructure to more effectively extract the resources. China's approach to gaining influence in the region has entirely been one of soft power and win-win economic benefits [2, P. 599]. The United States is currently supporting the completion of several pipelines in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan [2, P. 598]. The competition for the Central Asian natural resources is a delicate balance.

Each Great Power has distinct capabilities and challenges. Although Russia, the USA, the EU, and China have vast soft and hard capabilities, there are looming mutual concerns about the stability of the region. Great Powers must consider their aptitude of combatting radical groups, political instability, and drug trafficking. There is much to gain from the region due to its geopolitical attributes and natural resources. To benefit from regional resources, the Great Powers must consider their foreign policy goals, capabilities, and challenges.

RUSSIA – CENTRAL ASIAN RELATIONS

The collapse of the USSR prompted Russia to lose a significant amount of valuable territory. Although Russia shares similar language, infrastructure, and economy with Central Asian states, their ability to be the hegemon of the region has been greatly diminished. This fact should calm nerves down in the region about the Russians, but it has not. Of course, a combination of Internal and external factors has led Moscow to compete with other Great Powers for influence in the region, because they are all attracted to the geopolitical location and valuable natural resources of this region. Realistically, the global powers compete with each other in this region.

Russian Foreign Policy Goals

Russia's regional goals naturally include re-gaining hegemony. However, their means for fulfilling their goal is supporting authoritarian leaders who are more willing to work with Moscow. Monopolizing energy routes would also grant greater influence in this region [10, P. 636]. Moscow is concerned about the ethnic Russians who live in the region and seasonally migrate for work. Protecting them and preventing the spread of radical Islam are prime objectives. Russian leaders generally aim to decrease the influence of others, so they may regain hegemon again [10, P. 636]. Their policy to achieve this goal includes sustaining instability. In this regard, Alexey Malashenko from the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace claims: Although the Kremlin has repeatedly stressed its commitment to stability, Russia nevertheless finds shaky situations more in its interests, as the inherent potential for local or regional conflict creates as highly convenient excuse for persuading the governments of the region to seek help from Russia in order to survive [32, P. 9].

Following the British historical experience in India, the policy of perpetuating instability is akin to a divide and conquer strategy. Despite its merits, however, the same instability issues could eventually come back to haunt Russia if hegemony is achieved. Russia would essentially inherit the weakness they imposed. It would be in Russia's best interests to quell the instability and act as an ally. Furthermore, international trade integration and Western military presence have created a delicate situation in the region. Upsetting one of the existing characteristics could generate a larger problem with instability. Interestingly enough, despite a common cultural identity, Russia is unable to offset the economic power of China and diplomatic skills of the US and the EU. Therefore, Moscow is facing significant challenges to re-gain regional hegemon.

Russian Concerns: Russia is also heavily concerned with the drug trade prevalent in the southern Central Asian states. Heroin trade from Afghanistan makes its way up through the region into Russian territory, where there exists rampant drug addiction and drug related deaths. With at least 1 million heroin addicted citizens and 30,000 drug related deaths a year, a stricter grasp on the region would allow Russia to prevent their drug problem from worsening [53]. US and NATO forces have played an important role in the prevention of drug trade, which places Russia in an uncomfortable position. The withdrawal of Western troops would allow Russia to have a dominant military presence, but worsen existing drug trade concerns [53]. The containment of the spread of radical Islam is another foreign policy goal for Russia. Once again, the withdrawal of NATO and US troops from the Middle East and Central Asia would leave a troublesome power vacuum. At the same time, Russia must appease and overcome Western influence in Central Asia if they desire to attain supreme regional influence [53].

Russian Capabilities

From time to time, Moscow has used soft and hard power tactics to re-establish its influence in Central Asia. With limited success, Russia has aimed to regain a hand in this region that is considered its backyard. States, like Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, have significant natural gas and oil reserves. Russia has tried to corner energy trade with these states since their formation [53]. At first, Russia held the most influence over the region's natural resources. The fall of the USSR left the states with similar ethnic identity, language, and most importantly: infrastructure. Russia took advantage of this opportunity to gain oil and natural gas in the "near abroad" until competitive offers from the US and China presented themselves [2, P. 598].

Cultural Identities: Although the Central Asian states have a great degree of ethnic diversity, a vast amount of citizens have Russian heritage. Slavic Russian population, once the majority, has become minorities in new countries after the demise. Furthermore, many migrate back and forth for seasonal jobs [53]. Together with similar languages and preexisting shared infrastructure, Russia holds vital soft power capabilities. Russia could play the brother in the region, by relying on the linguistic advantages. Furthermore, Russia cares about the Slavic-Orthodox minorities in Central Asian countries. On the other hand, Russia could use these capabilities in the international arena. Using these capabilities, Russia had formed EurAsEc in 2000 with Kazakhstan, Belarus, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan [51, P. 5]. EurAsEc was the first step in forming an integrated economy similar to the European Union. It established joint programs for economic, transportation, social, and scientific programs. Issues related to trade were able to be resolved through EurAsEc. It was internationally recognized by the United Nations in 2003 [51, P. 6]. Although this international organization had some successes in creating an integrated Central Asia with Russia, it became clear for all that some states were obviously stronger than others. Furthermore, Russia's strong ethnic identity with Central Asia has become dwarfed by a Chinese identity. In 2014, 6.7 million Russian were reported in the region while it is estimated that there is near 110 million Chinese [43, P. 458].

Economic Influence: Russian role as primary trade partner of Central Asia has been shadowed by China's active diplomatic and economic support. Outside actors have engaged in energy trade that has significantly diversified the region's economic partners [53]. In attempting to become a dominant economic force, Russia has created several international organizations to form multilateral trade agreements like the EurAsEc Customs Union (CU) and the Single Economic Space (SEC) [51, P. 5].

In 2010, the CU was established. It included Russia along with the best economies from EurAsEc: Belarus and Kazakhstan. A year after its creation, trade between the states increased by 33.3% [51, P. 6]. Encouraged by the success of the CU, the three states subsequently established SEC in 2012. Its goals include promoting the free movement of goods, capital services, and people. It was meant to be the next and final step before a fully integrated Eurasian Union [51, PP. 6-7].

Although the CU and SES have had some degrees of success, but they have not become the dominant economic force of the region. In 2011, 85.6% of exports from Kazakhstan went to non-CIS states. Central Asians found that Western states are often willing to pay more for their exports, therefore driving them to diversify their trade agreements [51, P. 9]. Furthermore, Russia has imposed higher tariffs within the SES, disadvantaging Kazakhstan and Belarus, especially in automobile trade. Despite slight inequity of trade agreements within SES, it still has reasons to exist. Russia and CIS states are heavily interrelated through labor and migration. An economic agreement is vital to assess their common goals [51, P. 10].

Physical Influence: Dependent on the former Soviet Union technology, Central Asian states still utilize Soviet military equipment. The region's defense forces wield many outdated Soviet infrastructure, vehicles, and weapons [44, PP. 206-232]. As of February (2017), the IISS Military Balance has reported Russian foreign deployment in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Russia holds military bases in Kyrgyzstan and one reported base in Tajikistan. There is also one Russian radar station in Balkhash, Kazakhstan [44, PP. 206-232].

Naturally, Moscow does not like the presence of NATO in the region. However, Russia has benefited from the US and NATO presence in Central Asia for decreasing the spread of drugs and radical Islam. Russia also benefited from China's abilities to balance the Western powers influence. Consequently, it is impossible for Russia to be the only global player in Central Asia [53]. This should ease some concerns about the possible expansionist role of Moscow.

To deter NATO, Russia had employed the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). For Russian, the CSTO is structurally weak as many member states engage in similar relations with China through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. Uzbekistan, one of the wealthiest CIS states, moved out of CSTO after ethnic clashes between the Kyrgyz and Uzbeks in 2010. Kazakhstan is hosting some NATO troops

through the Partnership for Peace program [40, PP. 2-3]. It is unlikely that Russia would achieve military dominance in the region given the current situation. This should further ease the local concerns about possible Russian military invasion.

Russian Challenges

Despite cultural, economic, and hard power capabilities, Russia has met several challenges in becoming regional hegemon. Their recent declining economy, regional instability, and the anti-hegemonic policy of the Central Asian states withheld Russia from achieving their goals.

Economic Limits: Russia has major obstacles for becoming the regional hegemon. These obstacles are related to its economy, CIS sovereignty concerns, and balancing Great Power's interests. Since the Russian economic crisis in the late 1990s, their role as an attractive trade partner for the region has been permanently damaged. Central Asian states have continued to diversify their trading partners, finding trade with the West to be more lucrative [53]. Organizations, like EurAsEc and SES, have had a degree of success, but are easily dwarfed by the offers from other Great Powers, particularly China. By building pipelines and signing attractive energy trade agreements in the region, China took businesses from Russia [53].

Instability: Ethnic conflicts, dangerous drug trade, and the spread of radical Islam bring instability to the region. This led all Global Powers to approach Central Asia with great caution. However, the prospect for having influence in this geographic corner and energy trade is too attractive to avoid it. Accordingly, Central Asian states have used this fact to their advantage and have "elastic" foreign policies [33, PP. 297-300]. They tend to form relations with a diverse array of states, usually based on whoever fulfills their national interest most efficiently.

Central Asian Anti-Hegemonic Policy: While content with economic relations with Russia, the states in the region are wary of becoming neo-colonies to their intimidating neighbors. Russia does not want to allot China too much influence in the region; however, Chinese presence is necessary to offset the power emanating from the US. Washington tip-toes around relations with China and Russia in Central Asia, if it wants support for the US policy in Afghanistan. The EU aims to access the regional natural resources, while promoting a better system of human rights, but it needs Chinese presence to maintain stability [2, PP. 598-599]. In the wake of complex Great Power advances, Central Asian states have found advantages in adopting "elastic" or "multi-vectoral" foreign policy.

Following the independence, the Central Asian governments promoted nationalism to mobilize masses and to establish a link between national identities and the state. The Soviet past was considered as the history of the oppression. This view came along with the applications of de-Russification. Having been under Russian influence for so long, Central Asian leaders have begun to pursue some anti-Russian policies. Uzbekistan is a major example of this brand of foreign policy. As a newly independent state, Uzbekistan has placed utmost importance on its independence, sovereignty, stability, and development. Their ambiguous alignments have protected them from entrapment and abandonment [33, P. 304].

At the same time, Central Asian were searching for ways to integrate more with the rest of the world. This goal led to establishing new ties with the USA, Europe, and China. Nevertheless, the Russian role has not faded out; and Russian identity was considered at the same time. Therefore, Moscow was both the rival and the model for Central Asia. As a result, Russia falls behind in its ability to become a Central Asian hegemon. It lacks the means to appease each state's national interests, growth, and stability. Although Moscow has some soft power influence in the region, the means to establish stability are currently not wielded by any single Great Power. This dilemma transforms Central Asia into the new Great Game in international relations.

Vital for Moscow is the stability of the Muslims within Russian borders. Russia is reluctant to experience a rise of political Islam in the region. Thus, the stability of the Muslims both in Central Asia and within Russian Federation have been a critical issue. Even though Central Asian countries followed a secular nation building processes, Islam has been a vital factor for their identity. Banned from practicing their religion under the Soviets, Central Asian nations naturally resist Russian influence.

CONCERNS AND FUTURE PROSPECTS

This work both formally and informally addressed the myth and realities associated with the role of Russia in relations to other Great powers in Central Asia. While Russia look like an imposing factor in the region, there are gaps between the Moscow's policy goals and means in the region. We discussed that Rus-

sia, China, the US, and the EU have distinct goals for Central Asia. However, a closer look suggests that their concerns are generally more aligned than are in competition with each other.

The forces of instability in the region, not only threatens the very existence of the local governments, but also threatens each the Great Power's interests. Of course, external sources of threats are still of some concerns for these new republics. Yet, the internal sources of threats seem to be more significant. Russia and other Great Powers agree that radical groups, political instability, and trafficking are the most critical internal threats in Central Asia.

Radical Groups

Central Asian states embrace a dichotomy of majority Muslim population with a staunch secularist policy. Furthermore, in a survey conducted in 2009, researchers found that 61 % of Central Asian Muslims did not support the idea of international Islamic solidarity [35, P. 306]. Most of the region's Muslims also do not adhere to all five pillars of the faith. The strictest of Muslims tend to be academically educated and fall within the age range of 17-30 [35, PP. 308-318]. However, the small percentage of radical Muslims have prompted the regional governments to be extremely secular.

The Muslim faith in Central Asia has had roots in the 7th century. It became quite popular in the Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan territories during the Soviet rule. 202 out of the 495 Soviet mosques were in Uzbek land during the 1950's [31, P. 176]. However, during the Brezhnev rule, underground radical movements began to take root in Tajik and Uzbek communities as the religion was being eradicated by the Soviet-Communist rule. As they became persecuted by the state, they began practicing a version of Islam similar to the radical Wahhabi brand. In turn, trying to combat and quell the movement has only propelled it [31, P. 178]. The constant battle between quieting radical groups and hindering their growth has been a self-promoting problem.

Central Asian states have faced clashes of ethnic and religious identity since their independence. In Kyrgyzstan, ethnic Uzbeks in the South have felt underrepresented and have subsequently mobilized themselves in 2010 [5, PP. 21-24]. Kyrgyz are quick to blame their violence on the spread of radical Islam and the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU). Omelicheva proposes that the oppression of minorities has led to the spread of radical Islam. Persecuting ethnic and religious groups have forced them to develop underground movements and become defensive [31, P. 169]. The IMU has been described as a jihadist movement without major Islamic principles. There have been no aims at conversion or spreading the religion. Their goals in the twenty first century have been to gain power [31, P. 169]. Radical Islamic groups in Central Asia are mainly comprised of ethnically persecuted groups like the Uzbeks and Tajiks. While some like to contend that socioeconomic and political factors have led to radicalization, the radical Muslims in the region are well educated, urban dwelling individuals [31, P. 172]. Radical groups threaten the security and stability of Central Asian states and are a major deterrent to Great Powers from investing too much in the region.

Political Instability

The political institutions in the region are acting on a delicate balance of corruption and multilateral relations with powerful actors. Not only are foreign relations fragile, but multilateral regional relationships are currently based on rivalry and distrust.

Regional level: One can see this clearly through the allocation of water resources throughout the region. Water is not only vital for basic human needs and energy, but also for irrigation of crops, upon which many communities rely. For example, water is crucial for cotton growth in Uzbekistan in the Fergana Valley [15, P. 1]. The Syr Darya and Amu Darya rivers account for 90 % of the regions river water and 75 % of all water needed for agriculture. Kyrgyzstan controls a vast amount of the former river, while Tajikistan has holding in the latter river, leaving Uzbekistan at the mercy of others [15, P. 2]. The Fergana Valley is where these water sources and countries connect as well as clash. The borders have been disputed multiple times from 2010 to present day, leaving a trail of many deaths, hostages, injuries, and account of arson and property damage in its wake. Moreover, water scarcity for communities propels civil unrest and promotes instability through violent clashes [15, P. 11]. The ethnic clashes have more to do with resources than ethnicity.

State level: Political stability within Central Asian states themselves shadowed by corruption, mafia networks, ethnic clashes, and no legal precedence. These states have not completely embraced the notion of a democracy since their creation. Seeing their authoritarian leaders as legends who saved their country, citi-

zens will not challenge their policies or expect free and fair elections [39, P. 138]. However, these authoritarian leaders have provided stability to a degree in the region. What is most concerning is the forthcoming transfers of power: especially in Kazakhstan. The current President, Nazarbayev, has ruled since 1990; and he is obviously much older now. The Kazakh constitution allows for a temporary succession plan if the president is abruptly unable to rule, but there are no means nor precedent to establish a permanent president [39, P. 143]. Furthermore, this is an unspoken rule that ambitious actions have consequences. Rahat Aliev, the president's son in law, was vocal about his plans to run for election and was forced to leave Kazakhstan in 2007 [39, P. 144]. Uzbekistan also shares the custom of keeping ambitions hidden. The next ruler of Kazakhstan would also need Russia's silent blessing. Nazarbayev has been vital to helping the Kremlin carry out their economic community goals for Central Asia [39, P. 145].

There is a multi-tiered system of threats to stability in the region that will take years to resolve. Currently, vulnerable to conflict are the Central Asian states themselves, their relationships with one another, and their relationships with the Great Powers.

Drug Trafficking

Central Asia's geographic location makes regional security vulnerable to illicit trading. Afghanistan to the South has the world's largest poppy farms while Russia to the North has the world's worst opium addiction [8, P. 1235]. Illegal drug trade has become a large financial resource for terrorist groups. However, in the aftermath of 9/11, the Western world has put in great efforts to quell terrorist groups and their hands in the drug trade of Afghanistan. Today, the majority of illicit trade is conducted on a mafia-state nexus [8, PP. 1236-1237].

The collapse of the USSR allowed criminal syndicates in the region to take advantage of the insufficient border control. Since the 1980's, opium production in Afghanistan has increased 5 times. In 2010, roughly a quarter of all Afghan heroin ended up in Russia. That is essentially 90 metric tons of heroin being trafficked through Central Asia [8, P. 1237]. The trade is managed by regional mafias who also deal with trafficking cannabis, humans, and arms. However, heroin is their most lucrative product. These mafias have specialized their trade since the 1980s and are associated with powerful businessmen and political elites [8, PP. 1237-1238]. The mafia-state relationships are interdependent and mutually beneficial. They engage in an exchange of favors where mafias are offered immunity for a share of the profits. For this reason, there is little violence involved in illicit trafficking [8, P. 1238]. Mafias also feel no need to engage in turf wars as the competition is not harsh. While actors outside the region continue to deal with the terrorist drug related networks, the Central Asian mafias act with little risk of abolishment [8, P. 1238]. If Russia, China, the United States, or the EU aim to tackle the drug trade issue, they would destabilize the well-established mafia-state relationships, and consequently the stability of local governments.

Future Prospects

Obviously, all Great Powers do not approach the Central Asians in the same manner. However, there is a substantial window for cooperation among them. Russia and other Great Powers seek regional political stability, economic development, containment of radical Islam, and prevention of trafficking. Thus, these powers pursue an open door policy with the Central Asians. These Great Powers should do the same with each other.

The Great Powers mainly differ regarding the type of political systems that they promote: authoritarian or democracy. Russia and China have no problem building relationships with authoritarian leaders since they separate business from politics. Nevertheless, the US and EU prefer to promote democratic political systems among their partners in Central Asia. However, these differences among Great Powers do not need to impede a multilateral effort to eradicate Jihadist political Islam and drug trafficking. Cooperative diplomacy among Russia and other Great Powers can be utilized to manage these common concerns in the twenty first century.

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МИФЫ, РЕАЛЬНОСТЬ И ЗАДАЧИ РОССИЙСКОЙ ПОЛИТИКИ В РЕГИОНЕ ЦЕНТРАЛЬНОЙ АЗИИ С УЧЕТОМ РОЛИ ВЕДУЩИХ МИРОВЫХ ДЕРЖАВ

Распад СССР вызвал глобальные перемены: было создано 15 новых государств, что подтолкнуло Москву к переоценке связей с Центральной Азией или, теперь уже, ближним зарубежьем. Неожиданно Центральная Азия привлекла внимание всего мира из-за своего геостратегического положения, природных ресурсов и проблем безопасности/политики. Это привело к возрождению «Великой игры», в основе которой лежит соперничество между глобальными державами за сферы влияния. Отношения великих держав с центральноазиатскими странами уникальны. Разнообразие их политических целей, средств и задач в этом регионе создают сложную мозаику международных отношений. В этой работе рассматривается влияние ведущих держав, но основное внимание уделено отношениям между Россией и центральноазиатским регионом. Ведущие державы различаются, главным образом, по типу политических систем, которые они продвигают. У России нет проблем с налаживанием отношений с авторитарными лидерами, поскольку Москва отделяет бизнес от политики. В свою очередь, США пытаются продвигать в регионе демократические политические системы. Однако такие разногласия между ведущими державами вовсе не препятствуют многосторонним усилиям по искоренению общих проблем, связанных с джихадистами и торговлей наркотиками. Совместные дипломатические усилия России и других великих держав могут быть использованы для достижения общих целей.

Ключевые слова: Россия, Центральная Азия, США, международные отношения, политический ислам, торговля наркотиками, этнический конфликт, экономические ресурсы, развитие.

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