



## Impact of Sino-Russia Cooperation and Competition on Central Asia after 9/11: An Analytical Study

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### Abstract

*The energy-rich Central Asian region (CAR) has been in the news ever since the demise of the Soviet Union. This landlocked region shares frontiers with China, Russia, Iran, and Afghanistan. The Sino-Russian mutual relations have had an immense impact on the whole CAR. Russia directly ruled the region for more than a century. However, with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, Beijing increased its influence in the region. These two giants of the world politics manage their interests through different regional organizations such as the SCO, CIS, CSTO, and the EAEU. After 9/11, the Central Asian region gained special attention when the US began operations in Afghanistan. Initially, China and Russia welcomed and supported American activities but the 'colour revolutions' in the former Soviet republics prompted China and Russia to build strategic partnerships to check American activity in the neighbourhood. The basic purpose of this study is to investigate the nature of cooperation and competition between China and Russia in Central Asia. Applying the qualitative method, it also highlights the effects of the Sino-Russian relationship in this region.*

**Keywords:** China, Russia, Central Asian region, Afghanistan, US, SCO.

### Introduction

Previously, the five Central Asian States, namely Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan used to be the part of the Union of the Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). Their population size ranges from the most populous Uzbekistan (30.6 m) to the geographically largest but sparsely populated Kazakhstan (18 m.) to the smallest Tajikistan (8.8 m.),

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Kyrgyzstan (6.1 m.) and Turkmenistan (5.5 m.). Ethnically, the region is composed of Uzbek, Kazakh, Tajik, Turkmen, Kyrgyz, Russian, Uyghur, Korean, Tatar, and Dungan populations.<sup>1</sup>

Since their independence, the states have faced multiple challenges. They had to overcome political obscurity, economic isolation, repercussions from the conflict in Afghanistan, as well as the perils of being positioned geopolitically between Russia and China. Most of the regional states like Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan have significant hydrocarbon reserves which has been helpful in the stabilization of their economies. But, unfortunately, these states failed to efficiently utilize all their resources due to lack of planning and other basic facilities. As far as Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are concerned, the dearth of economic resources has kept the polity volatile and unpredictable.

It is an undeniable fact that the Central Asia region due to its great geo-strategic and geo-economic importance has always been a combat zone for world powers.<sup>2</sup> With the fall of the Soviet Union, the borders between Russia and China reduced by 2000 kilometers. The newly independent states posed a unique challenge to Beijing.<sup>3</sup> Both powers—Russia and China— wanted stability and status-quo in the neighbourhood through increasing bilateral ties in the field of security and other mutual interests. For example, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has been one such manifestation to check US penetration in the vicinity. During BRICS summit in October 2016, the Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese Premier Xi Jinping vowed that no external power would be acceptable to interfere in the Central Asian affairs.<sup>4</sup>

### **Sino-Russian Cooperation and Competition in the Central Asian Region**

Chinese relations with Russia have successfully been reshaped after the disintegration of the Soviets Union from vast differences to a more

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<sup>1</sup> “Total Population by Country 2017”, *World Population Review*, available at <http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/> (retrieved on 10 January 2017).

<sup>2</sup> Sébastien Peyrouse, “Building a New Silk Road? Central Asia in the New World Order”, *Origins* 2, No. 10 (July 2009), available at <http://origins.osu.edu/article/building-new-silk-road-central-asia-new-world-order>, (retrieved on 20 November, 2016).

<sup>3</sup> Alexander Pisarev, “Russia and China in Central Asia”, *ISPI Analysis*, No. 131 (July 2012): 2.

<sup>4</sup> “Putin discusses Syria with Xi Jinping”, (15 October 2016), available at [https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2016/10/15/n\\_9222863.shtml](https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2016/10/15/n_9222863.shtml), (retrieved on 15 March 2017).

inclusive cooperation. The change of leaderships in both the countries during the last quarter of the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought openness and outward-looking policies to meet global challenges. These developments between Sino-Russia relations culminated in the strategic partnership in 1996 and Treaty of Friendship in 2001.

Later on, gradually, both the countries settled their persisting issues adopted a strict policy of non-interfering in each other's matters. Also, Moscow and Beijing resolved their outstanding territorial disputes.<sup>5</sup> The Central Asian region is always attractive owing to its rich natural resources to regional and global powers. After the 9/11, the US established its bases in Central Asia to carry out its military operations in Afghanistan, which in the longrun could also help Washington to observe Sino-Russian strategic reach in the region.

#### **Chinese interests in Central Asia**

Maintaining traditional and friendly relations with Central Asian states and having a common boundary of 3300 km, the prime motive of Chinese leadership was to stabilize and manage its north and north-west borders disputes with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Russia. Reciprocally, these states promised to respect the 'One China Policy'.<sup>6</sup> China have sustained peaceful contacts with Central Asian states firmly adhering to the principles of respecting the sovereignty of each other while at the same time seeking closer economic relations.<sup>7</sup> Chinese strategic interests in the region are obvious and certain. Beijing has been extremely sensitive to any Uyghur activism and, therefore, it is natural from the Chinese standpoint to keep these Turkic states at arm's length. By keeping the region away from other border security matters, Beijing meant to gain maximum access to region's energy resources. Geo-economically, the introduction of Central Asian products in the Chinese market helped the new republics to gain some leverage vis-à-vis Russia and US.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Bobo Lo and Andy Rothman, "China and Russia: Common Interests, Changing Perceptions", *Asian Geopolitics*, Working Paper of Royal Institute for International Affairs (May 2006):4.

<sup>6</sup> Sébastien Peyrouse, Jos Boonstra, and Marlène Laruelle, "Security and Development Approaches to Central Asia The EU Compared to China and Russia", EUCAM Working Paper No. 11 (May 2012):11.

<sup>7</sup> Sun Zhuangzhi, "The Relationship between China and Central Asia" (Sapporo, Japan: Slavic Research Center, Hokkaido University, 2007):47.

<sup>8</sup> Sébastien, "Security and Development Approaches", 11.

As the globe's biggest energy buyer, CARs have turned out to be one of the principal destinations of China's hunt for energy worldwide. Chinese oil and gas companies have made a number of logistical and exploration agreements in the hydrocarbon sector.<sup>9</sup> China's strategy is to uphold regional stability, strengthen overall relations in the Central Asia republics, and keep avoiding any major confrontation with the US in the region.

Another core interest of China towards Central Asia is the advancement of the 'Silk Road' project. It was proposed by President Xi Jinping in Astana during a state visit to Kazakhstan in September 2013. The economic belt is intended to act as a dynamo for strengthened bilateral trade and economic relations between China and the Eurasian region. In a significant addendum in May 2015, China and Russia agreed in Moscow to integrate the project with an advanced vision of a trade and infrastructure network across Eurasia and respect each other's interests in region. The Russian-led Eurasian Economic Union formally launched in January 2015, comprising of Russia, Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. It aimed to become the biggest free trade area in near future which reinforced Russia's own 'pivot to the East' and served to dispel the apprehension that Russia and China might take a confrontational stance against one another's interests.

Furthermore, this new 'Silk Road' project directly links China to the EU thereby unlocking the vast European market for its products. Some critics are raising doubts that there is a new great game afoot in Central Asia and the Caucasus involving Russia and China in a strategic alliance against the Western hegemony. The free trade and growing cooperation in a number of spheres further strengthened a new great game theory. Some experts assumed China's giant network of more than 60 nations in the 'Belt and Road Initiative' building a huge network of connectivity encompassing China, Africa, Middle East, and Europe, which would potentially transform the region under combined Sino-Russian influence.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Swanstrom Niklas, "Sino-Russian Relations at the Start of the New Millennium in Central Asia and Beyond", *Journal of Contemporary China* 23, No. 87 (2014): 480-497.

<sup>10</sup> Meine Pieter van Dijk and Patrick Martens, "The Silk Road and Chinese Interests in Central Asia and the Caucasus: The Case of Georgia", Working Paper (February 2, 2016). Visit at <https://ideas.repec.org/p/msm/wpaper/2016-12.htm>.

### **Russian interests in Central Asia**

Relations between the Russian Federation and the Central Asian states have witnessed many ups and downs in the last two decades. Ever since their independence, Russia has intended closer relations with these states in order to sustain its erstwhile influence in the region. Additionally, Moscow's quest to re-emerge as an active balancing power in the Middle East reveals its critical position in the current global scenario. Russia secured its leading role through economic and security organizations like the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Besides, Moscow is paranoid with fears like regional upheavals such as the Tajik Civil War (1992-1997) and the Andijan bloodshed (2005). Also, the spectre of 'pro-democracy' movements in the region (for e.g., 'Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan in 2005) only exacerbates Moscow's anxiety.<sup>11</sup>

The ex-Soviet countries remain significant for Russia and thus, its related regional security is the priority area in Russian foreign policy. During the Soviet era, it established military bases in three Central Asian states – Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan didn't have any military installations but both states continue to have deep security relations with Russia.<sup>12</sup>

The security of the Central Asian region serves as a vanguard against extremism and drug dealers, keeping the region secure and preventing it being exploited by other outside players.<sup>13</sup> Russia is also keenly interested in the Chabahar port in Iran.<sup>14</sup>

### **Sino-Russian Cooperation towards Central Asia**

Strategically, China and Russia have almost similar interests in Central Asia because of comparable geographical connections with the region. Both of them experienced a new phase in their bilateral relations when they

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<sup>11</sup> Alexander Pisarev, "Russia and China in Central Asia", *ISPI Analysis*, No. 131 (July 2012):3.

<sup>12</sup> Arman Mussin, "Russia's Military Bases in Central Asia," *Nazarbayev University Political Science Review* (January 2017). Available at <https://nupsreview.wordpress.com/2017/01/11/russias-military-bases-in-central-asia/>.

<sup>13</sup> Sébastien, "Security and Development Approaches", 6.

<sup>14</sup> "Russia Eyes Iran's Chabahar to Transit Goods", *Tehran Times* (August 2019). See <https://www.tehrantimes.com/news/439344/Russia-eyes-Iran-s-Chabahar-to-transit-goods>.

announced a strategic partnership on April 25, 1996.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, the SCO was a consequence of a series of bilateral agreements regarding similar security concerns. It led to the broad concept of regional security. Uzbekistan also joined the SCO in June 2001, when the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was officially named.<sup>16</sup> Under the SCO, both powers wanted to stand against some mutual concerns like separatism, terrorism, and extremism; both nations desire to have a strengthening of relations amongst member states, upholding the regional stability<sup>17</sup> and economic advancement of the region. Furthermore, they aim to keep supporting the secular governments. The main reason for their cooperation over Central Asia is to counter balance Washington's interests in the region. During the course of four decades, unsettled border disputes between China and Russia were finally resolved in July 2005.<sup>18</sup>

After the 9/11, the US and NATO started military operations against Al-Qaida in Afghanistan and established military bases in the region. Initially, both China and Russia welcomed and supported the American campaign, but, later on, they raise their concerns. The chief reason behind their opposition was the 'Colour Revolutions' like Rose, Orange, and Tulip that arose in ex-Soviet states in Georgia, Ukraine, and Kyrgyzstan respectively between 2003 and 2005.<sup>19</sup> These 'revolutions' were taken as serious threats to the regional status quo. China and Russia perceived American presence in the region as a ploy to decrease their Sino-Russian influence in Central Asia. To contain Western advancement in the region, Beijing and Moscow took certain measures to avoid future upheavals in Central Asia.

Both powers feared the growing activities of the Islamic State (IS) in the region and separatism and terrorism in the North Caucasus and the

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<sup>15</sup> Zhao Huasheng, "China-Russia Relations in Central Asia", the ASAN Forum, (22 November 2013), available at <http://www.theasanforum.org/china-russia-relations-in-centralasia/?dat=November%20%E2%80%93%20December,%202013> (retrieved on 27 February 2016).

<sup>16</sup> Jeanne L. Wilson, *Strategic Partners: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era: Russian-Chinese Relations in the Post-Soviet Era* (New York: Routledge, 2015), 51-52.

<sup>17</sup> Linda Jacobson, et al., "China's Energy and Security Relations with Russia: Hopes, Frustrations and Uncertainties", Policy Paper, SIPRI (29 October 2011), 4-5.

<sup>18</sup> Geir Flikke and Julie Wilhelmsen, "Central Asia: A Testing Ground for Great-Power Relations", *NUPI Report*, Norwegian Institute of International Affairs (2008): 21.

<sup>19</sup> Thrassy Marketos, *China's Energy Geopolitics: The Shanghai Cooperation Organization and Central Asia*, (New York: Routledge, 2009), 100-103.

Xinjiang. China and Russia joined hands for ensuring stability and harmony in the region at any cost and having confidence-building exercises.<sup>20</sup> For instance, the 2014 combined drills in northern China at the Zhurihe Training Base under the banner of the SCO war-gamed scenarios against domestic threats.<sup>21</sup>

Retrospectively, Russian and China have had similar stances on all key issues like international conflict management, non-proliferation, the war on terror, and weapons of mass destruction. It is important to mention that both states are veto-wielding powers. They also opposed the war in Iraq as well as sanctions against Iran and North Korea. Both the countries support each other's territorial sovereignty. For instance, Beijing respects Russian claims over Chechnya and feel grateful to Moscow for being supportive on China's stand on Taiwan, Tibet, and Xinjiang issues.<sup>22</sup>

The cooperation in the oil and gas sector between the states are more acute since energy provides substantial grounds for mutual cooperation, so both China and Russia wanted to gain maximum benefits from these energy resources. Historically, Russia got benefits from the regional oil and gas reserves, now China has built two pipelines which bypass Russia and provide alternative sale routes to the CARs.<sup>23</sup> In the meantime, it is also considered that there is sufficient potential for economic cooperation, and that free trade would be beneficial for the Central Asian states, Russia, and China.<sup>24</sup> Nevertheless, it can also be noticed that Chinese economic dominance of the SCO unsettled Moscow and other Central Asian states.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>20</sup> Li Jingjie, "Sino-Russian Strategic Partnership Cooperative Relations and the US Factor", *The ASAN Forum*, 22 (22 November, 2013), available at <http://www.theasanforum.org/sino-russian-strategic-partnership-cooperative-relations-and-the-us-factor/> (retrieved on 18 December, 2016).

<sup>21</sup> Richard Weitz, "SCO Military Drills Strengthen Russian-Chinese Regional Hegemony", *The Central Asia-Caucasus Analyst* No.2 (October 2014), available on <http://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/13054-sco-military-drills-strengthen-russian-chinese-regional-hegemony.html> (retrieved on 25 December, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Bobo Lo, "The Long Sunset of Strategic Partnership: Russia's Evolving China Policy", *International Affairs* 80, Issue 2 (2004): 296.

<sup>23</sup> Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012), 94.

<sup>24</sup> Huasheng, "China-Russia Relations."

<sup>25</sup> Stephen Aris, *Eurasian Regionalism-The Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 87.

In the recent past, the Sino-Russian relations reached at unprecedented high levels after the SCO joint military exercises in Tajikistan.<sup>26</sup> In 2013, during a security summit in Kazakhstan, the Chinese President stated that China would never intervene in the internal affairs of Central Asian states' and would not seek leadership role in regional affairs without the consensus and approval of regional parties.<sup>27</sup>

China respected and acknowledge Russia's deep rooted bond and dominant role in the regional states. It also seems quite beneficial for China to have a peaceful atmosphere for commercial expansion rather than indulging in any security management role.

### **Sino-Russian Competition toward Central Asia**

Russia appears to be aware of its weakening position vis-à-vis China as a world power, and, therefore, it has been cautious with regards to regional integration. It desires to use Russia-led organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States founded in 1991, the CSTO agreed on October 2002 to increase security cooperation, and the Eurasian Economic Union,<sup>28</sup> January 2015 to increase economic cooperation and ceased custom barrier.<sup>29</sup> Interestingly, China is not a member of these organisations. Russia has used these forums to exercise its influence and counter balance the Chinese and other powers' presence in Central Asia, which has become an arena of competition between Moscow and Beijing with the EAEU and the SCO representing the preferred organs respectively.<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Andrew Kuchins, "Russia's China Challenge in a Changing Asia: An American Perspective", The ASAN FORUM, (22 November 2013), available at <http://www.theasanforum.org/russias-china-challenge-in-a-changing-asia-an-american-perspective/>, (retrieved on 5 December 2016).

<sup>27</sup> "President Xi Jinping delivers important speech and proposes to build a Silk Road Economic Belt with Central Asian Countries", Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the People's Republic of China (7 September 2013) available at [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa\\_eng/topics\\_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh\\_665686/t1076334.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/topics_665678/xjpfwzysiesgjtfhshzzfh_665686/t1076334.shtml) (retrieved on 8 December 2016).

<sup>28</sup> Ardak Yesdauletova, and Aitmukhanbet Yesdauletov, "The Eurasian Union: Dynamics and Difficulties of the Post-Soviet Integration", *TRAMES* 18, No. 1 (March 2014): 12-13.

<sup>29</sup> Dmitri Trenin, "From Greater Europe to Greater Asia? The Sino-Russian Entente", *Carnegie Policy Paper* (2015):12-18.

<sup>30</sup> Adil Kaukenov, "Internal Contradictions of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization", *Central Asia and Caucasus* 14, Issue 2 (2013): 7-17.



It is a common understanding that the Central Asian states are in a better and beneficial position to attract international community towards its resource-rich domain. They have a choice to either engage with the two neighbouring powers or seek outside engagement according to their national interests. For instance, Kazakhstan faces two challenges one from the East (China) and another from the West, which incessantly insists on democracy and freedom. The SCO itself faces a number of challenges with Russia and China managing regional integration according to their own national trajectories.

Russian and Chinese led National Oil Companies (NOCs) often contested for similar oil and gas projects in the Central Asian states. This competition has led to delays in joint oil and gas agreements. According to some political thinkers the region is open for competition rather than cooperation between the two as evident by the increasing Chinese energy developments in this region. Russia, for its part, has somewhat come to terms with the Chinese penetration in the region.<sup>31</sup>

The Chinese share of oil production in Kazakhstan is much greater than the Russian one.<sup>32</sup> Turkmenistan further clarified the Sino-Russian interaction in the energy fields and the new gas pipeline agreement between China and Turkmenistan left the Russians far behind.<sup>33</sup> China outmaneuvered Russia in Turkmenistan when it signed a gas pipeline agreement with Ashgabat.<sup>34</sup> Due to consequent contracts with Turkmenistan, China began receiving at least 40BCM of gas annually which increased to 65 BCM per annum. Beijing's support to Turkmenistan not only strengthened its energy freedom but also permitted it to diversify its oil and gas exports.<sup>35</sup>

The growing Chinese presence in the regional energy sector challenges the historic influence of Russia in Central Asia since the Chinese provide a

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<sup>31</sup> Evan A. Feigenbaum, "Why America no Longer Gets Asia," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, No. 2 (Spring 2011): 29 - 31.

<sup>32</sup> Fabio Indeo, "Russia and China in Central Asia: Growing Geopolitical Competition", (ISPI Policy Brief 199, Milano: ISPI, 2010): 3

<sup>33</sup> Farkhad Sharip, "China tightens grip on Kazakh gas", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, Issue 3 (6 January 2010).

<sup>34</sup> Roman Muzalevsky, "Implications of China's high-speed Eurasian railway strategy for Central Asia", *Eurasia Daily Monitor* 7, no64 (2 April 2010):76-141.

<sup>35</sup> "Interview with President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan", *Xinhua Domestic Service in Chinese (Beijing)*, FBIS SOV, (8 June 2006).

better alternative against Russia in this particular. The development has allowed Turkmenistan to negotiate on more acceptable conditions the cost and volume of its exports to Russia<sup>36</sup>, affecting the previous Russian mechanism of cheap gas imports from Central Asia.

Chinese heavy infrastructural presence has been worrying for Moscow. Moreover, the growing military and defence capabilities of the Chinese have gravitated the Central Asian states towards Beijing. For instance, Tajikistan have replaced its Russian aircrafts with Chinese aircraft.<sup>37</sup>

However, be that as it may, Russia and China have strenuously avoided to make their differences over regional dynamics a staple for news consumption. Moscow has not created any impediments in the Belt and Road initiative. In May 2015, Chinese and Russian Presidents, during a bilateral meeting, expressed a firm determination to have close ties and establish a common economic space between China and the EAEU.<sup>38</sup>

It also reflected that the ruling elite in Russia understands the economic power of China and admits it as a major investor in the region. As a consequence of Western sanctions and under financial pressure, Russia has eyed \$40 billion infrastructure investment through the Chinese Silk Road Regional Fund.<sup>39</sup> In the meantime, the Russian-led CSTO has become the world second biggest weapons supplier.

Financially speaking, remittances from Russia play a crucial economic role for regional countries especially Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. Chinese influence has opened an alternative for the regional states. In the presence of these opportunities, the regional states like Kazakhstan shifted their exports towards China. Similarly, Turkmenistan also exported more gas to

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<sup>36</sup> Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules*, 94.

<sup>37</sup> P. Stronski and N. Ng, "Cooperation and Competition: Russia and China in Central Asia, the Russian Far East, and the Arctic", *Carnegie Endowment Brief*, (February 2018).

<sup>38</sup> Shannon Tiezzi, "At Russia's Military Parade, Putin and Xi Cement Ties", *The Diplomat* (May 2015), visit at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/05/at-russias-military-parade-putinand-xi-cement-ties/> (retrieved, 8 December, 2016).

<sup>39</sup> Alexander Gabuev, "Eurasian Silk Road Union: Towards a Russia-China Consensus?", *The Diplomat* (5 June 2015), available at <http://thediplomat.com/2015/06/eurasian-silk-road-union-towards-a-russia-china-consensus/> (retrieved on 15 January, 2017).

China than to Russia.<sup>40</sup> The overall Chinese trade volume with regional states is also higher than Russia.<sup>41</sup> So, it can be noticed that China is the largest trading partner of the region reaching to a trade volume of \$46 billion in 2014. In 2010, China's trade turnover with Central Asia stood at just over \$21 billion<sup>42</sup>, which is nearly two-fold of Russia's. China's global outreach is more welcoming in third world countries than Russia. Nevertheless, Russia remains a fundamental pillar of peace and stability in the Central Asian region.<sup>43</sup>

Central Asia is considered as a battlefield between major powers just because of its natural resources. Having all the main road links with Russia previously, the region had no alternative. However, by providing the sea routes to the landlocked countries of Central Asia China has become indispensable for the non-coastal republics. Fortunately, the Chinese seaports are also helpful in the Central Asian region for reducing Russian dependence. The two strategic partners are cautiously monitoring any attempt of monopolistic control over the region's resources.<sup>44</sup>

#### **Analysis of Sino-Russian cooperation and competition**

The Sino-Russian saw ups and downs during the Cold War. Regarding the Central Asian region, both countries have shown cooperation for their mutual interests. But the real motivation for these friendly ties is to restrict Western interests in this area. The Sino-Russian cooperation is not limited to oppose the American influence and there are many other reasons for cooperation such as; maintaining political stability, regional security, maintaining the status quo, and establishing regional organizations. Russia and China are dependent on each other, but Russia is more dependent

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<sup>40</sup> Testimony of Dennis C. Shea (Chairman, U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission), "China's Energy Engagement with Central Asia and Implications for the United States" for the House Foreign Affairs Subcommittee on Europe, Eurasia, and Emerging Threats Hearing on "The Development of Energy Resources in Central Asia" (May 21, 2014):2.

<sup>41</sup> Younkyoo Kim and Stephen Blank, "Same Bed, Different Dreams: China's' peaceful rise' and Sino-Russian rivalry in Central Asia", *Journal of Contemporary China*22, No. 83 (2013):18.

<sup>42</sup> Visit <https://eurasianet.org/who-wins-in-chinas-great-central-asia-spending-spreed>.

<sup>43</sup> Virginia Marantidou and Ralph A. Cossa, "China-Russia's Great Game Central Asia", *The National Interest* (9October 2014), available at <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/china-russias-great-game-central-asia-11385?page=show> retrieved on 12 November, 2016.

<sup>44</sup> Stephan Blank, "China and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization at Five", *China Brief* 13, (21 June 2006):2.

than China. The geopolitical tensions increased when American and European powers imposed a number of sanctions against Russia. The relations are also crucial to counter extremism and terrorism.

While concluding it is identified that energy is the key factor of competition between China and Russia in the Central Asian region. Both powers want to increase their influence in the political, economic, and security domains. Controlling energy resources and gas pipelines are the other areas of competition. It has observed that the Central Asian states were mostly dependent on Russia for oil refineries and explorations, and energy transportation. Meanwhile, China is increasing its economic influence, and for this purpose, it has heavily invested in oil refineries in the Central Asian region. China's financing energy pipelines coming from Central Asian states. Chinese-led BRI are also helpful in maximizing its control on the regional economy, and which will, in the coming years, decrease the Russian monopoly on the energy. Both countries have different views about regional economic integration; China wants it through the SCO, while, Russia wants it through the EAEU. Their bilateral competition, limited to the energy sector, does not affect their mutual relations. Respecting the strategic interests, the two powers' friendly relations support each other's stance on international fora to maintain stability in the region. And, therefore, they explicitly avoid to produce any regional security danger to each other.

On the other side, Russia and China have also some issues in their bilateral relationships. Russia does not want the Chinese economic expansion in the region to such an extent that it would have led to the loss of its control over the regional resources. Both countries understand the importance of each other's presence in the region and respect the interests of each other. The presence of both countries is beneficial for the regional development and progress. As a result of which the ties among the regional states within CSTO and the EAEU are equally stronger as in the SCO.

Some analyst believes that Russian hegemony will face challenges from the U.S. and Chinese aspirations to control regional energy resources and main regional trading partner. Consequently, Russia has lost its previous position in Central Asia which it had been enjoying for the past nearly two hundred years as a main economic and political player. Also, it has an edge over other powers because of its historical and cultural linkages with Central Asia.