GLOBAL POLITICS, REGIONAL COMPETITION: GREAT POWER POLITICS IN CENTRAL ASIA

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Abstract: This paper deals with the issue of competing great power interests in Central Asia, known for specialists in international relations as the New Great Game. The focus is in first hand on interests of the “Big Four” global powers and secondly, on the interests of a series of regional powers which can bring decisive contributions to the New Great Game. The analysis has two directions: one concentrated on strategic analysis, and the second focused on economic interests.

Keywords: New Great Game, Central Asia, economic diplomacy, geopolitics, Shanghai Cooperation Organization.

The states of Central Asia represent a tighter concept in comparison to geographic definition of Central or Inner Asia. Basically it represents the five former Soviet republics of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. These share lots of similar characteristics, but differences also. Two of them – Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan – own important deposits of oil and natural gas in their subsoil, they became objects for competition among current great powers of the world, and of their corporations. Our paper will sketch a few of the motivation and strategies of current world powers: the United States of America, the Russian federation, the rising superpower China and the European Union, which has great possibilities when its integration process will be complete.

According to Joel Kotkin, who sketched in one of his articles in the Newsweek in 2010, 19 “tribal alliances” divide the republics of Central Asia in two categories. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, together with Turkey, are “The New Ottomans”, offering a special importance to their relations with the European Union, but currently they turn their attention rather toward the Muslim world, also developing constantly their relations with Russia and China. In the second category, “The Wild East”, are included Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, together with Afghanistan, Pakistan and Azerbaijan. Their common characteristics are that they remain the epicentre of contention for competing powers including China, India, Turkey, Russia and North America (this later means, in this

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case, the USA and in a smaller extent, its Canadian ally). Not all the competitors has the same positions however. The main power whose presence is the best felt in Central Asia was, is and will be the Russian Federation, through its economic, military and cultural influence, and also through the great number of Russian minority in these countries. Since the time of the Soviet Union, Russian influence naturally weakened, and will never be as it was before: a similar regain of position like happened with Belarus would be impossible in this region, due to cultural differences and the opposition of local Central Asian elites toward such attempts. However, controlling the region through tools of soft power is possible, and Russia still is the main exporter of raw materials – among them gas and oil- from the republics, its trade corridors with important partners like India and Iran are crossing Central Asia. The three eastern states also rely seriously on Russian military protection for their own security, especially against the hegemonic claims of Uzbekistan, but also in their relationship with China. The “joint defence of borders and air space” is translated in practice in Russian border patrols at the borders of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan on their borders with China, for the strong eastern neighbour to not have some irredentist ideas, and China until this moment clearly understands the message, and is focusing its politics for expansion toward other directions. Beijing made serious efforts for settling its remaining border disputes with the Central Asian republics, and on its turn, signed military agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. This situation is also illustrating that at least on the plan of military strategy, the Pax Russica in the region remained virtually unchallenged.

Russian influence used to be seriously challenged in the last decades, especially on economic plan. It is no wonder that the Gazprom is trying to lock recently Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan into new production agreements, which could assure a monopoly-status for Russian investments in regional energetic field. The contesters are also representing powers like the United States of America, China and the European Union.

Russia’s key strategic goal is to preserve its economic and political domination in the Post-Soviet space and to develop its reintegration in a functional cooperation, having the Russian Federation as its main force. One of its tools is the Eurasian Economic Union, functional since 2015 January 1, which has among its members, besides Russia, Belorussia and Armenia two Central Asian countries, Kirghizistan and Kazakhstan. In both of the Central Asian republics, popular support for Eurasian integration is high: according to the data of the Eurasian Bank for Development from 2016, 74 % of the Kazakhs and 81% of the Kirghiz is supporting the further enlargement and the deepening of the integration. These scores, however, represents a descending tendency compared to the year 2015, with 6, respective 5 percent. In the most potential member-state of the future, Tajikistan, 68 % of the population is supporting the integration, which represents a fair background for the

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1 Kotkin, 2010; Csizmadia, 2016, 75-77.
4 Kaplan, 2012, 212.
leaders of the country to make this step. Following the death of the powerful Islam Karimov are high possibilities that his successor, Shavkat Mirziyoyev will change Uzbekistan’s strictly neutral, balancing policies among the great powers, and to develop a closer cooperation with Russia, which can even lead to Uzbekistan taking the road of the Eurasian integration. Fastening the economic integration processes under a Russian leadership is even more important for the Kremlin since China is increasing gradually its influence in Central Asia, through the Silk Road Economic Belt and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and through both projects, the Chinese politics is developing further its practical, already viable economic relations.

For a period, especially during the nineties, it could seem that the new economic hegemonic will be the global one in the region: the United States of America. After declaring their independence, the USA was among the first states that quickly opened embassies in all of the five republics, followed soon by its west European allies, and the Newmont Mining Corporation quickly claimed the concession to exploit the Maranthau gold mine from Uzbek authorities. But after this, relations became somehow distant. Following to 11 September 2001, the possibility of a deepened cooperation came, ruling regimes sharing the same enemy with the US, Tajik, Uzbek and Kyrgyz leaders offering their help almost immediately. However, nowadays relations became distant once again, US military being driven out from most of central-Asian bases, cooperation experiencing both moral and practical controversies. For central-Asian ruling elites, ideals like “democracy” and “civil society” are not only strange, but bear dangers similar to Islam terrorism, and therefore, are not welcomed, even if their country is the one who is losing due to this. For example, cotton represented 90% of the Uzbek exports to the USA, until the Wal-Mart decided to boycott Uzbekistan, due to moral concerns regarding the respect of human rights by the Karimov regime. However the USA is still an important aid-provider in security issues to these countries especially for Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The contribution of the republics in America’s war on terror can be summarized in the following way: after a short period of cooperation, ties started to deteriorate starting with 2003, due to abuses on human rights by the Central Asian ruling elites, but also due to the opposition for American bases of regional players like Russia, China and Iran.

Through the withdrawal of its troops from Afghanistan, the USA lost in a great measure its prestige and positions in the region, and is not excluded, that in case of a possible complete failure in Afghanistan – similar to the one in Vietnam – the US will back up from Central Asia also, leaving it as playground for other powers and following its interests in other regions of the world. This possibility increased with the victory of Donald Trump in the American presidential elections. The specialists of the Russia’s Institute for

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6 Интеграционный барометр, 2016, 8-9.
7 Гущин, 2016.
8 Hyman, 1993, 300-301.
11 Csizmadia, 2016, 167.
Strategic Studies are expecting for the decrease of support for pro-American NGO’s and on a middle term, the weakening of American influence and presence in the region from Trump’s presidency. Some specialists are even writing about “the end of the New Great Game” and the retreat of the USA from Central Asia. But knowing American national strategy concerning energy security and especially the nature of US based corporations, this is pretty unlikely, since Central Asia has got great opportunities in its energy supplies. Other experts however are militating for deepening a more “nuanced” approach by the US policy-makers in the region, since from the point of view of economic security, cooperation with these republics can be crucial, even through the price of harmonizing interests with Russia.

On the field of energetic supplies, US diplomacy is strongly supporting US-based companies, like Amoco, Texaco and Chevron, not only for economic, but also from strategic issues. The USA as the first oil consuming country of the world wants its share from fossil fuel supplies of Central Asia, but the way how it gets it is just as equally important. In an indirect way, the USA is also interested to decrease energy dependency of Europe from Russia. Currently, the idea for Central-Asian gas addressed to American interests to be transported in pipelines which goes through Russia or Iran are risky and unacceptable; therefore, pipeline projects through the Caspian sea, Turkey, the Balkans and East-central Europe are encouraged. From these, the Nabucco-project used to be the most popular, the most serious and the closest one to be put in practice. But due to different regional security risks- like Turkish reprisals against Kurdish rebels, the unstable Syria and other similar issues – currently the Nabucco is postponed, and its immediate future seems to be gloomy. The sole “consolation” for supporters of the Nabucco currently is that the projects serving Russian economic interests are not doing any better, and in lack of a coherent strategy for the Black Sea region, acceptable for all parts involved, such a pipeline will be hardly built in the nearby future.

Even if in the energy sector the USA and Russia are competitors – or even better said, companies with American and Russian capital, strongly supported because of strategic reasons by official state diplomacy – in security issues they are rather parallel, having similar interests regarding stability of the region and preserving the status quo, which has immeasurably less risks than an eventual disturb of current state. Beside, both of them have other concerns in the region than each other. For the USA, the main goal is that radical Islam to not get any background in here, and Russia has its own uneasy and very complex relationship with communist China. Currently, the events from Syria and Ukraine brought back into discussion of a new “Cold War”, on a more reduced scale, but even so, the geostrategic interests of the USA and the Russian Federation are not clashing in Central Asia.

12 Александров, Макаревский, 2016.
13 Куриакин, 2016а.
14 Mahnovski et alii, 2006, 73-75.
15 Kirchner, 2010, 874.
16 More about the Nabucco: Finon, 2011, 47-69; Socor, 2011; Stoica, 2015 etc.
If there is a chance for an external power to direction, it will not be the USA, but the integrated or not – European Union. The EU represents currently the largest economic system of the world, and even if militarily and on the plan of foreign politics integration is advancing very slow, it is already a major normative power, whose values are found to be attractive by elites of developing countries, while the USA, which shares the same values, but in promoting them is using a different approach, instead of being perceived as “gentle giant” or “Policeman of the World” is getting the image of the aggressive bogeyman. On major strategic and international questions today, Americans are from Mars and Europeans are from Venus. They agree on little and understand one another less and less,” wrote Robert Kagan in 2002 in one of his short articles, seeing the “wind of change”, which by years became more and more visible. Tony Judt affirms that antagonism concerning transatlantic community of values started to open long before George W. Bush came into power, but the harsh tone of the Bush administration made clear for many Europeans that differences in political attitude are very deep and serious. Several analysts and observers are blaming for this the Bush-government, of which even if requested full moral support of its allies for its own War on Terror, its decision-makers did not seek policy dialogue on a strategic level, often ignoring its “unasked” suggestions. It is true, that especially in the case of Iraq, the USA ignored international treaties, organizations and understandings, which were formally respected till than, and when this was brought in discussion by major European decision-makers, the answer was cheap arrogance. However, recently it seems that the conflict in Ukraine with Russia and the need to solve issues of the Middle East harmonized in a great extent American and EU foreign politics.

For leaders and their supporting elites of Central Asia, the EU is a benign giant, which represents no danger, not for their independence, territorial integrity or society, but actually, it can only help by aid and know-how, which can only be beneficial.

In 2007, the Strategy for Central Asia of the European Union was drafted for the first time. Currently, the main instrument of EU policy in Central Asia is represented by the Technical Assistance for the Commonwealth of Independent States (TACIS), which is designed to help former Soviet states in their transition toward functioning democratic market-economies. Currently – as Francis Fukuyama states – the Central Asian republics are neither fully authoritarian, nor meaningfully democratic. But except this, there is no coherent EU foreign policy in this part of the world, neither for the region as a unit, nor for

23 For an image in details of the politics of the European Union, represented by its executive body, the European Commission, see the collection of programs and articles on the Commission’s site: https://eeas.europa.eu/diplomatic-network/european-countries-and-central-asia_en.
its countries one by one. However, the political influence of the EU, due to its internal crisis—illustrated by the issue of immigration and the Brexit\textsuperscript{25}—seem to be weakened, at least on a short term. For the partisans of European integration, the concept of the Eurasian Union could represent a serious alternative challenge for the future, especially in case the EU fails to manage its system of values according to the needs of its own citizens and of those countries which perceived the EU as a model in politics and social welfare. In this context of competition made through the means of soft power\textsuperscript{25}, the prime challenger for the Russian Federation is not the “aggressive”, “imperialistic”, militarized USA, but an integrated and strongly idealistic European Union, able to promote its interests. The competition is easy to be observed currently in Ukraine, and can become more visible in the future in other former Soviet states too, even if the Russian Federation still holds the pole position. For illustrating how this European idealism alloyed with pragmatic interests could compete with the pragmatic and neutral approach of Russia and China concerning political values, we will cite a fragment here from the analyst of the Stockholm International Peace research Institute, N. J. Melvin:

\textit{“The EU’s approach should be based upon looking for real opportunities for change and to make use of these. In concrete terms, the EU should support bilateral and trilateral initiatives and regional cooperation designed to build closer ties with Europe and to open the region more generally through transport, energy, trade and investment, and communication/media links, but also in terms of strengthening human capital and promoting exposure to new ideas and access to information. At the same time, the EU should aim to build a framework of political and security cooperation within the region that rewards and strengthens those that demonstrate a genuine commitment to reform. A framework of positive cooperation should demonstrate the benefits of reform and, thereby, place pressure on those who seek to oppose change and to challenge those who argue that sustaining authoritarian orders is the only way to ensure stability in the region.”}\textsuperscript{26}

Just in case of the other powers, for the EU Central Asia is the most interesting due to its energy resources. The first attempts to vindicate the joint European interests concerning fossil fuels of Central Asia were represented by the Interstate Oil and Gas Pipeline Management (INOGENATE) program from 1995, the 2000 Commission Green paper on Energy and the 2004 Baku Initiative.\textsuperscript{27} Currently, with all the efforts for implementing renewable and “green” energy strategies, energy consumption in the Union still has fossil fuels on its base. Regarding to some statistics, during the mid 2000s oil represented 37% of consumption in the countries of the Union, followed by natural gas (24%), solid fuels (18%), nuclear power (15 %) and renewable sources represented only 65\textsuperscript{28}, and this high percentage is mainly based on imports. Regarding percentage of provenience of

\textsuperscript{25} For details, see: Lakatos 2016, 61-70.
\textsuperscript{26} Melvin, 2007, 2.
\textsuperscript{27} Fenton, 2016, 169.
the EU’s oil imports, on first place is Russia, whose companies are ensuring around 1/3 of the fossil fuel supplies, followed by Norway and several other oil producing countries from the Middle East. On plan of natural gas, dependency is even higher than in case of oil: imports from Russia in 2008 represented 55% of global import. Since Russian oil and gas is cheap on global market, it is close and Russia is willing to sell to Europe, this trade functioned well until now. On the other hand, responsible European politicians perceive to be a strategic interest to diversify its energy imports and through this, to become less dependent on Russia. A part of this strategy is the direct dealing with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan; on third place on the EU’s economic interests is Uzbekistan, which has no significant energy resources, but a series of other minerals. However, the lack of a common foreign policy represents a major disadvantage for the Union, but Russian-American competition, and the competition among rivaling pipeline projects represents great opportunities for lots of European specialized companies, especially from East-Central Europe. In this issue, economic nationalisms are already competing for exploiting the possibilities, but often, cooperation based on common interest gets the upper hand.

National and private companies of European states by themselves cannot rival with success in this part of the world giants like the Russian Gazprom or Lukoil, American Amoco, Texaco or Chevron, or Chinese CNCP. But current state brought that two transport-projects are currently in competition, the Nabucco, which is supported by Americans and the West-European allies, and South Stream, supported by Russia and its also West-European allies. Negotiating the route of the pipelines and the share of national and local companies responsible for this security of transport infrastructure on their portion, and staying out from the deal can bring a serious weakening of the respective company’s position on international markets reported to its rivals. The Bulgargaz (Bulgaria), Transgaz (Romania), MOL (Hungary), OMV (Austria) and other interested companies receives now unique chances, but also the possibility of great risks. How they are going to deal with them, will be shown by the future and their probable strategies are going to be the subject of a separate academic article.

Unlike the distant EU, the emerging continental China is not just close, but actually is part of Central Asia, geographically speaking, through its western province Xinjiang (Chinese Turkestan). 935 percent of this province’s population is represented by minorities, different than the Han population which forms China’s majority. Xinjiang is home especially for the Uyghur, but are living here also Tajik, Hui, Kirgiz, Uzbek and Kazakh population also. During the long Civil War, Xinjiang served as background for nationalist troops, and was pacified late after Cheng Kai-Shek retreated to Taiwan. But nowadays, China is facing direct opportunities and challenges in the region. “China’s emergence in Central Asia is the most interesting thing to happen in the region since the Soviet collapse and the emergence of

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Independent states in 1991“ states an analyst of the Council of Foreign Relations (CFR). Also, through developing its relations with the Central Asian republics, focusing primarily on economic cooperation based on interdependencies, Beijing is receiving an important tool the stabilizing and economically emancipating Western China – perceived to be very backward compared to the Eastern shores of the country – and diversifying its energy resources. In the same time, the mutual benefits can improve living standards for the citizens of the republics, through which the spreading of radical Islam will meet a serious obstacle.

In the vision of the Australian expert Emilian Kavalski, currently Chinese foreign policy interests are manifesting themselves through four dominant areas of interests: 1, by diversifying and ensuring China’s access to energy resources, 2, cutting of any international links between Muslim Uyghur separatists in the province of Xinjiang and their ethnic and religious kin across central Asia, 3, encouraging economic and trade relations between China’s western provinces and Central Asian states and 4, indicating China’s preparedness to become a global actor. As we can see from Kawalski’s points, two of them, first and the third has mostly economic directions, the second has to deal with the country’s internal security in a realist approach, and the fourth is related to reflection of general image. But from all of them, currently the first point seems to be the most important.

China currently is the most rapidly developing great country of the world, and regarding to some predictions, in the forthcoming decades will dethrone the United States from the position of the world’s leading economic power. The fast growth also implies high costs: since 1993, China became a net oil-importer and is currently the second largest consumer after the USA. In this sense, it is a strategic must for Chinese supplies to be guaranteed and diversifies. Continental China is currently investing large amounts in Africa, developing relations with countries of the Middle East, and is also constantly increasing the value of its commends toward Russia and Kazakhstan.

When the five republics became independent, and were struggling to forge new ties and build up a conjuncture which allows them greater independence from the Russian federation, China was close, and the province of Xinjiang province redeveloped quickly interdependent trade relations with neighbouring Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan. From the point of view of its energy security, Kazakhstan and an opening Turkmenistan are crucial for China, since even if they cannot supply the whole structure of Chinese state economy, they are certainly an alternative to provision from Russia, from which China, just as the EU, don’t want to become dependant, and is doing serious efforts in this sense. Currently, with all of its favourable factors – geographic state, mutual economic advantage – Russia is only the fifth supplier of China with oil, following to Saudi Arabia, Angola, Iran and Oman, and if it is after Chinese leaders, role of Russian supplies will decrease even

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34 Feigenbaum, 2010.
35 Csizmadia, 2016, 167.
more. China will also try to act as a global power in the region, which brings it into direct competition with Russia and the United States.\textsuperscript{40}

In this latter sense, in the vision of professor Zhao Huasheng, expressed in 2009, China has five alternatives: 1, seeking strategic advantage (going in alone), 2, a combined Sino-Russian front, 3, an American dominated security structure, 4, a Russian dominated security structure, 5 a synthesis of balance between these powers.\textsuperscript{41} In our opinion, the first point is a win-lose situation, which is very risky, even if China has its own advantage its geographical position and regional cooperation organizations, like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization; the fifth option is the ideal win-win situation, but it is hardly to be created and maintained, beside, none of the realist policy-makers of the three powers involved will adopt this approach, fearing lack of honesty of the others; complete Russian or American domination are unacceptable for Chinese policy makers, so probably the common Sino-Russian front has the greatest probability, even if it has its vulnerabilities also. On level of global policy, in the last two decades, a Russian-Chinese deepening consensus can be observed related to several major conflicts, in which they lately successfully challenges US positions, especially in the General Assembly and the Security Council of the UN. But this cooperation is not compulsory to be transposed on a regional level, where the common interests are represented only by adversity toward American and Islam influence, in other sense the two powers being competitors. Currently it seems that the Russian political-military influence, completed by the Chinese economic expansion avoiding the direct confrontation with Russian interests is the most realistic and acceptable scenario for Chinese great power politics. It is not sure however that this strategic partnership will last forever, a shift in this sense requiring a very strong China and a Russia in decline. “Chinese IR elites might then claim that Russia had enough time to adjust to China’s rise and to learn to understand its “peaceful rise”- strategy and that enough compromises have been made” says in his book Thomas Stephan Eder.\textsuperscript{42}

The Central Asian region is present in the global political games especially due to the interests of the “Big Four” mentioned above, especially due to the competition of the American, Russian and Chinese interests. In the same time, however, other countries, on their turn middle powers, are trying to obtain benefits in this region, sometimes in strategic alliance, other times as strategic competitors for the big players. For example, in the last years a certain constantly growing interest of Japan and South Korea could have been observed, which is manifested through humanitarian aids and investments in the local economies.\textsuperscript{43} In October 2015 Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo proceeded to make a historical tour in the capitals of the five republics: in Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan for the second time, after 2006, and in the rest of the three was for the first time a Japanese PM in official visit. The result of his tour was concretized in 87 contracts signed with state-owned and private

\textsuperscript{40} Feigenbaum, 2010
\textsuperscript{41} Zhao H., 2009, 476. Apud Lakatos, 2014, 150.
\textsuperscript{42} Eder, 2013, 132.
\textsuperscript{43} КУРИЛКИН, 2016b.
companies, in a complete value of 28 billion USD investments. In the same time there are great differences from country to country concerning Japanese interests, the greatest attention being paid by Tokyo to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The governmentally sponsored Japan External trade Organization (JETRO) opened even an office in Tashkent. From the value of the contracts signed during the tour of Abe Shinzo from 2015, Turkmenistan is sharing 18 billion, Uzbekistan 8,5 billions of USD, especially in the field of energetic industry, oil and gas exploitations, while the value of contracts signed with Kazakhstan, Tajikistan and Kirgizistan are not reaching at one place the sum of 2 billion USD. In the last two countries, the most present Japanese organization is the Japan International Cooperation Agency, (JICA), which is according scholarships, and humanitarian aid through the development of sanitary and water management systems, through these also contributing to the development of bilateral diplomatic relationships.

The main reason for the Japanese interest is the request of Japanese economy for raw materials, and the immediately second one is that Tokyo does not want to lose its ground in its competition with China, which latter is the beneficiary of the ambitious projects of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

The activities of South Korea has the same motivation. The prime partner for Seoul is Tashkent, and Uzbekistan is one of the main beneficiaries, even on a global scale of the programs of the Korea International Cooperation (KOICA) and the key Korean player in the field of automobile industry the Daewoo (since 2015, Ravon) is present in the country since 1992. The summits between the two countries are regular, when the –by now defunct – president Islam Karimov was reelected in 2015, his first official visit lead to Korea. Of course, the investments prestige and influence of Japan and Korea cannot be compared with the Russian, Chinese or even American one, but on a long term, due to the predictable tendencies, they will certainly grow into important players on a long term.

The situation of India is somehow similar, because India turned its attention over Central Asia. The Connect Central Asia program of the Indian government was launched in 2012, having as an openly declared goal to prepare the country for becoming a full right member in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. India and Central Asia are sharing two major issues: the fight against Islamist terrorism, in which they are both highly affected, and the energy politics. India is one of the largest consumers of energy on the Earth, while the soil of Central Asia is extremely rich in fossil fuels. As a consequence, the competition between India and China for oil and gas is taking place in Central Asia too. While roughly a quarter of the Kazakh oil exploitation is controlled by Chinese investors, starting with 2009 the Indian Oil and Natural Gas Corporation Videsh Ltd. (ONGC or OVL) and the Kazakh

44 Diplomatic Bluebook, 2016, 125.
45 Мордвинова, 2015.
46 Курилкин, 2016b.
47 For details, see: Dabaev, 2016.
48 KOICA...
49 Узбекистан – Республика Корея...
50 Seethi, 2013.
Kazmunaigas signed a series of contracts, and as a consequence the OVL is participating as a strategic partner in the exploitation of the Satpayev field, with a 25% share.\textsuperscript{51} In 2012, the OVL effectuated the largest transaction of its history, by buying the 8.4% share of the ConocoPhillips of the Kashagan oil field.\textsuperscript{52}

The region is playing a crucial role from the perspective of trilateral relations among Russia, India, and China (RIC). Currently these three powers are bound together by their quest against American global political and economic hegemony, but it is not excluded that the decline of American power or the growth of China will cause a turn in this triple alliance. While they are coordinating their goals, all the three are paying attention to protecting their own interests and maintaining their own individual projects. The Central Asian ground, because its integration is included both in the goals of the Russian lead Eurasian Economic Union and of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, where China is the main actor, is the subject of both cooperation and competition for these two global powers, and as we mentioned, both of the Chinese and Indian large economies have a crucial need for the fossil fuels. Concerning the future of the RIC, we can propose three possible different scenarios: an optimistic, a pessimistic and a moderate optimistic one. In the vision of optimistic analysts, the partnership of the three countries will be developed into a real and functioning political alliance, while the pessimists believe that unsolvable conflict of interests will lead to such a level of rivalry that further development of cooperation among the RIC states will become impossible. We consider that the highest probability exists in the case of the third scenario, which is planning on a middle term, and is predicting a dual character of the complicated great power relations: Russia, India and China will coordinate their politics on a global level, while on a regional level, they will remain rivals, with the respect for certain boundaries.\textsuperscript{53}

We must say a few words about the presence of interests of several Muslim states in the region. During the last years, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Islamic Development Bank, which both are under the influence of the rich states from the Gulf, increased the volume of its investments in Central Asia.\textsuperscript{54} Two regional rivals, Turkey and Iran are both making gestures toward the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, finding that the approach to China can be fruitful for developing their economies, and are also trying to protect their already existing interests in the Central Asian region. Turkey can count on its cultural relations with the people of the region, the majority of four republics from the five being Turkic nations, while for Iran economic and political considerations are the most important ones. For example, during the last years, a strong cooperation was developed between Iran and Kazakhstan. Kazakhstan played the role of the diplomatic intermediary in the negotiations concerning the delicate issue of the Iranian nuclear program. This is not a simple coincidence since Kazakhstan is not only a Muslim country and a member of the SOC but also the greatest uranium exporter of the world. Kazakhstan has as interest to find new markets for its merchandise, because following to the atomic catastrophe the price of the

\textsuperscript{51} Hussain, 2012, 256.
\textsuperscript{52} Indian OVL...
\textsuperscript{53} Мареева, 2012, 246.
\textsuperscript{54} Курилкин, 2016b.
uranium on the global market was falling drastically to the third of its previous value, but for 2020 is predicted the price to rise back.  

Central-Asia, in the mirror of events in other post-Soviet and Muslim countries, is currently not on the map of events of primal importance of world politics. However, it still remains a scene for great power competition, and will remain so at least for a few years more, if not for decades. The New Great Game takes place in the present, and the final results remain to be seen. Our paper just highlighted a series of its aspects, those which are determining the global implications of this constant competition.  

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55 Рулева, 2016.
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