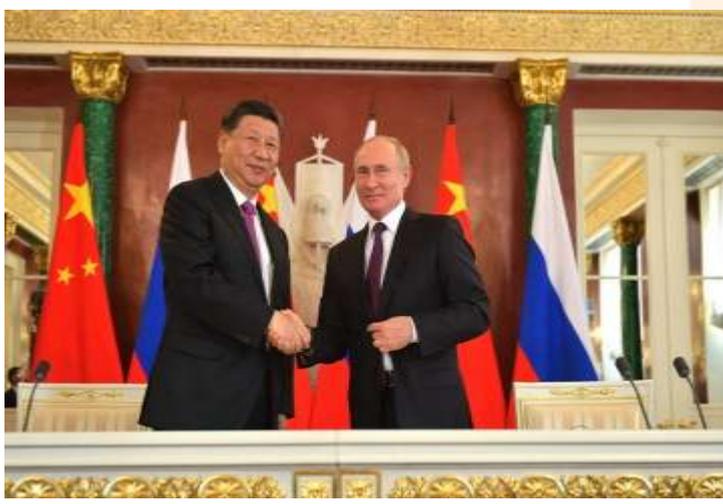
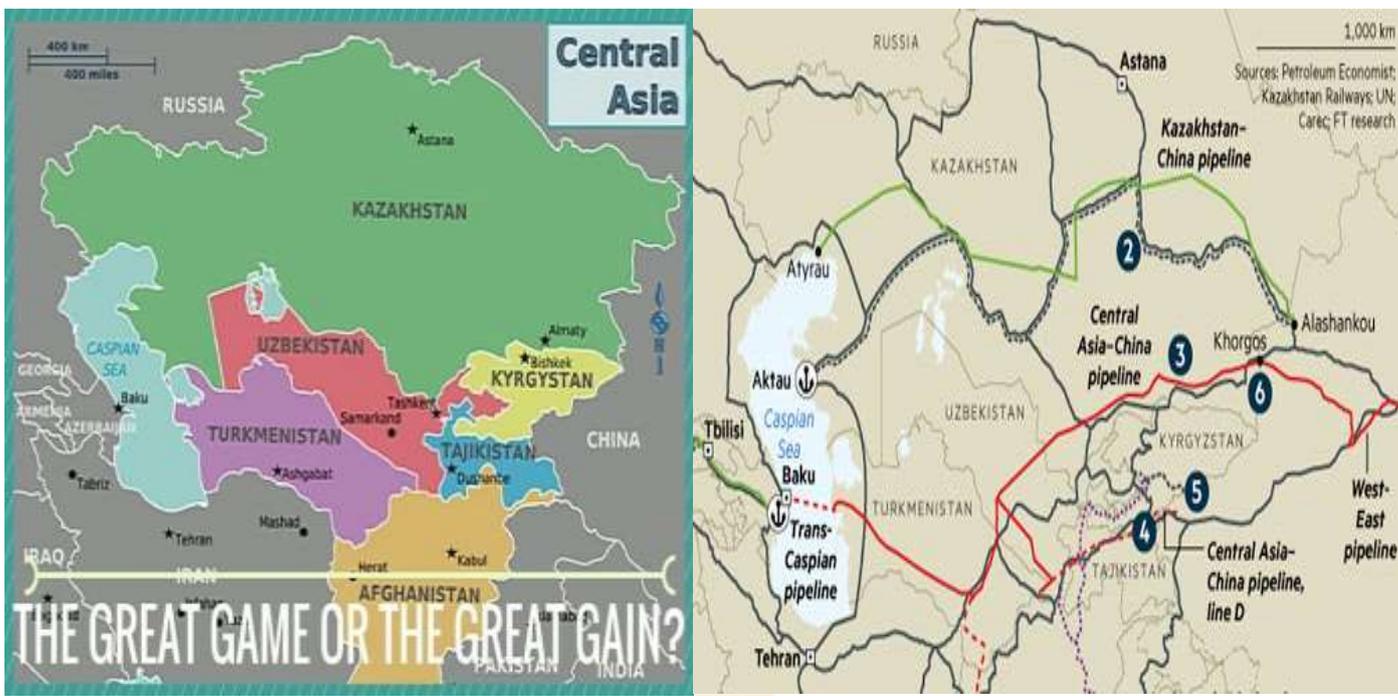




“GREAT GAME IN CENTRAL ASIA & ROLE OF CHINA”.



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1. ABSTRACT:-

This assignment shows concern on **'Great game in Central Asia and China's role in it.'** A new "Great Game" is being played out in Central Asia, one in which powers on the periphery compete for influence, but also one in which the Central Asian states themselves are active players. Their own struggle for power can influence immediate neighbors Russia, China, and Iran, and even beyond into the Indian subcontinent along with furthest neighboring influencer USA. Serious political, economic, ethnic, religious, and social challenges confront the five Central Asian states. How each state is able to resolve these problems will determine its ability to emerge as a viable force in the regional struggle for influence. Instability might seem to provide opportunities for states such as Iran or China, but the risks that such instability would ricochet back on them are too great. Thus, Iran, USA, India, Russia, and China each seek, in their own way, to promote stability within Central Asia while expanding their own regional influence. Over the last decade China has actively pursued its interests in Central Asia. With the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the present countries of Central Asia established independent rule. With Soviet control removed, social and international problems that were hidden and suppressed began to show themselves throughout the region. Seeing the power vacuum, the negative effects of smuggling, separatism and terrorism associated with Islamic fundamentalism, and the effect these issues could have on China, Beijing decided to take steps to help address these concerns in Central Asia.

2. KEYWORDS:-

'Great Game', 'Central Asia', 'Influence', 'China', 'Role' etc.

3. INTRODUCTION:-

The hinterland of Central Asia¹ had been the center stage of nineteenth century imperial rivalry or **'great game' between Britain and Russia**². The centrality of Central Asia did not diminish even in the **'New Great Game'**, though changed its dimension. The disintegration of Soviet Union changed the geopolitical realities in the region as well as in the world politics as the five Central Asian states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan emerged. The three factors accrued significance to the Central Asian states in the International Politics. First factor is the geographical location of the region. Its geographical location makes it the landlocked region with no access to the Oceans. Hence it needs well developed land routes to access other countries. The second factor is the closeness of the region to the important world powers such as Russia and China. Thirdly these States are rich in energy resources such as natural gas and oil. These three factors play an important role in initiating the new phase of the Great Game in Central Asia. The collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 created an unexpected power vacuum in Central Asia followed by a fierce competition between the big three, Russia, China and US. This competition is commonly known as "The New Great Game" in the present day international politics. The rich energy resources are usually considered the main reason of the renewed interests in the region and provide principal motivation for Russia, China and US. However, the role of energy resources is usually overstated. This paper will identify which other factors along with energy resources should be considered in order to have a broader and comprehensive understanding of the present Geo-political scenario in the Central Asia. Using the Neo-Realist approach, this paper will analyses the competing interests of Russia, China and US and the strategies adopted by each for the achievements of its objectives. It will be concluded by stating that

how China struggles to attain, keep and enhance power and that energy resources are just a mean to this supreme objective. It will also conclude by asserting that although the great powers behave aggressively and self-interestedly they may find minimum degree of cooperation to tackle common concerns such as **growing radical Islamism**³¹.

Central Asia increasingly seems to be either the stage for a revised version of the Great Game, where the main actors today are China and the USA rather than the nineteenth century actors Russia and Great Britain, even if Russia still holds a failing grip over the region, or the object of an attempt by China to re-create a classical vassal relationship between China and the Central Asian states. The importance of Central Asia in China is larger than it has been since the region west of today's China was an integrated part of the Chinese tributary system. Chinese expansion in the region is only slowed by the current Russian, however decreasing, influence and competing US attempts to exert influence over the region. Beijing has developed a prioritized policy orientation towards Central Asia, in contrast to the American policy, which seems to have a much more reluctant ad hoc presence based on the war against terrorism. From a Chinese perspective the most important reason for Chinese presence in the region appears to be an effort to dominate Central Asia in order to secure China's growing need for oil and natural gas. Moreover, there seem to be important security reasons for China's attempt to create a traditional 'vassal' relationship between China and the Central Asian states through investments, trade and military cooperation. It is clear that both the security on China's Western border and her internal security in Xinjiang depend upon peaceful development in her Central Asian neighboring states and China's relations with them.

4. DESCRIPTIVE ANALYSIS:-

Starting with the conflict of interests in between British Empire and former USSR Great game in 19th century in Central Asian republics has turned out to be in broader perspective at present context due to its geo-strategic importance and role playing influence of great powers. So to evaluate and analyze this great game we need to get into great power rivalry in this region in very brief along with China's role.

GEO-STRATEGIC IMPORTANCES & INFLUENCE OF GREAT POWER IN CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS:

This broader sense of Great game started in 1991 between USA and Russia centering two oil and gas company projects '**Unocal**' and '**Bridas**'. Conflict of interests were there between setting up ties with Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan and other CAR states regarding oil and gas and export pipeline and on the other hand issues of averting war **against 'Talibans'** and supporting official Kabul govt. in Afghanistan. Later on with the involvement of NATO and other formation of power allies with interest speculations, War on Terror, exporting oil and gas via trans-border pipelines made **CARs** a context of great power rivalry.

The geo-political importance of Central Asia is an open secret. This region has been described as the heart of the world. A modern geographer **Halford John Mackinder in 1904 wrote, "The one who rules Easter Europe, command the heartland and the one who rules the heartland commands the world"**⁴. This

3. . Qamar Fatima; Sumera Zafar; '**New Great Game: Players, Interests, Strategies and Central Asia**'; Vol. 29, No.2, July - December 2014, pp. 623-652; A Research Journal of South Asian Studies.

theory was validated by the subsequent great games in the heartland, the long struggle for influence in the region between Russian and British Empire in the latter half of the 19th century. Both the empires exerted their utmost power to establish dominance in the Central Asian Republics and the Caucasus states. The title of heartland was coined during the second half of the 19th century to describe central Asian and Caucasus region which were under the control of Tsarist Russia. This landlocked region abundant in gas and hydrocarbons has the focus of Russian strategy. The control of Indian Ocean and Mediterranean has been the focal point of Soviet Union, but due to defeat in Crimean War which diminished its interests thereby changing the course of Soviet Union foreign policy. After that Tsarist Russia fixed his eyes on Central Asia with the hope to proceed further towards South, securing an outlet to the Indian Ocean. Russian's strategy of expansionism towards South was encountered with strong opposition from British, as sub-continent was ruled by Britain at that time and they regarded it as a golden sparrow and jewel in the crown of the British Empire. The big powers of the world politics Russia, China and US rushed to fill the vacuum left by Soviet Union after 1991.

Energy resources are far larger than the energy resources of the Middle Eastern region. The central Asian energy resources are enough to satisfy the energy needs of the of big energy consumers such as Russia, China and US and can be the best substitute for Middle Eastern energy resources, whose supply is vulnerable to fluctuation due to the risk of terrorism, Islamic extremism and presently social revolutions in the region. The untapped richest energy resources so far are located in the Caspian basin surrounded by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan, Iran and Russia. Role of Caspian basin and Central Asian Republics as commercial hub cannot be neglected. This region has been a cross road between East and West since ancient time. An ancient time it connected Beijing with the Mediterranean Sea and was the corridor followed by caravans of camels loaded with Eastern goods aimed for Western markets. This corridor was familiar with the name of "**Silk Road**"⁵. Central Asian Republics started diversifying their economic and political partners. In this way the implementation of liberal classical policies aimed at fostering greater economic cooperation between the Central Asian Republics and regional political integration has failed due to some practical hindrances such as the poor and politically unstable Kyrgyzstan joined World Trade Organization in 1998 while the other states of the region such as Tajikistan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan has so far have observer status in it. It is believed that political, economic, social and religious forces have made the world states increasingly interdependent. If the Central Asian Republics want to ensure its commercial, financial and military development then it should develop diversified and profitable trade relations, the establishment of new transportation routes for the export of large volumes of energy resources. In this way it has opened avenue for the US, China and the European world for participating in the interesting energy deals in a region that was formerly under the control of Russia exclusively. Russia, China and the US are pursuing their own interests and objectives in the region. The present day protagonists of international politics cannot be the mere spectators and the role of small states cannot be underestimated. They are now actively involved in determining who gets what, when, where and how in the geopolitics of the Central Asian Republics. This paper takes a close look at the great powers conflicting strategies and interest to get dominance in this important region of the world.

Moscow's interests in Central Asian region are diverse. The first is the fear of proliferation of the region's independence movements, filled with Islamic extremism, a perception shared by Beijing. Religious extremism along with weapons smuggling and drug trafficking is considered to be a real threat concerning to regions adjacent to AFGANISTAN. Its second interest in the region is hydrocarbon resources, considered strategic in character. Russia is determined to maintain central role in the extraction, refining and exportation of these energy resources to European market. Huge quantity of it has been exported by Moscow to central and Eastern Europe originated in the Central Asian Republics and Caspian basin. Russia after realizing to tickle with US hegemonic ambitions in the Central Asian region unilaterally was beyond its capacity particularly after the incident of 9/11 and the subsequent war against terrorism, and its penetration in the Central Asian region was in search of allies. Moscow is willing to turn its eyes towards those states which share its concern over US penetration into Central Asia. This perception of Russia has brought it closer

to China evident in the shape of Shanghai Cooperation Organization in 2001. China in order to satisfy the energy needs of its huge population has entered into bilateral agreements with Central Asian Republics, in opposition to Russia's ambitions in the region, as it may put an end to its monopoly over Central Asian energy resources and its price control mechanism. In July, 2009, for instance, **'China National Petroleum Corporation' and 'Kazmuneq gas', an oil company of the Republic of Kazakhstan completed 962 kilo meter long Atlasu-Alashankou oil transportation pipeline, leading from Atyaru in the republics of Kazakhstan to Alshankou in Beijing, providing Beijing an access to huge energy resources of Central Asian and Caspian region.** This project is considered to be a game changer in the region in the race for controlling Central Asian energy resources. In the same way CNPC signed another agreement related to oil and gas with Uzbekistan in June, 2006. The two ex-communist rivals would require foresight and farsighted vision and coordination if they want to achieve mutual cooperation for weakening United States in Central Asian geopolitics.

With the demise of soviet influence in CAR United States applied liberal political and economic reforms with the hope that it would transform the Central Asian states from socialist economy to market based economy. Thus freedom support act was, leading to allocation of \$150 million to boost regional economic development from the 1992 to 2005. Western liberal values were not regarded sufficient for the removal of it from the soviet orbit dismantling of military arsenal and closing of Moscow military bases in the Central Asian region was also essential in this regard. This strategy was outlined exhaustively in a national security strategy of enlargement and engagement with aim of export of development models for the promotion of democratic institutions, free trade and demilitarization of post-soviet space. The United States strategic interests in the Central Asian region projected in **the 1999 "Silk Road Strategy Act"**⁶, emphasizing the need of closer, integrated and profitable economic engagement among the Central Asian states and the Western world. Such interaction would promote financial and trade cooperation and would act as a counter proliferation of nuclear arsenals, terrorism, drug trafficking and corruption. Soon it became evident that Washington has unambiguous interests in the regions energy resources, for it has yet found any alternate to Middle Eastern hydrocarbon resources. It proceeded with concluding energy agreements with energy rich Central Asian states. Efforts have been made for the construction of energy transportation pipeline (oil & gas) as an alternative to historical Russian **pipeline "Druzba" such as BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) Nabucco and TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) pipeline**⁷. In this way US can put an end to Russian monopoly over energy transportation routes and its price mechanism. The 9/11 incident together with neo-conservative government changed the US political priorities and the world politics. The war against terrorism was envisaged by US political leadership as a necessary step to ensure its supremacy not only in the Asian continent but throughout the post-soviet bi-polar world. Bush doctrine enshrined in "national security strategy" clearly expressed the need to renew US foreign policy to tickle with the perceived threat of Al-Qaeda and to oust Taliban government in Afghanistan. The contrast of views with United States led the Central Asian Republics perceiving US hegemonic aspirations negatively and therefore prompted to strengthen and develop its relations with Moscow and Beijing. US declined to offer considerable aid to the Central Asian world. As a result of **Andijan incident in 2005** in the republic of Uzbekistan United States was ordered to vacate its military base in Uzbekistan. Being aware of the geopolitical changes in the Central Asian region, Russia and China became ready to put aside their differences and opted for conditional cooperation against the shared rival through SCO. In its session in Astana, China, Russia and the four Central Asian Republics with the exception of Turkmenistan, collectively decided that United States should announce the date for the withdrawal of its forces from the Central Asian territory creating new complicated developments in the 19th century, "New Great Game".

Apart from these super powers IRAN, PAKISTAN, TURKEY and other CAR states they are fully interdependent on each other regarding respecting cultural exchange security, East-West energy corridor expansion to transport resources of Caspian basin bypassing RUSSIA, averting WMD possibility with rumors of nuke reactor, stability, countering tribal militancy, terrorism, Islamic fundamental extremism, reserving and exporting oil and gas in foreign markets by forming economic blocs with other states in Central and South East Asia along with Middle East. Forming security and economic alliances like SCO, CSTO (collective

sec.treaty org.), CIS, ISAF etc. CAR states are encouraging these roles in the region playing through global powers self-interest gaining rivalry. In Central Asia, the 'New Great Game' can be seen in both the competition for resources and influence in the region. China has had a head start on India, having been involved in Central Asia since the 1990s when its state-owned China National Petroleum Corporation acquired the 'Uzen' oilfield in Kazakhstan.²² Similarly, in 1996, China established a new Eurasian forum, known initially as the 'Shanghai Five', which involved China, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Russia and Tajikistan in social, economic and military-related discussions; it was enlarged in 2001 to include Uzbekistan, and renamed the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.²³ In July 2015, its members agreed to broaden the grouping to include India and Pakistan, a move no doubt intended by China and Russia to counter the influence of the US in Central Asia. Others, however, have asserted that Pakistan and India's well-established bilateral disputes will likely burden the forum, as well as further complicating China-India relations and their respective spheres of influence. In recognition of the growing relevance and importance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization in regional affairs—and no doubt aimed at countering China's influence in Central Asia—India announced in June 2012 a new policy of 'Connect Central Asia', with India's Minister of State for External Affairs stressing that 'most member countries are our neighbors, or belong to our extended neighborhood, with a strong historical and cultural legacy of centuries binding us together'. An underlying element of the policy also relates to India's interest in accessing the energy resources of Central Asia, which is complicated by India's lack of a border with the Central Asian states, and Pakistan's lack of cooperation in facilitating the transit of hydrocarbons and the movement of trade goods to India. It is one of the reasons that New Delhi has developed relations with Tehran to use Iranian territory to transit energy from Central Asia via the Iranian port of 'Chabahar'. Also CHINA-PAKISTAN strategic alliance in spreading influence towards warm water and in ASIA –PACIFIC by China has made it difficult for INDIA in having a multipolar ASIAN dream inspite of having 'Connect Central Asia' policy in the region.

CHINA'S ROLE PLAY IN GREAT GAME:

Not only by using 'Silk road strategy', OBOR or CPEC or CNPC for gas and oil reserve and export China's involvement in this Great game and implications are in a unique way. Among other reasons, the Beijing's plan of building high-speed rail infrastructure connecting Central Asia, Far East and Europe is reason behind the conflict between big powers over Central Asian and Caucasus region's energy resources and competing Trans-Siberian rail infrastructure. A basic reason behind it is the generation of new industrial centers in the Eurasian region urging to speed up trade in goods and lowering transportation expenses to facilitate the transportation of energy resources. China's strategy is well thought and simple. Its aim is to increase its participation and cooperation with the countries of all continents South East Asia, South America and Central and South Asia. To meet with this end it has employed the African model, which consists of providing low cost technology advanced railway infrastructure to the energy rich Central Asian region states. However, the strategy of china presents a perceived threat to Russian monopoly over Central Asian energy resources. Russia's Gazprom, has currently holds a monopoly in the Central Asian region and withstand crucial attacks on its position from United States and china in the shape of proposed pipeline projects, designed as an alternative to the present operational pipeline controlled by Moscow.

Beijing political strategy in Central Asia is guided by two important factors: i)To get lion share in the hydrocarbon resources of Central Asian region with the help of profitable long lasting economic ties with the region; ii)Physical Integrity of the Peoples Republic of China, security of its national borders and promotion of regional stability. Without having influence in CAR during cold war China filled the vacuum for profit of communism in the region with agreements with neighbouring countries in against Russian geo-strategic expansion of Caucasus states, INDIA, Mongolia etc. after demise of USSR influence. China concluded high

ranking political, commercial and military agreements with the neighboring Central Asian Republics. The trade volume between china and Central Asian states reached 465 million dollar in 1992 and 7.7 billion dollar in the year 2004. Trade between China and Central Asia states presently increased much. China exceeded Russia in trade volume with Central Asian states in 2009. Russia's trade with the region was 22 billion dollar in 2010 while china Central Asia was 29 billion dollar. In 2009, the largest total trading volume among the Central Asian republics is between Kazakhstan and China amounting to 13.8 billion dollar. The cordial economic relations that Beijing has developed with the neighboring regional states are further enhanced by economic interdependence between them. The African method has enabled the government of China to effectively play a geopolitical game for the achievement of long standing regional goals. Getting access to Central Asian hydrocarbon and gas resources has the first priority in Central Asia. Beijing has invested significantly in the infrastructure for production, drilling and refining Central Asian and Caucasus hydrocarbon resources. This has been accompanied by huge pipeline network for transportation of oil and gas to mainland China, bypassing Moscow, to satisfy its economic ever growing energy ambitions. Diversification of energy resources (oil & gas) transportation routes and strengthening regional economic cooperation are the two efficient tools to counter Russia's monopoly over central Asian energy. TAPI (Turkmenistan- Afghanistan-Pakistan- India) pipeline project is backed by China and Asian development bank. The aim of this project is to transport Turkmen gas to china through Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. This has been the potent instance how Beijing is trying to oust Russia and other neighbors from the Central and South Asian region. National Petroleum Company of china, CNPC has entered into bilateral agreements of energy with Central Asian states, including construction of rails and roads. With its help, Chinese govt. wants to enhance transportation of energy between Beijing and its North Western neighbors, consequently, opening the gate for transportation of agricultural and other finished goods from Beijing to Central Asian states. It means that Beijing, economic integration is not an end in itself rather a means to military and political integration. China invested 25-150\$ million in energy resource projects in CAR. States like Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan etc.

Regional stability and security are the other important interests of china in the region. In order to meet with this end Beijing is promoting cooperation for combating the three evils, extremism, separatism and terrorism. Particularly, it has preoccupation with prevention of extremist and separatist movements spreading in its province of **Xinjiang**⁸. The rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the South Asian and Central Asian states is dangerous for Beijing for it has the real potential threatening regional stability. This situation resulted in the establishment of **SCO**⁹, which according to China may be used as an instrument as an instrument for the development of military and economic cooperation for fighting against terrorism and Islamic fundamentalism. SCO is capable of increasing Beijing's economic and political in CARs and Russia being its main pillar wanted to isolate it by restoring control over all the former USSR and republics. Counter terrorism war and the need of insurance of regional stability is not seen in China as expedient and necessary steps to secure regional stability. After 9/11 incident the United States led war against terrorism saw it stationing troops permanently in the Central Asian Republics. This move of US instigated China to take anti U²S position through Shanghai Cooperation Organization. To China it was clear that by doing so US wanted to impose its economic and political influence in the CARs. In coming time, Beijing will sort to counter US competing claims in geopolitics of the region and to mitigate the ancient concept of Central Asian region to be an exclusive domain of Russia under tsars, Soviet Union and post-soviet Russia.

Following above discussions it is very conspicuous that China has a major role to play with its implications in CAR Great game or power rivalry.

8. The conflict of XINJIANG PROVINCE in CHINA carries great importance in International Politics. Distinguished, different, sometimes hostile or tyrant policies and attitudes of Communist party govt. of PRC towards the UYGHUR muslims and other ethnic communities in this region are causes for discontent and suppression of humanity in this region.

5. CONCLUSION:-

The shift in international power structure with the disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 and the subsequent independence of CARs brought changes not only in the geopolitics of Central Asia but the world over. The energy rich newly independent Central Asian Republics became bone of contention among the world states in general and Russia, China and US in particular. Russia in order to gain its lost position wants to preserve pro-Russian authoritarian system of governments there, contrary to that United States want to replace it with western style democracy through liberal democratic institutions, values and free market economy. She is also struggling to maintain soviet period energy transportation infrastructure passing through the present Russian territory and its price mechanism. On the other hand China and United States struggling for diversification of energy transportation infrastructure for dual purposes, to put an end to Russian monopoly over it and its price control, to satisfy its own domestic energy needs. The European allies of US presently depend on fragile and unstable Middle Eastern energy resources. In case of disruption of it they would have no alternative then to go into the fold of Russia therefore compelling US to have safe energy supply for its European allies from CARs. Shared interests of them in region are stability and security. All of them have agreed to curb the three evils from the region for their distinct objectives. Russia wants these destabilizing forces may not cross over towards it; China wants these elements may not destabilize its fragile province of Xinjiang, which already has the sparks of separatism. United States having no direct concern with these elements just wants to penetrate into the region under the pretext of war against terrorism and to have vigilant eyes on Russia and China. So the important question which needs an answer here is where this tug of war will lead these states. After analyzes of the interests of Russia, China and US in the region, it can be predicted that these states will not lead to hot war. Their interests are mainly concerned with the Central Asian energy and its infrastructure. In case of war it will be destroyed and will be perceived as a defeat for all of them. So it can be arguably said that this will lead them towards compromise. Presently, it is dominated politically by Russia, economically by China and United States has just commercial presence there.

China is the fastest growing economy in the world. In 2004 China became second largest consumer of petroleum. This growing economy needs continued supply of energy and this demand can be fulfilled by the Central Asian energy reserves (Fu, 2010). Energy strategy of China has two aspects. To focus oil reserves of the Central Asian region. To fulfill this demand Chinese National Petroleum Corporation signed deals with **Kazakhstan which holds largest oil reserves in Central Asia**¹⁰. By this China aims to play her role in other oil projects in Kazakhstan and then makes her way to the Caspian energy resources. Another aspect of China's energy policy is to focus the gas reserves. China, in order to achieve this objective is supporting the construction of pipelines to have an access to the gas reserves of the region. Turkmenistan hosts the largest gas reserves in the region. Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline started working in 2009. This pipeline is a major success of Chinese energy policy (Fu, 2010). China is also playing her role in other sectors such as security, trade and economy. Chinese policy aims economic integration of the Central Asian region through different regional organizations. For this purpose **China is playing an active role in Shanghai Corporation Organization (Fu, 2010)**.

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