

Russia, China and Central Asian Integration

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Puzzle of lack of Central Asian integration

- Economic
 - Non-complimentary economies; raw materials base
- Political
 - Nation-building focus; primacy of sovereignty
 - Bilateral disputes (water, borders)
 - Authoritarianism
- External
 - Russia – divide-and rule
 - China – focused on bilateral relations
 - Integration with Russian and/or Chinese characteristics.
- Main question – to what extent have Russia and China undermined Central Asian integration?



Early period – 1990s to mid-2000s

- Both Russia and China did not accord a high priority to Central Asia. Period
- The US had some sway – supported integration but ineffectually
- CA states had little incentive to integrate in any case.
 - Logic of political autonomy + non-discriminatory multilateralism
 - Disintegrative processes within Central Asia
- Central Asia benefited from a relatively benign external environment

Transition period – late 2000s to 2021

- Things change in the mid to late 2000s
- Significant shift in power projection and influence of Russia and China
 - Resource boom results in a Russia with enhanced military forces and global ambitions
 - China's focus on resources and access to oil, gas and other raw materials
- Coincides with US gradual withdrawal from Afghanistan



New external drivers for integration

- Russia and drive for real economic integration – 2011 Customs Union and 2015 Eurasian Economic Union
- European model of integration: EU/NATO; EAEU/CSTO
- Trade destruction and diversification; costs for Kazakhstan
- Benefits for migrant labour regularization
- Without Uzbekistan, creates fissures in Central Asian region



China

- 1999 'Go West Strategy' as forerunner to BRI – shift from interest in Russian to Central Asia gas. Central Asia integration as means to pacify Xinjiang
- More open model of integration: BRI and SCO
- Economic complementarity means that trade diversifying impact of EAEU is limited
- Strong political will for building infrastructure from East to West
- Global Value Chains from Chongqing to Duisburg.

Conclusion

- Turning point in Central Asian integration – 2006-9
Turkmenistan to China gas pipeline
- From landlocked to land bridges.
Importance of transport interconnection
- Potential energy connectivity
- Improved bureaucratic process
- New leadership; new generation.

