
Central Asia

How the British 'Great Game' has led to a number of smaller games

by Ramtanu Maitra

A large number of Central Asian scholars were recently in India, attending a seminar on March 22-23 on the "Geopolitics Surrounding Central Asia," organized by the School of International Studies (SIS) at Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi. As the theme of the seminar suggested, most of the Central Asian and Indian participants presented papers which discussed the proliferation of a host of smaller games within the British "Great Game," designed to create chaos and uncertainty throughout the region.

At the same time, the scholars outlined the moves that are now being made to capture control over the region's huge energy reserves. A number of Kyrgyz and Tajik scholars, while pointing out the present lack of Indian initiative in Central Asia, cited the ancient, but vibrant, cultural and economic ties between India and Central Asia.

The oil game

Those who spoke on the complex energy-related geopolitical games that have been unleashed in the region following the disintegration of the Soviet Union, included a number of leading Indian analysts. Former Indian Ambassador to Turkey K. Gajendra Singh, who chaired one session, recalled how the game was given a boost in 1997 by Azerbaijan President Heidar Aliyev, when he went to the United States and signed oil deals worth some \$10 billion with the U.S. oil multinationals. In Washington, more than 400 VIPs, including senior officials and geopoliticians such as Zbigniew Brzezinski and Caspar Weinberger, along with lobbyists, investors, and facilitators, attended a \$250 per plate dinner in Aliyev's honor.

Aliyev's selling point, geopolitically speaking, was an anti-Iran, anti-Russian, and pro-Turkey nexus. Aliyev, Ambassador Singh pointed out, was helped by the large Azeri Jewish population and the American Jewish lobby to establish contact with powerful people in America. It was no surprise, he said, that Aliyev got to meet President Bill Clinton in 1994, and soon after that, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu came calling to see him in Baku, the capital of Azerbaijan.

If Ambassador Singh's anecdotal descriptions gave a glimpse of how the Central Asian oil game has been broadened to invite the geopoliticians with colonial interests, a

scholar from New Delhi's Institute for Defense Studies and Analyses elaborated on the potential for intense fighting over control of Caspian Sea oil. Despite the Almaty Declaration, signed in December 1991 by the members of the Commonwealth of Independent States, including the newly created republics of Central Asia and the Caucasus, the key legal dispute over the Caspian involves the division of the Caspian Sea into exclusive zones to be used by each sovereign state for its own purpose.

This involves a legal debate over whether the Caspian is a "sea" or a "lake." If it is a sea, then the international law of the sea holds and implies certain distribution arrangements, including the establishment of an exclusive economic zone for each bordering state. A lake, on the other hand, is not subject to any presumed delimitation, and as such, requires mutual consent for the division of resources.

Security threats

In addition to the oil game, or, perhaps, to ensure victory in the oil game, a number of other games are being played in the region. One Indian scholar pointed out that Islamic fundamentalism in the form of Wahhabism, exported from Saudi Arabia through various routes, has taken on a virulent form in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. Wahhabism, termed by a large section of the Islamic world as "ruthlessly orthodox," rejects Sufism as a Turkish conspiracy to undermine Islam, and attacks the Shias as heretics.

A paper presented by this author, on behalf of *EIR*, emphasized another "small game," the arms- and drug-trafficking, which is prominent in the region. Money generated from drug-trafficking finances a number of secessionist movements in Central Asia and Russia. It also has the potential to cause massive damage to the region politically, economically, and culturally. Eyewitnesses report a growing involvement in drug-trafficking and gun-running in the Pamir Mountains by shadowy groups of Ismaili Shias. It should be a matter of concern that various international organizations linked to the Aga Khan Foundation of the Europe-based Sadruddin Aga Khan are investing generously in the Pamirs, this author noted.

The *EIR* paper, entitled "The Importance of the Eurasian

Land-Bridge for Central Asian Development,” pointed out that the stakes in Central Asia are large for all major nations adjacent to it, including Russia, China, India, Pakistan, and Iran, and that time is running out fast. Unless the major nations quickly evaluate the security and strategic situation in the region and come to a constructive arrangement for economic development, there is a great likelihood that the “small games” played upon economically and politically weak nations may turn the whole of Central Asia into a large Afghanistan, where problems breed at a much faster rate than solutions.

What Central Asia needs

This author pointed out that Central Asian leaders, and those of the major nations surrounding it, must understand that so long as the Central Asian nations are viewed as suppliers of important raw materials, the Great Game can spawn a whole range of small games, keeping the region in a constant state of chaos.

The key to establishing stability and economic development is in identifying the agro-industrial potential of the Central Asian nations and utilizing the vast energy and abundant material resources to reach that goal. An all-round agro-industrial development program for these countries would ensure development of transportation, communications, and human and water resources. These developments, if taken hand-in-hand with the establishment of industries for processing of raw materials and production of capital goods and basic consumer goods, would make Central Asian society stable and sustainable, the *EIR* paper stressed.

This author pointed out yet another area which the scholars tend to ignore, namely, the financial globalization that the Central Asian nations are presently undergoing. As a result, the financial institutions in the region have remained very weak and are falling under the influence of foreign bankers and speculators.

Having gotten rid of the “birthmarks of socialism”—the nationalized banking system—the Central Asian nations, Kyrgyzstan in particular, opened their new financial systems and they immediately went bust. Out of 20 commercial banks functioning in Kyrgyzstan, 12 have gone under. In Uzbekistan, where the banks are more solvent, the picture is not reassuring. Uzbekistan has the largest number of representative offices of foreign banks in the region, and a number of joint venture banks have cropped up as well. Deutsche Bank, Chase Manhattan Bank, Malaybank, and 20 other foreign banks are represented, ensuring Uzbekistan’s steady loss of control over its finances and eliciting its pledge of faith in financial globalization.

In a paper by SIS academic Prof. K. Warikoo, a note of optimism was struck. Having recently visited Kyrgyzstan and travelled a bit along the old Silk Road, he noted the growing commerce and trade between Kyrgyzstan and China, and Kazakhstan and China. Citing Askar Ch. Aitmatov, an adviser to Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akayev, Warikoo said that

Kyrgyzstan is keen to overcome its landlocked situation by opening multiple communications options with the outside world through Russia and China.

Professor Warikoo also mentioned a number of positive developments along the China-Kyrgyz border. Kyrgyzstan has settled its inherited border dispute with China, and has agreed not to allow Uighur secessionist activity within its territory, while China has vowed not to allow any increase in the number of Chinese immigrants into Kyrgyzstan. Warikoo also described the increasing hustle and bustle along the Chinese-built sections of the Eurasian Land-Bridge, and positive signs of economic achievement along the route.

New geopolitics

Painting a broader picture, Prof. Devendra Kaushik, former head of the Russian and East European Section of the SIS, said in his paper that the classic form of geopolitics, propounded by Rudolf Kjellen, Friedrich Ratzel, Alfred T. Mahan, and Halford Mackinder, has once again raised its ugly head in Central Asia. As a follower of these colonialist political scientists, Zbigniew Brzezinski, in his book *The Grand Chessboard* (see *Feature* in this issue, and Lyndon H. LaRouche, Jr., “Mad Brzezinski’s Chessboard,” in last week’s *EIR*), proposed a fragmentation of Russia into a confederative European Russia, while a Siberian Republic and a Far Eastern Republic are to be managed in cooperation with China and Japan. Azerbaijan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan are to be managed jointly in cooperation with Turkey and possibly also Iran. Brzezinski moots that control over Central Asia be in the hands of the United States, China, and Japan, while NATO provides the overall umbrella.

Such geopolitical formulations, if brought to fruition, Kaushik points out, would mean no end of trouble for Central Asia and the Caspian area. He points out that for Central Asia, its natural dependence should lie with Russia, China, and India. Russia and China are neighbors, and both have enormous scientific and technological capabilities to change the economic scene in Central Asia. India, which does not have a direct land route with Central Asia, must try to build one through eastern Ladakh and connect it to the Xinjiang-Tibet highway.

Kaushik is optimistic that the geopoliticians of the likes of Brzezinski can be out-manuevered. He told the Central Asian scholars that the weakness of classical geopolitics is that it is based upon the theory that “political power in the modern world rests upon a complex base of raw materials and that no state can become or remain a great power without secure access to huge quantities of mineral fuels and other sources of energy, metallic ores, non-metallic chemicals, etc.” This physiocratic analysis failed to anticipate modern technological advances in discovering substitutes for rare metals and important raw materials, Kaushik notes.

Sketching out the new mode of geopolitics, Kaushik said: “As a highly dynamic transnational economy rapidly replaces the state-centric classical geopolitics, fixed geographical con-

ditions and configurations like heartland/rimlands, lifelines, choke-points, critical strategic zones, etc., hardly impinge upon the policy and behavior of great powers engaged in pursuit of hegemony.”

Interview: Chary Taganovich Kuliyeu

Turkmenistan develops its oil, gas resources

When the news of a pipeline deal between Turkmenistan and several Western oil companies was announced, for a pipeline under the Caspian Sea, through Azerbaijan, Georgia, and into Turkey, it was hailed in some European and American press as a geopolitical coup, whereby Turkmenistan had “joined” the camp of the Brzezinski-led faction of geopoliticians, who seek to exploit Central Asia oil and gas for political purposes. It was also said in this connection, that Turkmenistan’s agreements for pipeline and other economic cooperation with other states, such as Iran, Russia, etc., had thereby been cancelled.

To set the record straight, EIR requested an interview with the Ambassador of the Republic of Turkmenistan in Bonn, Germany. His Excellency Mr. Chary Taganovich Kuliyeu provided exhaustive clarification regarding this and related issues, in an interview with Muriel Mirak-Weissbach in March.

EIR: What was decided about the natural gas pipeline on the Caspian Sea floor, in the agreement reached between Turkmenistan and the American consortium PSG?

Kuliyeu: On Feb. 19, 1999, the President of Turkmenistan, Saparmurat Niyazov, and the chief executive director of PSG corporation, Edward Smith, signed an agreement, under which that firm became the charter sponsor of the trans-Caspian project, as well as a Project Memorandum. These documents mean that implementation of the trans-Caspian project has entered a qualitatively new stage, initiating the formation of the consortium that will build and commission the trans-Caspian pipeline.

This important event was welcomed, on behalf of the American administration, by adviser to the President and to the State Department for Caspian region energy development Richard Morningstar, who noted, in particular, that the trans-Caspian project will enable Turkmenistan to exploit its energy potential with maximum gain for itself, while marking its integration into not only the regional, but the global energy system. He also emphasized that this event is historic in the

context of strengthening bilateral relations between Turkmenistan and the U.S.A., and that the American government will do everything in its power to continue to promote the trans-Caspian project.

The trans-Caspian project is the first international project of this scale to be carried out at the turn of the century. This event was the result of efforts not only by Turkmenistan, but also by our partners, particularly the U.S.A. and, above all, U.S. President Bill Clinton and Vice President Albert Gore, with whom President S.A. Niyazov discussed in detail all the questions related to implementation of the trans-Caspian project, during talks in Washington in April of last year.

In working to implement this project, Turkmenistan is not playing political games, but is guided exclusively by its national interests, insofar as it is impermissible for a country that possesses 30% of the world’s reserves of hydrocarbon [natural gas] raw materials to do nothing for the development of pipeline infrastructure.

In response to concerns on the part of some countries in the region, about the possible ecological impact of this project, it will be subjected to international expert ecological analysis, for which purpose the Turkmen side has proposed to recruit experts from all of the Caspian littoral states.

President of Turkmenistan S.A. Niyazov has reported that he has received official support from the Presidents of Azerbaijan, Georgia, and Turkey, across whose territory the pipeline will run. As for Turkmenistan, it will firmly and unflinchingly adhere to the responsibilities it has assumed.

The technical and economic research data indicate that the pipeline will be built in a period of 28 months. Its length from the eastern natural gas deposits in Turkmenistan to the Turkish city of Erzurum is approximately 2,000 kilometers, with a capacity of 30 billion cubic meters of gas per annum. The estimated cost of the project is on the order of \$3 billion.

Edward Smith, chief executive officer of PSG corporation, which is jointly owned by General Electric Capital and Bechtel Enterprises, has stated that over the next few months, the operator plans to conclude agreements with other potential participants in the consortium and with the transit countries. He also announced that government and private financial agencies from the U.S.A. and other countries have expressed interest in the project. At the present time, talks on the financing package are already under way.

On March 12, 1999, a framework agreement was signed between Turkmenistan and the Botash Petroleum Pipeline company, on the purchase and sale of Turkmen gas. The document contains the basic principles for purchases and sales. Its significance is to accelerate the trans-Caspian pipeline project and create the conditions for the project to be financed. The agreement was endorsed by Turkish Minister of Energy and Natural Resources Ziya Aktash and Edward Smith, president of PSG, named the leader of the pipeline consortium.

The framework agreement regularizes annual contract volumes of gas, which Turkmenistan pledges to deliver via the trans-Caspian pipeline, while Turkey guarantees receiv-