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Central Asia in World System : its Geopolitical Significance, Strategic Importance and Prospects

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This article addresses the problem of how contemporary Central Asia is integration into World system. Now Central Asian nations have diplomatic relations with many world association countries and international organizations: United Nations' Organization, Europarlament, NATO and etc. The proccesses play a strong role for any country, because any nation, large or small, is of great significance for the world economy. But no any nation can contribute to the economy if it is in position of selfisolation. And the world powers don't recognize it – its history remembers many tribes and peoples having vanished without a trace from earth' face. In the modern world it is difficult to vanish physically, but it is possible for a nation to face political and economical oblivion. Today such problems as isolation make up the main agenda of political and economic development within Central Asia.

Central Asia is a vast area, half as large the United States, extending from the Caspian Sea to China, from Siberia to nothern Iran. Ever since its conquest by Russia in the 19th century this region has been both an asset and a problem – because of its strategic and economy importance and because of its several million Moslem inhabitants, to this day unassimilated and unreconciled to Russian control. Great change, a new period of international isolation, began in 1920 when Central Asia was incorporated into the Soviet Union. Contact with neighboring states was progressively cut off and

the region's economy and politics focused exclusively on Moscow. Central Asia became a region which has been excluded from the main focus of international attention and from economy development within the world system.

The collapse of the USSR reintroduced Central Asia to world, but in a form very different from what historically existed in the region: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan. With independence new governments suddenly needed to establish their legitimacy and viability as nation states in a radically changed world. The socialist "bloc" as one of world subsystem vanished.

Today, the world, more globally intergrated than ever before in history, is broken into important subspheres subsystems, the Northern Atlantic system (Western Europe and the United States – Canada), the Pacific rim (Japan, Taiwan, Korea, Indonesia, Malaysia and etc.), China, still a system of its own and the North African – Western Asia Arab world. Each of these subsystems has its own core, containing a hegemonic state whose economy sets the terms of trade for its "satellites"¹⁾. Today Central Asia as part of former socialist countries must decide what side independent Central Asia countries chose – West or East, perhaps a re-integration with Russia.

Central Asia has a very important geopolitical position in world system. It is between West and Asia. Landroutes lead to the main world region. In all Central Asian nations the population is multi ethnic, having some groups that dominate. At that time Kyrgyzs, Kazakhs, Tajiks and Turkmens live compact in all neighboring countries. Central Asia is the cross – roads for three religions and several ancient civilizations.

From diverse population the economic point of view Central Asia specializes in production and reception of

1) Abu – Lughod Janet L.. Before European Hegemony. The World system A.D. 1250-1350. Oxford University Press,1989.P.32.

specific agricultural goods and raw materials. According to some calculations there are enormous reserves of oil, gas, uranium, gold and non-ferrous metals which necessary for modern production in this region. There are also enormous possibilities for the development of hydro-electricity. Central Asia borders China, Russia, Iran and Pakistan. These states have definite interests in Central Asia. At the time of independence debates about Central Asia's identity and role in modern world had barely emerged before they were smothered. It's no surprising then that so many of the issues in Central Asia today are reminiscent of the era following the first world war in the Near East: nationalism, self-determination, national language and alphabets, the role of religion, national models of development, and relation with old colonial powers²⁾.

Some leaders of Central Asia look to Turkey as an example of strong secular government, democracy and nationalism based on Turkish identity. Others look to Iran and Afghanistan, seeking to rediscover their Islamic roots. The Tajiks in particular seek new ties to a greater Persian speaking world. Still others seek to preserve the old authoritarian Soviet system with Central Asian face resulting in the return of a corrupt new model emirs. Without a doubt Central Asia will remain the home of many nationalities, what is at issue is the type of state and societies that will emerge there for the first time in these nations, the outcome of this struggle for identity will have a real impact on the world³⁾.

Working at this problem we researched scientific works of I.Wallerstein, M.Weber, E.Wolf, A.G.Frank, Th.Barfield, J.L.Abu-Lugbod, A.M.Khazanov and etc. There are some important conclusions, notes and discussions at their works

2) Th.J.Barfield. Prospects for Plural Societies in Central Asia. Cultural Survival Quarterly / Fall. 1994. P. 51.

3) P.51.

which necessary to underline and use. First, the principles of organization of world system can have considerable variability, and second, world system are dynamic and therefore undergo periodic restructuring⁴⁾.

The modern "world system that emerged in the centuries following the 12th gradually became organized hierarchically according to different modes of production (capitalist, semifeudal and precapitalist)⁵⁾. Then historic long-term economic interconnections of world are now universally accepted. The idea of economic "world system" advanced by I. Wallerstein has set the period of linkage in the early modern period. Andre G. Frank and Barry K. Gills argue for a chronology. They argue that interconnections can back as 5000 years. They are leading academics examine this issue in a debate contributed to by William A. McNeill and I. Wallerstein among others⁶⁾.

Central Asia is also main attempt for systematic analysis of world system's history. Now some scholars pay attention on centrality of Central Asia in world history and system⁷⁾.

Other group of scientists and scholars characterize Central Asia as following a Path similar the Third World. Another Third region unsolved structural problems and minimal potential for rapid economic and sociopolitical development. The future does not look particularly bright for region. Social disorder and even violent riots in spontaneous and sometimes very unpleasant form may soon become a social reality. Those people in Third world countries and in the West as well, who, in their search for the best solution to the problem of underdevelopment and modernization have been inspired by Central Asian (or, to put it bluntly. Were

4) Abu-Lugbod Janet L. Before European Hegemony... P.364.

5) Wallerstein I. The Modern World System. New York: Academic Press, 1974.

6) Frank A.G., Gills Barry K. The world system. University of Amsterdam. 1993.

7) Frank, A.G. Centrality of Central Asia. UV Amsterdam Press, 1992.

sometimes intentionally or unintentionally brainwashed and cheated by Soviet propaganda). Should seek other solution⁸⁾.

Global changes on the territory of former USSR define attitude of world subsystems in order to differentiate and to determine their relations with new independent Central Asian countries. There are issues of national security and strengthening stability in Central Asia. Now there is a struggle between great Powers for advantages in this region. Central Asia being suppressed by such great Powers as China and Russia tries to strengthening their influence by regional countries as such as Pakistan, Iran and Turkey from one side and another – Afghanistan. Central Asian nations must balance distribution forces of interested parties in order to defend itself.

Taking account the military – technical cooperation of India and Russia from one side and Iranian influence on Afghanistan with Tajikistan from another, Western countries and first of all the USA supporting Pakistan and Turkey for force balance. This policy touches all Central Asian states.

The contour of the new structure can be seen now but they will be precisely defined after Central Asian nations will lay down their priorities in foreign policy. The obvious scenario is that in future Central Asian states they will be under one or more of the world Powers (Russia, China); to be established of chaos threatening the security in the region achievement of necessary balance and agreement (support NATO's development to East).

Central Asian states attempt to increase their weight in international relations by taking part in regional unities: organization of economical cooperation (OEC), where there are Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and in Organization of Islamic conference. Kazakhstan has obtained security guarantees from the

8) Khazanov, A.M. After the USSR. University of Wisconsin Press, 1995. P.155.

nuclear Powers and considers NATO as a prospective and reliable (safe, dependable) partner. On the 10th of March of 1997 General Secretary of NATO H.Solana visited Kazakhstan and said: “The New epoch demands new approaches to security and universal approaches which unite itself in political, economical and military measures for preventing and regulating crises defense and the assertions of our basic values. NATO plays a role in the development of such new approaches.

Our countries can survive the situation of security and stability only in the case that we keep the same rules and principles, including respect of the national minorities and territorial integrity of states.

In forthcoming years NATO, Kazakhstan and other states of Central Asia will form deeper (profound) and more confident cooperation and all Euroatlantic region will receive benefits it”⁹⁾.

9) Kazakhstanskai Pravda, 1997, March 7.