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Investigating, Importance and Impact of the Contemporary Silk Road on the Geopolitics of Central Asia

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Abstract

With the rise of China in the 1990s and the stability of its remarkable economic growth in the new millennium, the Contemporary Silk Road, as the most important international initiative, has been placed in the geopolitical center of Asia. "Contemporary Silk Road" or "One Road, One Belt" is the most high-flying mega-project in the present time, which is the manifestation and symbol of China's power beyond its borders. Meanwhile, in the eyes of China, Central Asia is the focal point of the new cloud road, which controls its routes to Afghanistan, Iran, West Asia, South Asia, and South Russia. In addition, Afghanistan and Xinjiang also have important positions in the process of forming new land routes of the Silk Road. The pioneering research, from this perspective, explains its main question about the actors and trends influencing the land belt of the Contemporary Silk Road on the geopolitics of Central Asia. This article mentions the specific details of the Central Asian governments and their policies. Also, the scope and scope of Beijing's investments and policies in this region will be examined.

Keywords: Silk Road, Geopolitics, Geoeconomy, Central Asia, China, Eurasia, Macro Strategy

1. Introduction

With the emergence of China as a major power in international politics in the 1990s and the stability of its impressive economic growth in the new millennium, the Contemporary Silk Road became the geopolitical center of Eurasia. In October 2013, Xi Jinping and then Prime Minister Li Keqiang unveiled the new cloud road megaproject. In 2015, a national document entitled "Aspirations and Actions for the The State Council of China released documentation on the establishment of the "Silk Road Economic Belt" and the "Twenty-First Century Maritime Silk Road. "On May 16, 2017, the Contemporary Silk Road was opened in China in a ceremony attended by the leaders of nearly 30 countries of the world to clear the path for the greater economic ambitions of this Asian power. The Contemporary Silk Road, or the plan of one belt, one road of China, is a plan of investment in the economic infrastructure of more than 60 countries of the world and the development of two

trade routes of the Silk Road¹ Economic Belt and the Maritime² Silk Road. After five centuries, it seems that the Silk Road will once again become the economic, political and cultural center of the world.

After announcing this plan in 2013, China has promised to allocate 1 trillion dollars to provide loans for infrastructure investments in more than a thousand. The rebuilding of this road will cover 65% of the world's population, 40% of the net national production, and 68 countries (Time, Griffiths, 2018: 2018).

The support of this plan is the industrial power of China's economy and the investment power of this country. By implementing this plan, along with China's military power, it can lead to the hegemony of this country in East Asia and by controlling land and sea trade routes. The great expanse of Eurasia makes Beijing a new economic superpower. Introduce the future world that will have important consequences in the political, military, security fields, as well as ideological, normative (normative) culture. In short, the Contemporary Silk Road will be the most important symbol of China's power beyond the country's borders in the coming years and decades.

The importance of the new cloud road in international security and power arrangement in the environment around Afghanistan in Central Asia cannot be ignored. There are numerical changes of such intensity and extent and duration, especially in the post-Cold War era, that can change the geopolitics of Eurasia, the new world order, and also the power structure around Iran. even make an impact.

Considering Afghanistan's historical and geographical links with the Silk Road, it will be important and necessary to examine the trends of the Silk Road. These cases represent the integration of the Contemporary Silk Road with regional and transregional transformation.

"The dry route of the new cloud belt, how and with what mechanism will it affect the geopolitics of Central Asia?" This is the fundamental question and the focus of the advanced research that shows the analytical desire of the actors influencing the trends of the Contemporary Silk Road.

2. Research background

Many theoretical and practical issues in the knowledge of international relations and geopolitics depend on the proper and systematic understanding and explanation of the interweaving of geography, history, and theory for the analysis of international politics. From this perspective, there will be influential writings based on these three pillars. In the meantime, we can mention some writings that have analyzed the cloud road and its consequences for international politics. "China's Asian Dream: Building an Empire Along the Contemporary Silk Road", written by Tom Miller (Miller, 2017), is one of the brilliant writings about the Contemporary Silk Road.

Quoting from Napoleon Bonaparte, who sees China as a sleeping dragon that will wake up and shake the whole world, Miller considers the consequences of the rise of the Contemporary Silk Road on Asia and sees it as a step to achieve hegemony. Richie knows China in Asia.

Miller begins his geopolitical analysis based on "One Belt, One Road³" and then focuses on Xinjiang, Central Asia, and Russia. Miller is of the opinion that the "One Road, One Belt" plan is a plan in the direction of globalization with the Chinese model, which intends to reshape the world's economic system and place countries and companies in the orbit of China's economy. The second book, "China's Eurasian Century", written by Nadge Rolland (Rolland, 2017) also focuses on China's "One Belt, One Road" high-flying plan.

Rowland considers this plan as the concept and symbol of the organizer of China's foreign policy and grand strategy in the era of Xi Jinping. Rowland shows that the "One Belt, One Road" plan reflects China's goals and aspirations to shape Eurasia from a perspective and a worldview, and it shows its desired features. By studying and examining the source of the concept and idea of this plan and China's domestic and international goals,

¹ Silk Road Economic Belt-SREB

² Maritime Silk

³ One Belt One Road or OBOR

Nadje has reached the conclusion that the "One Belt, One Road" plan is only a single list of infrastructure plans. It is not economic and commercial, but it is China's grand strategy to dominate Eurasia.

The book "Belt and Road: What does China offer to the world with its rise", written by Wang Yiwei (2016), is the first important book about China's Contemporary Silk Road written by a Chinese thinker and strategist. Wang believes that the plan "One Belt, One Road" contains the inherent logic of China's openness, which shows the inevitable process of the survival of human civilization, represents the prerequisites of globalization, and reflects China's fundamental turn from a participating country to a country leading the globalization program. Also, he has examined China's peripheral policy, regional cooperation, and global development. In the end, Wang also points out the dangerous consequences of this plan in the security, economic, moral, and legal fields.

Another important book, "The Contemporary Silk Road Now and the Future of the World", is written by Peter Frankopan (Frankopan, 2018). In this book, Frankopan has attempted to trace the trajectory of the New World Order based on the Contemporary Silk Road. It is subject to a deep turn and this turn can be seen in the isolationist policies of Trump and Barghazid; While in Eurasia, the Contemporary Silk Road emphasizes cooperation between the countries along the route, such a turn has led to a transformation in power centers at the international level.

Another important study is "The Contemporary Silk Road: Challenges and Responses", written by Richard Griffiths (Griffiths, 2019) He holds the view that this mega-project should not be considered a Chinese-only project and the participation of Eurasian countries along the route of this ancient highway should be considered important and decisive in launching this route.

Another important book is "One Belt, One Road: China's Long March of 2049" by Michael Glantz (Glantz, Ross & Daugherty, 2019). This book describes the Belt and Road Initiative, a Chinese initiative for global trade and infrastructure innovation, and considers it a program to help developing countries achieve economic development.

Every country that is on the path of this mega project has a special story of China's support for its infrastructure projects. China expands its influence by providing large loans, construction materials and labor force to these countries. To put it more clearly, this megaproject is a winning game.

The authors also follow the consequences of Trump's "America First" policy and his isolationist decisions for China's grand strategy and the resulting geopolitical vacuum. In short, this book traces the scope and rotation of the world power equilibrium through the opening of a belt, a path.

Another new book on this topic, "Emperor's New Way: China and Projects for the Century", written by Jonathan Hillman (Hillman, 2020) the head of the project, "Asia Link"⁴ in the center of strategic and international studies⁵. In this book, Hillman has collected numerous, first-hand, and up-to-date data about the grand project of the Contemporary Silk Road. He emphasizes on the important role of Chinese President Xi Jinping in the formation of this project. Hillman called this project ambitious projects, and simultaneously, the most perplexing and difficult to understand geo-economic project, and in the end, he has argued that if China succeeds in advancing this mega project, it will change the world anew. He wants to place himself in the center of this new system.

As a result, Thomas Zimmerman, in his report entitled "The Contemporary Silk Road: China, America, and the Future of Central Asia" (Zimmerman, 2015), at the Center for International Cooperation⁶ at New York University, the consequences of creating the road He has checked the new cloud.

⁴ Reconnecting Asia Project

⁵ Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS)

⁶ International Cooperation

Zimmerman holds the view that the Contemporary Silk Road, despite the similarity with the historical silk road, was more than a trade route. This multi-faceted strategy covers various aspects of China's domestic politics and economy. According to Zimmerman, the Contemporary Silk Road is an attempt by Chinese political circles to balance the American policy of "pivoting to Asia"⁷ and to neutralize America's efforts to dominate the region.

The mentioned researchers have investigated and analyzed the influencing variables on the trends of the Contemporary Silk Road. The focal point of these important writings, directly or indirectly, is focused on the geopolitical competition between China and America and the effect of the Contemporary Silk Road on achieving global supremacy. In spite of such previous literature and the importance of the Contemporary Silk Road, scarce information is available about the role played by the Central Asian states along the Contemporary Silk Road belt with extensive details and close analysis. Even in the few writings that have studied this issue in a way, this belt is only accepted as an assumed route from China to Europe, and there are references to the special and distinctive activity of the Asian countries.

In order to fill this research gap, advanced research with a comprehensive view and in-depth investigation will examine in detail this overlooked component that has an influence on the modern silk road belt.

3. The theoretical framework of the research

The theoretical foundation of his advanced research relies on a three-dimensional interpretation of the international system along with geopolitical components. Geopolitics seeks to examine the influence of geography on politics.

Geopolitics is about the impact of geographical factors on the relations between governments and the effort for world power (Foster, 2006); Therefore, "geopolitics of power", geography and order, connect the world power. Geopolitics emphasizes the role of geographical limitations and opportunities in policy implementation. Such a set of threats and opportunities also has political, cultural, and economic aspects. From this perspective, Mohyaluddin Masbahi's theory provides a powerful framework for the evolution and dynamism of the Contemporary Silk Road. This framework provides a tripartite view of the international system "with three distinct political-military, social-normative, and economic structures" (Mesbahi, 2011).

Apart from the geographical factors, every government interacts with the three-level spheres. Such a framework shows that the traces of the roots and consequences of this megaproject is present in the three spheres of geopolitics, geoculture, and geoeconomy, and at the three levels of "international," "regional," and "domestic." Therefore, the progressive theoretical framework shows the role of important historical periods, forces (internal/external), and actors (decision-makers/elite/institutions) that play a pivotal role in the route of the modern Silk Road. This proposed framework represents the importance of geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural components in the creation and evolution of the land corridors (Belt) of the new Cloud Road.

Of course, this importance is dual-sided; from one perspective, the mentioned components can be considered as driving forces of the Contemporary Silk Road belt, and from other perspective, the consequences and effects of the establishment and expansion of these corridors can be found in these three areas and three levels. In other words, the geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural components at three national, regional, and international levels cause the formation of highways and their lines; Therefore, the establishment of these highways will have geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geocultural consequences in these three levels. This ambivalence of road and geopolitics can be called "road geopolitics"⁸.

The geopolitics of the road is based on the coordination and consultation of geopolitics and the road⁹. Here, geopolitics is used in a general sense and includes the fields of geoculture and geoeconomy. In short, the

⁷ Pivot to Asia

⁸ Road Geopolitics

⁹ Reciprocity

geopolitics of the road refers to the role of geopolitical elements in the creation and course of the road, especially international highways, and also to the influence of road construction on our geopolitics. Tiki focuses regionally and internationally.

4. Research methods and sources

The pioneering research is based on the descriptive-analytical method in explaining the Contemporary Silk Road and has used the sources and data of libraries and documents to show the layers of the Contemporary Silk Road and its influence on Central Asia.

The main sources of this research are written sources, documents, and strategic reports; Therefore, by using library studies and collecting data published on the Internet, we have explained and analyzed the ruling trends on the Contemporary Silk Road and its influence on the geopolitics of Central Asia.

5. Activists

The formation of Contemporary Silk Road lines and routes depends on the intertwined interactions of domestic, regional, and international actors.

These activists, with their decisions and actions, influence the direction and final direction of the Contemporary Silk Road. The significant aspect is that the strategies of these actors are based on their special perception of the Contemporary Silk Road and its possible consequences for the internal and external context of their regions. These influential activists include three groups of governments, rebel military groups, and intra-governmental institutions.

The first category, i.e. "government actors", includes governments whose decisions will affect the direction and future of the Contemporary Silk Road. Activist governments include Central Asian regional governments, trans-regional powers beyond Central Asia, and great powers.

The "regional governments" of Central Asia incorporate the former republics of the Soviet Union in Central Asia that gained independence in the early 1990s. These governments are: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. All these governments are more or less supporters of the establishment of the Contemporary Silk Road.

The Contemporary Silk Road brings them economic prosperity and increases the importance of their geostrategic position in the international system. In addition, the Contemporary Silk Road will reduce Moscow's traditional influence in Central Asia and provide a platform for diversifying the strategic partners of the Nubian republics of this region. However, this mega project can increase their dependence on Beijing even more.

Besides the Central Asian regional governments, there are "transregional powers" that influence the dynamics of the Contemporary Silk Road with their policies. In addition to Iran, the three countries Turkey, Pakistan, and India, each with different points of view, have tried to use their influence in the Central Asian region and based on their national interests on the Contemporary Silk Road plan.

Unlike Turkey and Pakistan, who have shown their happiness with the new Cloud Road plan, Indian leaders perceive it as a threat and see it as a way for Beijing to penetrate more and more in Central and Western Asia. Apart from the Central Asian regional governments and transregional powers, the "big powers" can also change the dynamics and course of the Contemporary Silk Road by using their economic, political, military, and cultural power. These powers are America, Russia, European Union, and of course, China. America is the most important opponent and critic of the Contemporary Silk Road. Amidst the countries of the European Union, there is still no consensus to start a comprehensive cooperation with China; Although the countries of Italy, Greece, and even Germany evaluate it positively. Putin's Russia has also maintained its positive position, although with ambiguity.

The leaders of Moscow consider the Silk Road as a tool for economic prosperity, even in the middle of the economic sanctions of the West; Of course, Moscow is worried about China's influence in Central Asia and even regions of its territory in Siberia and the Eastern Asia.

Apart from the state actors, the effective activism of "non-state military groups", i.e. political, revolutionary movements, and militias can also challenge the basic assumptions of realism and international politics. Question the state-oriented and traditional claims of nation-states and cephalospories about governance.

Meanwhile, we can refer to the Taliban in Afghanistan, the Baloch separatist groups in Pakistan, and the Uyghurs of Xinjiang. All these non-governmental groups are against the construction of the new cloud road. The Uyghurs view it as a threat to their collective identity, because the development of Western China will be accompanied by the increasing cultural, economic, and political control of the Xinjiang Uyghurs. The Taliban also consider the Contemporary Silk Road as a strategy for stability and stability in Afghanistan. Since this plan provides a more stable place for Kabul leaders and brings stability to this war-torn country, the Taliban oppose this plan. Unlike the Uighurs and the Taliban, the Balochs of Pakistan supported this plan at the beginning, because the economic corridor of the Contemporary Silk Road to Gwadar port can lead to the advancement of the deprived state of Balochistan of Pakistan. But the construction of another route in Pakistan, which passes through the states of Punjab and Sindh and bypasses Balochistan, has fueled the tensions inside Pakistan. Until in November 2018, Balochistan Liberation Army militants attacked the Chinese consulate in Karachi and accused China of exploiting Pakistan's resources (Meher,& Masood, 2018).

Since this research focuses only on the Belt and not the Contemporary Silk Road, only the influence of regional players in Central Asia and Afghanistan, as well as Xinjiang, on the formation of the Silk Road trends.

6. Central Asia: the focal point of the Silk Road

Central Asia is the most important region that, because of its closeness to the western borders of China, will be under the constant pressure of the large, long-standing, and deep impacts of the Contemporary Silk Road. This effect is rooted in the neighborhood of Central Asia with China.

In the past, due to this geographical proximity, the historical silk road always passed through Central Asia. In fact, Central Asia has been the historical-geographic link of China with two important regions of Russia and West Asia. It is because of such a combination of geographic and historical importance that Central Asia is called "the center of the Silk Road" in the 20th century. In the words of Carl von Clausewitz, the famous Prussian strategist, the center of the Silk Road can be called "expensive¹⁰".

Chinese strategists consider Central Asia the center of the Silk Road and the center of Belt and Road initiative. The geo-strategic position and the historical role of Central Asia, in addition to having large oil and gas resources, has doubled the importance of stability in this region.

Despite their short lifespan, the countries of this region have enjoyed high economic growth and political stability due to huge investments. In the past three decades following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the newly independent republics of Central Asia have encountered comparatively fewer internal and external threats in comparison to other global regions.

The armed conflict in Tajikistan in the 1990s and the unrest in Uzbekistan in the previous decade were among the few cases of instability in the region.

The most significant perspective is that China has the least geopolitical tension with Central Asia. In other words, in the long history of relations, there have been few threats in Central Asia that have endangered China's national security. With such a historical background, China's Silk Road will soon move towards Europe, the

¹⁰ Center of gravity

Middle East, and Africa. With the rise of China in the international scene and the expansion of this country's influence in Central Asia, the geo-economy of this region has changed; As China has become the most significant player in the fields of energy, trade, and transit in this region.

China's requirement for energy in the Central Asian region has made this country the most significant player in the geopolitical field of energy. In this direction, Beijing has made extensive investments in Central Asia to acquire and control energy resources; Therefore, the streaming of oil and gas exports of this region is intertwined with the world's largest consumer markets.

Beijing has dominated the gas resources of all three countries with the Central Asian gas pipeline that starts from Turkmenistan and reaches China through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Also, China has established a 960-kilometer pipeline that connects the center of Kazakhstan to the northwest of China at a cost of 700 million dollars.

On the other hand, Beijing has made the most investment in the energy sector of this region. The most crucial issue is that, by paying large loans to the Nobanian countries, this region has become the largest trading partner of these countries; The place that Pishazain chose was Moscow. With the increasing expansion of China's economic and energy exchanges in the region, its political influence will also increase.

In other words, the consequence of deepening China's increasing influence in Central Asia will be the spillover of its geo-economic¹¹ influence to geo-political influence. Among the countries of this region, the two countries of Turkmenistan and especially Kazakhstan, have more interest in joining this plan.

Favorable geography and wealth of natural resources provide the best opportunity for Kazakhstan to become a pole. Kazakhstan is a country that shows that the two Eurasian plans and the Belt and Road endeavor work in a complementary way; Astana is a member of China's Belt and Road initiative and is also a member of the Eurasian Economic Union. The volume of Beijing's investments in this most extensive and richest country in Central Asia has been such that many observers have called Almaty, the largest city and the former capital of this country, "new Dubai" (Shepard, 2016).

Khorgos¹², on the border of China and Kazakhstan, where it is called the "accessible Eurasian point" (Castellanos-Garcia & Lombardo, 2007). It has become a symbol of Astana's customs cooperation with China. Khorgos was replaced by Dostik, who is opposite Alashanko in China. For an extended duration, Dostik was the host of the only link between China and Central Asia, but due to the tensions among China and the Soviet Union, this link remained unused for years. Until finally, the restrictions ended in 1990 and the first freight trains passed through this border in 1991. However, compared to Khorgos, Dostik has older infrastructures (ktzh-gp.kz, 2018). Having advanced equipment, Khorgos can move the train twenty hours faster than the old possibilities in Dostik (Hillman, 2020: 52). Actually, the railway route between Almaty and Khorgos is four hundred kilometers shorter than its distance by two sticks. The paramount aspect is that Khorgos has a support in China. In 2017, at the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, China Ocean Transport Company acquired 49% of the shares of this center. Zhou Lirong¹³, the head of this company¹⁴, promised to turn Khorgos into "a regional pole" (Kazakh-TV, 2017). Kazakhstan's cooperation with China in this grand plan is to the scope that the Kazakh authorities half-jokingly say that their country intends to be a "bucket" in China's belt (Hillman, 2020: 54).

In addition, Kazakhstan has two ports, Kurik and Aktayu, located along the Caspian Sea coastline. The share of the ports of Kazakhstan in the export, import, and transit of goods and in the total operation of the harbors along the Caspian Sea is about 25 percent annually on average, about 12.3 million tons of goods through the ports. It is carried in Kazakhstan. By the end of 2019, Kazakhstan has passed four and a half million tons of goods through Kurik port, which is three times more than last year. The operation of Octayo port in 2016 was 5 million and 842

¹¹ Spillover

¹² Khorgos

¹³ Xu Lirong

¹⁴ China Ocean Shipping Company Limited or COSCO

thousand tons. Kurik port, which is one of the most active harbors in Kazakhstan and the closest sea route to the ports of the Republic of Azerbaijan, is also a connecting point for the transit corridor of wheat, coal, oil, metals, fertilizers, chemicals, and other goods. But it has worked from China and Central Asian countries. This port has unloaded and loaded more than 420,000 tons in 2016 through two rail wharves with a current capacity of 4 million tons, which will increase to 7 million tons in the near future. Kazakhstan is considering to increase the capacity of its ports to 25 million tons by 2020, and also, aiming to establish a dry goods transit zone, to the extent of 20 million tons by 2022 from China to Europe, through the sea. It is Caspian. Astana has tried to use its geographical location and use of abundant gas reserves to generate prosperity and, consequently, enhance national strength. The land route of the Contemporary Silk Road has forced the Kazakh leaders to design their own native master plan. In November 2014, Nazarbayev unveiled his plan to improve Kazakhstan's infrastructure and called it "clear path¹⁵". This plan aims to turn Kazakhstan into one of the commercial centers of East and West (Hillman, 2020: 54).

For this very reason that Nazarbayev called it "a turning point for Kazakhstan to start a completely new page in its economic development" (Zakon.kz, 2018). The leaders of Ashgabat have also shown their desire to join this plan. To achieve this goal, Turkmen leaders have avoided regional conflicts. Also, they have tried to take advantage of their geographical location and use of their abundant gas reserves to generate prosperity and, consequently, enhance national strength. The Republic of Turkmenistan has 4 ports, including Turkmenbashi International Port, Turkmenabad River Port, Alaja Port, Khazar Port, and Akram Port.

Turkmenbashi port is the most important port of Turkmenistan, which was established in 1896. This port, situated in the southwest of Turkmenistan along the Caspian Sea coastline on the Contemporary Silk Road, is the largest port under the sea level and the largest artificial island below the sea level in the book of records. Honey Guinness has been recorded. The new international port of Turkmenbashi, which has an area of one million and three hundred and fifty-eight square meters, has several cargo and passenger terminals and canteens. This port was founded with the aim of loading 26 million tons of goods, and in addition, it has shipbuilding factories and a ship repair shop. Upon the project's completion in 2018, the new international port of Turkmenbashi will be one of the substantial ports in the Caspian Sea region and also in Central Asia. The total area of this port is more than 105 hectares. This port will have 5 terminals (container terminal, bulk and general goods terminal, passenger terminal, and propylene and oil derivatives terminal) with wide capacities. The yearly capacity of the port will be 17 to 18 million tons. The capacity of this port will be 25 to 26 million tons. Also, this port has shipbuilding and ship repair facilities. The paramount function of the port of Turkmenbashi is to connect Turkmenistan with China from the east and, of course, with Europe in the west. The paramount point is that the port of Turkmenbashi provides the most important route to bypass the territory of Iran. Turkmenbashi port provides the possibility of rail and sea communication among both sides of the Caspian Sea, Asia, and Central Asia in the East and the Caucasus and Turkey in the West and has shortened the connecting route between Europe and Asia. This port, following the Caspian Sea and the link with Baku and then, Tbilisi and the Black Sea and finally, Europe and also, the link with the port of Astrakhan on the Black Sea. The operation of the port of Turkmen Bashi will also increase the volume of goods transported between China, Afghanistan, and India.

At the same time, Afghanistan also intends to connect to its northern neighbor, Turkmenistan, from the north through the Lajurd Corridor, and from there to the Caucasus, Turkey and Europe by using the port of Turkmen Bashi. In addition to this, Central Asian countries are also trying to establish their simultaneous link with China, Russia and Turkey through routes outside the border of Iran and through the harbors of the Caspian Sea coastline. Follow

The important point is that this port has been improved and developed with the investment of 1.5 billion dollars by the Turkish holding company Chalik Holding. These conditions show that Ankara, contrary to the promises of friendship and apparent cooperation with Tehran, is seeking to bypass Iran on the Contemporary Silk Road and, in general, weaken Iran's presence in West Asia, Central Asia, and the Caucasus. Although Kazakhstan and

¹⁵ Nurly Jol

Turkmenistan are on priority of the list of China's trade and investment partners in the region, other Central Asian countries are also seeking to attract Chinese investments.

Imam Ali Rahman, the President of the Republic of Tajikistan, said: "Tajikistan can be a communication bridge between China and other countries" (president.tj, 2018).

Shokat Mir Ziaif, the president of the Republic of Uzbekistan, has also stated that "Uzbekistan sustained the Belt and Road project from the beginning and its implementation is a crucial factor in the enduring progress of our country" (president.tj, 2019).

Almazbek Atambaev, the president of the Kyrgyz Republic, has pointed out that " we can emerge as a proficient hub for transporting Chinese goods to Eurasia and Europe" (CA-portal, 2017).

Also, in 2017, the President of Turkmenistan, Qurbanguly Bardimahmoud, released a book titled "Turkmenistan is the center of the grand silk road" (Government of Turkmenistan, 2019) and made this phrase the official slogan of his country.

The downfall of the yuan to the region has stolen sleep from the eyes of Central Asian leaders; However, like the 2016 uprising in Kazakhstan, ordinary people are sometimes suspicious of the growing presence of the Chinese. The emergence of the Contemporary Silk Road has helped to increase regional security. The leaders of the regional nations have endeavored to reach an agreement to address the border disparities (for example, through land exchange between Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan) (Interfax, 2018) (Astana Times, 2018).

In March 2017, Ashgabat launched a rail bridge connecting Turkmenabad-Farab on the Amu Darya River (Turkmenista.ru, 2017). The drivers of these efforts to eliminate regional tensions are economic interests; For example, Kyrgyzstan has worked to secure the safety of the Bishkek-Tashkent route by establishing several railway stations in Osh, Batken, and Jalalabad (AKIPress, 2018).

Huge investments in Central Asia have also affected regional trade; For example, in 2017, trade between Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan increased by 2.31 percent (Omirgazy, 2018). This process has accelerated with the signing of numerous agreements between the two countries (Uzbekistan National News Agency, 2017). The formerly strained relations between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan have also ameliorated (AzerNews, 2018). This continuous political-economic stability can accelerate the process of integrating this emerging region into the Contemporary Silk Road; This means that the Central Asian republics, while trying to prevent the mistrust of Russia and America in particular, are seeking to increase cooperation with China.

The importance of Central Asia as an expensive center has not been covered by American strategists. For this very reason that the weakening of China's influence in Central Asia, along with China's containment in the South China Sea, has been the most important positive response of America's strategy. In fact, the big powers in Central Asia play different games. Before the unveiling of the Contemporary Silk Road, Eric McGlinchey rightly pointed out that "China is playing the monopoly game, Russia is playing the risk game, and the United States is playing the solitaire game. For the politicians in Beijing, this game is commercial, for the politicians in Moscow, it is existential, and for the politicians in Washington, it is secondary. For Beijing, Central Asia is material-oriented. If Central Asia's natural resources and infrastructural investments decrease, China can easily take a backseat. Central Asia is an empire for Moscow.

If the influence of this country is questioned, Russia will not back down from there. For Washington, Central Asia is not vital. Now that the attention is away from Afghanistan, the United States has forgotten about the region" (McGlinchey, 2015), but with the launch of the Contemporary Silk Road, China's retrograde image of the region will be simple.

In 2009, the China-Central Asia gas transmission pipeline was completed, passing through Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan. China has also become the main lender to the countries of the region. This country

has used resource transactions for loans to ensure access to Turkmenistan's gas and Kazakhstan's oil. In short, as much as China's investment in this region increases, the importance of Central Asia in China's national security strategy will also increase.

7. Xinjiang: long-standing insecurity and China's internal security

In the long history, China has been in a drought, insecure, and the security of the northern borders of this country has always been unstable. China, in all eras, has been under the rule of various peoples such as Huns, Turks, Mongols, and Manchus from the north, and today it sees its only historical insecurity in the dry borders in Xinjiang. The presence of Western powers in Hong Kong and Macao has been removed and the humiliating symbols of foreign interference in China's internal territory have disappeared. Mongolia, which was the seat of destructive forces for centuries, has come under the control of China's economic interests and Tibet has also lost its political and cultural autonomy. Despite the delay of the Chinese Empire, Eastern Turkestan or Xinjiang (the modern region in Chinese) was Only in the mid-18th century, during the Qing Dynasty (Manchu) that it was completely under the permanent rule of Beijing. Since then, Xinjiang has said that Fitzgerald has become a land of constant unrest in China (Kaplan, 2018).

Although the establishment of the Contemporary Silk Road is based on a set of economic and political diplomatic interventions of China in Central Asia, and it has made the Muslims of the former Soviet republics the focus of its macro strategy, but the Muslims The Uyghur deserters see themselves in Xinjiang as the main threat. Indeed, China's objective is to counteract the "three evil forces of terrorism, extremism, and separatism." (Zimmerman, 2015); For this reason, the key to establishing the Silk Road on land and sea is the security of Xinjiang.

In the grand strategy of Beijing leaders, Xinjiang is the gateway to the Eurasian land bridge that connects China to Central Asia and finally to Europe (Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road, 2015).

All transportation, trade, and energy routes between China, Asia, and Central Asia, and then West Asia and Russia on the other side, will pass through Xinjiang; For this reason, the control of the Uyghurs, especially in the cultural field, is the backdrop for the initiation of the Belt and Road initiative in Eurasia, as well as the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean (Kaplan, 2018).

Being the gateway to the Contemporary Silk Road to Central Asia, Xinjiang is one of the most underdeveloped parts of China. From this perspective, the Belt and Road initiative will also address China's internal security concerns. The policy of suppressing Muslim Uyghurs and even keeping more than one million of them in secret camps (nytimes, 2019) is a part of this strategy. In the meantime, the establishment of security in Xinjiang and its stable control will be the starting point for the formation of Great China in Eurasia. This moment will be the moment of liberating China's strength and power to exercise power in the Central and South China Seas. For this reason, the control of Xinjiang in the land area of Eurasia opens the gateway to the Indian Ocean for Beijing and is a strategic key to maintain and expand its maritime power through the establishment of new ports in Myanmar. It will be Sri Lanka and Djibouti. From this standpoint, the Belt and Road initiative is also a part of China's domestic strategy.

In his report, Zimmerman emphasized on the reconstruction of less developed western regions (Zimmerman, 2015); Therefore, the progress of the Contemporary Silk Road from the Xinjiang region will disappear with the sustainable development of the fields of instability and instability (as well as poverty and unemployment).

The control of radicalism among the Uyghurs of Xinjiang by increasing the investment in the infrastructure of Xinjiang and also changing the composition of the population will be stable and consistent in following the plans of the modern Silk Road. This issue shows that the Contemporary Silk Road will not only create a framework for the exercise of China's power beyond its borders, but more importantly, it will protect its national security and territorial integrity. China can deter competitors from meddling in its domestic affairs only by continuing

economic growth and relying on unbalanced progress, and the formation of the Contemporary Silk Road is the only and most important tool for Beijing to continue this growth and development.

From this perspective, the Contemporary Silk Road, rather than being based on the aggressive intentions of Beijing's leaders, as the United States and other competitors of China think, is based on China's defense intentions and security demands; For this reason, the Contemporary Silk Road will not remain only as a nominal plan, because it will be the most important guarantor of China's independence and territorial integrity. In short, this program is a way to achieve security in the insecure Xinjiang region through development-based economic plans that connect coastal China to Western China and Central Asia.

8. Afghanistan: breaking security and the presence of America

In the past, the region of present-day Afghanistan, as a part of Greater Khorasan was among the most significant regions through which the southern ancient route of the historical Silk Road passed. However, it has been decades that insecurity has gripped the country of Afghanistan. From this perspective of the leaders of Beijing, this long-standing insecurity is considered a potential threat to the security of Xinjiang and also to the trade routes of Central Asia. In other words, Beijing's leaders consider China's policy in Afghanistan to be intertwined with the security of Xinjiang and its presence in Central Asia.

This concern is not unfounded. In the 1980s, many of the forces of the East Turkestan Islamic Movement¹⁶ and the allies of the Mujahideen of Afghanistan joined Al-Qaeda in the 1990s.

The interesting point is that China itself had sent these Uighur forces to Afghanistan in the 1980s to help the Afghan Mujahideen in the war with the Red Army; A decision that later turned into the most important internal problem for the national security of China and its eastern borders; Therefore, Afghanistan has been the source of the most important external threat to the Contemporary Silk Road and China's security, because according to the Chinese, a weak Afghanistan will be a haven for terrorists.

Despite the consensus of Chinese strategists on the significance of the role and position of Afghanistan in the Contemporary Silk Road, there is no agreement among them for the type of relationship with Kabul and its integration with this master plan. To put it more clearly, the most important drivers for China's policy in Afghanistan are the security of its western regions and its territory in Xinjiang; Therefore, China's security priority in Afghanistan means that China's view of Afghanistan in the final stage is not economic, and for this reason, the possibility of the Contemporary Silk Road passing through Afghanistan is very low.

In addition, Afghanistan will be the most important foothold of Americans in the region to contain China. Many Chinese strategists are of the opinion that if America was not involved in the war in Afghanistan after its conquest, it would have controlled China sooner and with more force (Zimmerman, 2015); This means that America's presence in the East, in the South China Sea, and in the West, in Afghanistan, completes China's strategic encirclement ring. The conflicting point of Afghanistan's author is that China does not want America to leave Afghanistan at once, because a security vacuum will be created (Starr, 2009).

This security gap will be a strategic location for the forces of the Islamic Movement of East Turkestan. There are even important signs of the Taliban regaining power and the rise of Daesh in Afghanistan. It is in such a situation that Wang Yi, the Chinese Minister of Foreign Affairs, emphasized during his visit to Kabul that China firmly believes "the peace and stability of Afghanistan is crucial for the security of Western China, and more significantly, for the overall peace and development." It affects the region" (Reuters, 2014).

The consequence of not solving the insecurity issue in Afghanistan will be the weakening and breaking of the potential cooperation between Kabul and Beijing. Also, the issue of China's security priority in Afghanistan, from China's economic point of view, reduces this country; For this reason, the passage of the new silk route

¹⁶ ETIM -- 1. Eastern Turkistan Islamic Movement

from Afghanistan is less likely. Despite the possibility of the main route of the dry belt of the Contemporary Silk Road passing through Afghanistan, Beijing has tried to launch plans related to its master plan. In this direction, the Chinese undertake the renovation of the infrastructures. In advance, the 75-kilometer Mazar-e-Sharif to Hirtan train, which plays an important role not only in transportation, but also in the extraction facility for mineral materials in Afghanistan, established in 2011, was constructed with a loan from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Army, 2013).

The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank, forerunners, had started a series of feasibility studies for railways and rail lines within Afghanistan and also between Afghanistan and its neighbors. This railway, which is financially supported by the Export-Import Bank of China and the Asian Development Bank, passes through six provinces of Afghanistan (Kunduz, Balkh, Jozjan, Faryab, Badghis, and Herat), and the feasibility studies show that it is an Iranian company. (has done Asia Plus, 2014). The World Bank also conducted a feasibility study of the same route in 2012. Based the World Bank report, the route between Kunduz and Iran's border is the most likely and the most promising option; as it has the ability to "strengthen economic development across the northern border of Afghanistan" (Harral, Winner, Thompson, Sharp & Klein, 2012).

In this direction, effective steps have been taken to implement the agreements between Kabul and Monday and to protect the border security between the two countries (Pahjwok Afghan News, 2018). In short, the leaders of China do not consider Afghanistan to be an important player for the implementation of the Contemporary Silk Road grand plan, simultaneously, they have endeavored to enhance the level of relations with Kabul.

9. Conclusion

At present, the Contemporary Silk Road is the most powerful macro-strategy that has the ability to transform the international power structure. This transformation affects the geopolitics of Eurasia and other regions of the "Island of the World¹⁷" (Mackinder, 1904). In the meantime, the Central Asian region will be the first and most important region that will be under the pressure of the transformations resulting from this master plan. Geographical neighborhood, historical entanglement, and the emergence of Central Asian republics will all be the foundation for the consequences of the rise of the Contemporary Silk Road in this region.

Considering the importance of Central Asia in the foreign policy of Afghanistan and Iran, geopolitical changes in this region will affect the power structure in Iran's surrounding environment; Therefore, this research tries to reveal the dominant trends and routes of the Contemporary Silk Road, and to achieve this goal, it lists the actors of the Contemporary Silk Road who can change the geopolitics of Central Asia. take away.

Contrary to many published writings about this master plan, which have only focused on its consequences at the international level and the Beijing-Washington rivalry, the leading writing, the impact of the actions of important players in the heart of Eurasia is goat. showed the vein; Therefore, check here China's investments in Central Asia and the policies of these countries regarding this plan.

We also pointed out China's occupations in Xinjiang and Afghanistan. As history has shown, the expansion and strengthening of the Silk Road is accompanied by war and conflict. The ancient silk road was spread in Europe only after the crusades and then the invasion of the Mongols and the complete conquest of Eurasia. In the latter half of the 19th century, the competition between Russia and Great Britain and the "Great Game" took place in this heartland of the world island, and today the new great game between China and America is also ongoing. The center of this big game, once again, will be Central Asia.

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¹⁷ World Island

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