



Executive Summary

Strategic Studies Institute and U.S. Army War College Press



CHINA'S RISE AND RECONFIGURATION OF CENTRAL ASIA'S GEOPOLITICS: A CASE FOR U.S. "PIVOT" TO EURASIA

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China's emergence as a global actor has questioned the position of the United States as the strongest power and the future of the Washington-led global order. But achieving the status of a truly global player wielding influence in all dimensions of power would require China, among other things, to leverage its regional influence in Central Asia. This region is increasingly representing China's western leg of economic expansion and development, and is of a growing strategic importance for Beijing. It is also a region that should be of greater strategic importance to Washington, which seeks to preserve its leading position in the international system and ensure China's peaceful integration in the global political, security, and economic architecture.

The question of future economic and security order in Central Asia is thus of paramount importance to global stability. The region is experiencing constantly shifting "push-pull" forces exerted by external powers, which advance agendas conflicting with those of other powers and the Central Asian states, thereby increasing the risks of regional and global conflicts. Russia "pulls" the region north, the European Union, west; the United States, west and south; India, south; and China, east. While none of them yet wield an overwhelming influence across all areas, China is already projecting the strongest economic presence in the region and has the potential to build "comprehensive influence" across economic, cultural, political, military, and security spheres.

Just as in the Asia-Pacific, it is the rise of China and its perceived efforts at domination in Central Asia that are driving the reconfiguration of the region's geopolitics and are challenging the U.S.

global supremacy, requiring Washington to advance creative economic and military solutions in the heart of Eurasia. To stay relevant globally and regionally, the United States has to pursue a robust, direct, and long-term strategy of engagement in Central Asia. Specifically, Washington should complement its "Pivot to the Pacific" with a "Pivot to Eurasia" in order to effectively shape China's rise and the global and regional security and economic orders.

As it seeks to do so, Washington cannot premise its cooperation with other powers in Central Asia on the isolation of China—a global force calling for engagement where beneficial and containment where necessary. Washington should boost military engagement in the region, upgrade its New Silk Road Strategy (NSRS), advance cooperation with key partners, and shape China's global ascendance by leveraging its position in Central Asia. It should consider joining multilateral institutions involving the regional countries and China, or seek the creation of new ones to shape China's regional activities. It should link its NSRS with China's "belt" strategy where it benefits the region's development while ensuring multidirectional contours of regional geo-economic forces. It should also start pondering how to leverage its potential strategic relationship with Iran, which links the Middle East with Central and South Asia, and shares growing economic ties with China. Finally, it should develop platforms of cooperation with China in economic and security spheres pertaining to both global and regional affairs.

None of these tasks are easy to accomplish. But if there were any major failure that could characterize U.S. current or future regional policy on China, it

would be Washington's lost opportunity to connect the dots by zooming in on the region destined to serve as a nexus of the U.S. global policy toward traditional and emerging powers alike. If it sees that interest clearly, its commitment to achieving it will follow. This work sheds light on the crucial forces at work, assesses the possibility and implications of China's hegemony in Central Asia, and highlights the need for Washington to play real politics at the table rather than from across the high seas.

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