

# EURASIA IN THE NEW GEO-POLITICAL ORDER

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## INTRODUCTION

Ever since the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, the term 'Eurasia' has been extensively used by different scholars to define the combined landmass of 'Europe' and 'Asia', covering around 40 percent of the earth's surface, sheltering almost 70 percent of the global population (4.9 billion people) and producing 60-65 percent of the world's Gross Domestic Product (GDP).<sup>1</sup> It has been described as a continent, a region, a concept or a notion, and so on and so forth. However one defines it, one of the basic features of Eurasia is that it certainly holds a major part of the global demographic, geographical and economic potential, along with richness of natural resources, thus, offering enormous appeal to various global and regional players. Consequently, in the past few years, an unprecedented interest of various players has been witnessed in Eurasia. The belief is that multiple advantages could be gained by engaging with this somewhat open-ended global space. Further, a number of developments from 1990 onwards at the international level have thrust the concept of Eurasia firmly into centrestage.

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1. Gil Seong Kang, and Yongkul Won, "Eurasian Economic Integration and Regional Connectivity", [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311707061\\_Eurasian\\_Economic\\_Integration\\_and\\_Regional\\_Connectivity](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/311707061_Eurasian_Economic_Integration_and_Regional_Connectivity), accessed on 18 February, 2019. Also see, Samir Saran, "The Revenge of History: Eurasia Rises", June 8, 2018, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/41456-the-revenge-of-history-eurasia-rises/>. Accessed on February 20, 2019.

**One of the basic features of Eurasia is that it certainly holds a major part of the global demographic, geographical and economic potential, along with richness of natural resources, thus, offering enormous appeal to various global and regional players.**

The dissolution of the Soviet Union brought about the demise of the Cold War (bipolar world) and changed the global geo-political dynamics. The United States' unrivalled supremacy in world politics remained unquestionable throughout the 1990s, but with the growing political, economic and military influence of emerging actors like China, Japan and European Union, etc. in the second half of the 2000s, fundamental questions were raised about the sustainability of the unipolar structure of world politics.<sup>2</sup>

Also, dramatic political, social and economic developments in many of the Asian, African and post-Soviet countries in the 21st century provided a totally new context for the reevaluation of these regions, and the patterns of their interaction with other parts of the world. Hence, in place of the old geo-political parameters that have dominated much of the 20th century, the necessity to revise the political spaces of the globe has been realised.<sup>3</sup> As a result, the geographical mass of Eurasia has become a vast, open playfield. Against this background, the present paper will try to evaluate the significance of Eurasia in the contemporary times. For that, it is important to understand the different contextualisations of Eurasia and analyse the factors that make it so significant.

## **WHAT IS EURASIA?**

As mentioned above, the term Eurasia has been used in various contexts by various scholars/authors but there is a lack of consensus among them regarding its meaning and ramifications. However, broadly speaking, this terminology is considered to be closely associated with the erstwhile Soviet

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2. Emre Ersen, "Rise of New Centres of Power in Eurasia: Implications for Turkish Foreign Policy", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 5, 2014, pp. 1845-186, <http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S1879366514000049>. Accessed on February 19, 2019.
  3. Mark Bassin, "Re-imagining World Spaces: The New Relevance of Eurasia", <https://humanitiesfutures.org/papers/re-imagining-world-spaces-new-relevance-eurasia/>. Accessed on February 19, 2019.

Union, and in the present times, the post-Soviet republics.<sup>4</sup> When the Soviet Union ceased to exist in 1991, the former Soviet republics were naturally described as the 'post-Soviet' republics because of their (i) common historical past; (ii) common perceptions and behavioural pattern on different issues; (iii) deep ideological, social and economic linkages, etc., but over a period of time, the usage of this term became less reasonable. The term 'post-Soviet' does imply 'what remains of the Soviet decades' but expresses difficulty in comprehending how each of the post-Soviet republics will approach the changes

that it may have to face in the future. Therefore, in parallel, some other terms have emerged and Eurasia is one of them. Of course, a change of term cannot encompass all the ongoing processes but it does appeal to the belief that the "Soviet" element does not make much sense in capturing today's progressions.<sup>5</sup> Hence, Eurasia is now being used as a synonym to the post-Soviet space. It is being widely used by academicians in order to give a broader perspective to the ongoing changes in the region. Therefore, here the term Eurasia has reemerged as just a designation of a particular region, with no ideological connotations attached to it. Significantly, the word 'reemergence' symbolises that its roots are much older and it is not just terminology but a political-ideological and philosophical notion.<sup>6</sup> Various perspectives and theories have been articulated by historians, philosophers,

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4. Marlene Laruelle, "The Notion of Eurasia: A Spatial, Historical, and Political Construct", in Edward C Holland and Matthew Derrick, eds, *Questioning Post-Soviet* (Washington: Wilson Centre), 2016, p. 127, Also see, Evgeny Vinokurov and Alexander Libman, "Eurasia and Eurasian Integration: Beyond the Post-Soviet Borders", *MPRA Paper No. 49182*, 2012, <http://mpra.ub.uni-muenchen.de/49182/>. Accessed on February 17, 2019.

5. Ibid.

6. Mathew Schmidt, "Is Putin Pursuing a Policy of Eurasianism?", [http://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/13\\_1\\_Y35592282447U832.pdf](http://demokratizatsiya.pub/archives/13_1_Y35592282447U832.pdf). Accessed on February 17, 2019.

geographers and leaders to describe this notion in order to pursue their respective goals. Moreover, there is also a rich legacy of Eurasianism by classical and neo-classical writers to sustain the Eurasianist perspective.

### EURASIA IN A GEOGRAPHICAL CONTEXT

In the 19th century, the term Eurasia was defined in a geographical context. The natural scientists, especially geologists like Eduard Suess, defined it as a single continental landmass comprising both Europe and Asia, which until that time had been treated as two separate continents. Therefore, the term then also moved from geology to cultural and racial contexts to refer to children of ethnically mixed couples.<sup>7</sup> Further, for them, since Russia is located in the centre of this landmass, it gets the natural right and power to play a dominating role there to protect, promote and preserve its unique Eurasian identity.<sup>8</sup> The founding fathers of Eurasianism further explained that Russia is Eurasia in the sense that its geographical and cultural features are similar to those of the whole of Eurasia. They argued that the peripheries of Eurasia should get assimilated with the centre and, thus, the naturalness of Russia's imperial structure gets justified. Eurasianists also aimed at the unification of Eurasia by shared spatial features—a dialectic between forest and steppe, geographical symmetry and geometrical rationality and by similar anthropological, linguistic, and cultural criteria. They wanted that all the Eurasian people should share the same destiny and should, therefore, live under the same state structure.<sup>9</sup>

Besides the geographical context, the term Eurasia also referred to the cultural identity of the inhabitants of the Eurasian geography. The main cultural constituents of the Eurasians were orthodox Christianity, Buddhism and

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7. Laruelle, n. 4, p. 129.

8. Golam Mostafa, "The Concept of 'Eurasia': Kazakhstan's Eurasian Policy and its Implications", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, no. 4, 2013, p. 161.

9. Laruelle, n.4; also see, Marlene Laruelle, "Eurasia, Eurasianism, Eurasian Union- Terminological Gaps and Overlaps", *PONARS Eurasian Policy Memo No. 366*, July 2015, [www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/eurasia-eurasianism-eurasian-union-terminological-gaps-and-overlaps](http://www.ponarseurasia.org/memo/eurasia-eurasianism-eurasian-union-terminological-gaps-and-overlaps), accessed on March 11, 2019; Li Xin, Hu Yuanhong, "Eurasian Partnership: A New Balance of Power?", January 3, 2018, <https://doc-research.org/2018/01/eurasian-partnership-new-balance-power/>. Accessed on March 11, 2019.

Islam—all combined together into the ‘symphonic personality of Eurasia’.<sup>10</sup> They have evolved over the years in their own unique ways. Moreover, the role of the Kievan state, Mongol conquest, Europe-Russia relations in the 18th century, influence of Slavophile and pan-Slavic movements, Russian revolution, impact of massive emigration of non-Communist supports in 1917, Russian expansion towards the Far East in early 1920, etc.; all these factors helped in strengthening the spirit of Eurasianism. In fact, Eurasia was perceived as the only plausible frontier of common identity and as “the third way”,<sup>11</sup> i.e. neither Socialist nor Communist.<sup>12</sup> The Russians, because of the above-mentioned influences/factors, were apprehensive about the potential threats emerging from the regional identities, i.e. pan-Islamism, pan-Turkism, pan-Asianism, etc. Therefore, they promoted an all-Eurasian identity to unite the people of Russia and its periphery in a single unit.<sup>13</sup> From the classical Eurasianist’s point of view, the following aspects were derived to define Eurasianism:

- An idea of a cultural dialogue between Europe and Asia.
- The definition of a great ethnic entirety.
- An ideological or political movement of the 1920s.
- An idea of regional integration.<sup>14</sup>
- A justification for the existence and role of Russia as an empire.

However, the classical thinking remained somewhat ambiguous, because a definite explanation as to how to emphasise Russia’s position in Eurasia—whether it represents a potential political and cultural hub between Europe and Asia or not—never emerged.<sup>15</sup>

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10. Madhavan K Palat, “Eurasianism as an Ideology for Russia’s Future”, *Economic and Political Weekly*, vol. 28, no. 51, December 18, 1993, p. 2799.

11. Ibid.

12. Didier Claudet, et al., *When Empire Meets Nationalism; Power and Politics in the US and Russia* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2009), pp. 44-45 as quoted from Aryanta Nugraha, “Neo-Eurasianism in Russian Foreign Policy: Echoes from the Past or Compromise with the Future?”, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324449324\\_Neo-Eurasianism\\_Russian\\_Foreign\\_Policy\\_Echoes\\_from\\_thr\\_Past\\_or\\_Compromise\\_with\\_the\\_future](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/324449324_Neo-Eurasianism_Russian_Foreign_Policy_Echoes_from_thr_Past_or_Compromise_with_the_future). Accessed on March 17, 2019.

13. Mostafa, n. 8.

14. Ibid.

15. Nugraha, n. 12.

Following the collapse of the Soviet Union, classical Eurasianism was replaced by neo-Eurasianism which is considered to be more elaborative. Neo-Eurasianism, though it belongs to the Russian school of thought, was neither an adaptation of classical Eurasianism nor a continuation of the same to the post-Soviet phase.<sup>16</sup> It, however, constitutes a new trend in the Russian nationalist thinking, except for the assumption that Russia-Eurasia is a distinct cultural entity which is different from both Asia as well as Europe.<sup>17</sup> The term neo-Eurasianism was introduced by Aleksandr Dugin in the 1990s and is deeply rooted in the cultural and political philosophy of the European New Right.<sup>18</sup> He challenges the 'Atlanticists New World Order' theory which, according to him, is based on the idea of Westernisation (combination of American and European cultures) and not on universalism. Hence, it dilutes cultural and national diversity, which are the core values for the Eurasian order. According to Dugin, it is only under the Russian led 'New Eurasian Order' that the interests of various Eurasian nations and their cultural traditions can be secured.<sup>19</sup> Besides, another scholar, Andrei Tsygankov,<sup>20</sup> classified the neo-Eurasianist trends in Russia into four categories while maintaining the diversity of Eurasia and emphasising the fact that they view Russia as the heartland and the state responsible for organising the post-Soviet disorder. For him, these four categories are of Expansionists, Civilisationists, Stabilisers, and Geo-economists, with their own views and perceptions. The Westernisers believe that Russia is largely a European

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16. Andreas Umland, "Why Aleksandr Dugin's "New Eurasianism" Is not Eurasianist", *New Eastern Europe*, June 8, 2018, <https://neweasterneurope.eu/2018/06/08/aleksandr-dugins-neo-eurasianism-not-eurasianist/>. Accessed on February 15, 2019.
  17. John Mosbey, "Alexander Dugin's "Neo-Eurasianism and Sacred Geography—Part One", March 1, 2018, [http://www.academia.edu/36053932/Neo-Eurasianism\\_Alexander\\_Dugins\\_Adaptation\\_Part\\_1.docx](http://www.academia.edu/36053932/Neo-Eurasianism_Alexander_Dugins_Adaptation_Part_1.docx). Accessed on February 15, 2019.
  18. Alexander Dugin, "The Geopolitics of the European New Right" in *The Fourth Political Theory*, <http://www.4pt.su/en/content/geopolitics-european-new-right>. Accessed on February 15, 2019.
  19. Anton Shekhovtsov, "Aleksandr Dugin's Neo-Eurasianism: The New Right à la Russe", *Religion Compass*, vol. 3, no. 4, 2009, p. 697, <https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/j.1749-8171.2009.00158.x>. Accessed on March 20, 2019.
  20. A.P. Tsygankov, "Mastering Space in Eurasia: Russia's Geopolitical Thinking after the Soviet Break-up", *Communist and Post-Communist Studies*, vol. 36, 2003, p. 106, [https://is.muni.cz/do/fss/57816/40125114/Tsygankov\\_A.\\_Mastering\\_Space\\_Euroasia\\_Comm.Studies\\_36\\_2003.pdf](https://is.muni.cz/do/fss/57816/40125114/Tsygankov_A._Mastering_Space_Euroasia_Comm.Studies_36_2003.pdf), Accessed on March 20, 2019.

country because it has more common elements of history, religion and culture with the West/Europe than Asia, therefore, it must associate itself with the Western world and its institutions. Geo-economists emphasised that Russia is a Eurasianist power because of its location at the 'intersection' of various economic, as well as cultural, influences in the region. This strategic location will help it to develop a coherent strategy of trans-regional development and establish political order and peace in the region. The stabilisers believe in the philosophy that Russia's role in the region since the disintegration of the USSR is that of stabilising Eurasia. For them, the key word for the Russian security mission in Eurasia is 'stabilisation' rather than viewing it as a traditional territorial empire or self-sufficient civilisation. Expansionists and civilisationists belong to the conservative (politically) factions of Eurasianist thinking. They perceive Russia as a culturally anti-Western state and a constantly expanding territorial empire. For them, constant accumulation of power by way of territorial expansion is the only appropriate way to resist the Atlanticist influences. In this endeavour, they even want to pit Europe against the United States to build a larger geo-political axis of allies such as Germany, Iran, Japan, etc.<sup>21</sup> Thus, for neo-Eurasianists, the role and position of Russia is 'central' in the Eurasian space and they emphasise that Eurasia is a better alternative to both 'Atlanticism' and 'globalism'. The visibility of the concept of neo-Eurasianism is quite apparent in the current Russian foreign policy under President Putin also. The launching of the Eurasian Union [presently called the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU)] project in 2011, was seen as the victory of Eurasianist ideology.<sup>22</sup> EAEU, a Eurasian integration project led by Russia, with Kazakhstan, Belarus, Armenia and Kyrgyzstan as the other member states, is aimed at providing a common legal framework for the energy markets and free movement of labour and to further develop the integration process among the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)<sup>23</sup> and beyond. President Putin's policies towards the South

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21. Ibid.

22. Laruelle, n. 4.

23. Gulaikhan Kubayeva, "Economic Impact of the Eurasian Economic Union on Central Asia", *Central Asia Security Policy Brief*, February 2015, OSCE Academy in Bishkek, [http://osce-academy.net/upload/file/policy\\_brief\\_20.pdf](http://osce-academy.net/upload/file/policy_brief_20.pdf). Accessed on July 25, 2017.

**The British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, was the first one to coin the term Eurasia in the geo-political context. He conceptualised Eurasia in traditional geo-political thinking through his concepts of the “geo-political pivot of history” and “heartland” and placed it at the centre of world affairs.**

Caucasian countries, his vision of Greater Eurasia, etc. have been seen as the policy of Eurasianism in action. His vision is reflected in his statements like, “...Greater Eurasia is not an abstract geo-political arrangement but, without exaggeration, a truly civilization-wide project looking towards the future”.<sup>24</sup> Greater Eurasia, according to him, is not only the amalgamation of post-Soviet republics, but integration with other formats, like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), etc., hence, establishing ties with new states and economies.<sup>25</sup> Further, Putin has proposed that

the Greater Eurasia initiative is open for Europe too and expects that Europe will eventually join.<sup>26</sup> Thus, the impact of neo-Eurasianism is visible in the Russian foreign policy under President Putin, which is showing integrationist inclinations wherein he is trying to fix all the political trends.

## EURASIA IN GEO-POLITICAL CONTEXT

The British geographer, Sir Halford Mackinder, was the first one to coin the term Eurasia in the geo-political context. He conceptualised Eurasia in traditional geo-political thinking through his concepts of the “geo-political pivot of history” and “heartland” and placed it at the centre of world affairs.<sup>27</sup> He argued that the “heartland”, which roughly corresponds

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24. “Putin’s Speech at Beijing Forum: The Future Belongs to Greater Eurasia”, 15 May, 2017, <https://www.sott.net/article/351078-Putins-speech-at-beijing-forum-the-future-belongs-to-greataer-eurasia>. Accessed on February 18, 2019.

25. Ibid.

26. Li Xin and Hu Yuanhong, “Eurasian Partnership: A new Balance of Power”, January 3, 2018, <https://doc-research.org/2018/01/eurasian-partnership=new-balance-power/>. Accessed on February 12, 2019.

27. HJ Mackinder, “The Geographical Pivot of History (1904)”, *The Geographical Journal*, vol. 170, no. 4, December 2004, [http://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131016\\_MackinderTheGeographicalJournal.pdf](http://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131016_MackinderTheGeographicalJournal.pdf), accessed on August 1, 2018. Also see, Ersen, n. 2.



to the erstwhile Soviet Union, was a natural fortress and the place from where, due to its geographical location, the greatest political power could be projected.<sup>28</sup> He further explained that this heartland is surrounded by an inner crescent made up of Germany, Austria, Turkey, India and China. Also, there was the outer crescent made up of Britain, South Africa, Australia, the United States, Canada and Japan. His often used quote, "He who controls East Europe commands the heartland; He who controls the heartland commands the world island; He who controls the world island, commands the world"<sup>29</sup> is considered to be the core concept for

scholars of geo-politics. Due to such interpretations, the term Eurasia has often been accompanied by discussions of the 'great game', 'new great game' or 'the grand chessboard'. Probably, the Heartland Theory has been the main inspiration for Zbigniew Brzezinski, as he presents it as the basic theme of his famous book *The Grand Chessboard*, in which he has analysed Eurasia as the geo-political battlefield, where the world's great powers fought for political and economic influence.<sup>30</sup> In his words, "Eurasia is thus the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played, and that struggle involves geostrategy—the strategic management of geopolitical interests. A power that dominates

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28. Christopher J. Fettweis, "Revisiting Mackinder and Angell: The Obsolescence of Great Power Geopolitics", *Comparative Strategy*, no. 22, 2003, pp. 109-129, [https://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131022\\_Fettweis2003RevisitingMackinderandAngell.pdf](https://www.iwp.edu/docLib/20131022_Fettweis2003RevisitingMackinderandAngell.pdf). Accessed on February 27, 2019.

29. Christopher J. Fettweis, "Sir Halford Mackinder, Geopolitics, and Policymaking in the 21st Century", *Parameters*, vol. xxx, no. 2, Summer 2000, p. 58, Jacqueline Lopour, "Geopolitics at the World's Pivot: Exploring Central Asia's Security Challenges", *CIGI Papers no. 80*, November 2015, p. 2.

30. Ersen, n. 2.

Eurasia would control two of the world's three most advanced and economically productive regions".<sup>31</sup> True to his prediction, the Central Asian region serves as an important crossroads between Europe and Asia because of its geo-strategic location in the heart of Eurasia. In fact, goods and services have flowed across the region since ancient times connecting Europe, China and West Asia, thus, establishing many trade hubs. In modern times, the region has once again become the site of the geo-political and geo-economic interest of various external powers. These landlocked republics have borders with Iran and Afghanistan to the south, China to the east and Russia to the northwest. This strategic location and their energy resources make them increasingly important in the geo-strategic great game. Traditionally, Central Asia has been an arena of the great game where Russia and Great Britain vied for dominance. In modern times, the great game is being played out by multiple global powers such as Russia, China, Japan and the US. Regional powers such as Turkey, Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan all play a crucial role in this great game because of their substantial security and economic interests in the region.

Among the new actors that have entered the region with their own specific objectives and strategies, the People's Republic of China (PRC) occupies a prominent position. China has not only bypassed Russia as the region's leading trade-partner, but also three of the Central Asian Republics (CARs) (Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) are now connected to China with oil or natural gas pipelines and, for the first time in decades, have access to a sizeable export alternative to the Russian market and transit system. Besides extensively building oil and gas pipelines and developing a network of transportation links, China has also expanded its diplomatic and cultural presence in the region over the last 25 years. Alexander Cooley in his book *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia*, calls China a "winner on

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31. Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard-American Primacy and its Geostrategic Imperatives* (Basic Books, 1997), pp. xiv-33.

points” in the new Central Asian Great Game.<sup>32</sup> He argues, “Not only has China tailored its engagement to each of the CARs but has also sought to convince them that it seeks ‘win-win solutions’, a ‘harmonious region of peace and prosperity’, and non-interference in their domestic affairs, while it has tirelessly sought to reassure Russia that it harbours no regional hegemonic ambitions and continues to recognize Moscow’s claim to be the region’s privileged power.”<sup>33</sup> Similarly, Artyom Lukin in one of his write-ups, has gone to the extent of describing China “as the new contender for control over Mackinder’s Heartland”.<sup>34</sup>

### EURASIA IN HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Throughout history, people have moved from one place to another for the exchange of goods, skills and ideas, and during ancient times, Eurasia was interweaved with communication routes and corridors of trade that over the years got linked up to form the Silk Road. Thus, the Silk Road indicates the routes for the exchange of silk and other goods and transfer of information among people across the world, dating back to prehistoric times.<sup>35</sup> It can be described as the pre-historic phase of globalisation; also known as archaic globalisation, linking different cultures and belief systems.<sup>36</sup> It should be considered here that during those times, these ancient roads did not have any name, and well-defined boundaries among countries also did not exist, therefore, Silk Road is a relatively new term. It was coined by a German geologist, Baron Ferdinand von Richthofen, in 1877. He named the trade and communication network as Die Seidenstrasse (the Silk Road).<sup>37</sup> Further, the following points need due consideration while analysing the Silk Road:

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32. Alexander Cooley, *Great Games, Local Rules: The New Great Power Contest in Central Asia* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2012).

33. *Ibid.*, p. 74.

34. Artyom Lukin, “Mackinder Revisited: Will China Establish Eurasian Empire 3.0?”, *The Diplomat*, [http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/Mackinder\\_revisited\\_will\\_china\\_establish\\_eurasian\\_empire\\_3\\_0/](http://thediplomat.com/2015/02/Mackinder_revisited_will_china_establish_eurasian_empire_3_0/). Accessed on November 23, 2016.

35. “About the Silk Road”, <https://en.unesco.org/silkroad/about-silk-road>. Accessed on March 6, 2019.

36. Mousumi Ghosh, “Silk Road: A Glance at Archaic Globalization”, <https://iwp.uiowa.edu/silkroutes/city/kolkata/text/silk-road-glance-archaic-globalisation>. Accessed on March 12, 2019.

37. n. 35.

- It is not a single road with a definite starting and ending point traversing the whole of Eurasia, but a set of different shorter routes that have fluctuated over time.<sup>38</sup>
- People often stopped on parts of the route, and only a few of them travelled its entire length.<sup>39</sup>
- Since the road was not an actual road but a stretch of shifting, unmarked paths across massive expanses of deserts and mountains, people also took different routes at different times. It is, thus, often referred to as the Silk Roads (plural), to express this multiplicity of routes.<sup>40</sup>

The Silk Road network is generally thought of as connecting Eastern and Southern Asia with the Mediterranean world, stretching from Chang'an (now Xi'an) in China across the Taklamakan desert, over the Pamirs, through the grasslands of Central Asia, into Persia and to the Mediterranean, with branches in the northern Eurasian steppes and India.<sup>41</sup> Almost 8,000 km long (which is debatable), the road crossed some of the most difficult terrain but linked up some of the greatest civilisations, like India, China, Rome and Persia.<sup>42</sup> The cyclic occurrences of competing nomads of different origins conquered the vast Eurasian steppes, established Khanates, then perished in a perpetual cycle. This happened till the end of the 19th century, when Russia took control of the whole region.<sup>43</sup> Nevertheless, with the changing times and with the advent of new routes and discoveries, new developments in the modes of transportation and new technologies, the old silk routes lost their significance. However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union and

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38. Sally K Church, "The Eurasian Silk Road: Its Historical Roots and Chinese Imagination", *The Cambridge Journal of Eurasian Studies*, February 2018, [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323130605\\_The\\_Eurasian\\_Silk\\_Road\\_Its\\_historical\\_roots\\_and\\_the\\_Chinese\\_imagination](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/323130605_The_Eurasian_Silk_Road_Its_historical_roots_and_the_Chinese_imagination). Accessed on February 15, 2019.

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Ghosh, n. 36.

42. Ibid.

43. "Analysis of Post-Soviet Central Asia's Oil & Gas Pipeline Issues", December 25, 2013, <http://www.geopolitics.ru/en/article/analysis-post-soviet-central-asias-oil-gas-pipeline-issues>. Accessed on February 18, 2019.

with the emergence of new countries, many states initiated different plans to revive the Silk Road in order to closely engage with the Eurasian region. Japan's Silk Road diplomacy of 1996, the US-proposed Silk Road strategy of 1999, South Korea's similar strategies throughout 2009-13, etc. are some examples.<sup>44</sup> But it is China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) which has garnered the most attention and is seen as China's attempts to revive the Silk Road. China, through various infrastructural projects, has been successful in linking its economy with the markets of the Central Asian region. Furthermore, the project involves linking more than 60 countries in the economic belt, hence, redefining China's networks in Asia, Africa and Europe. This can further become an important factor in restoring the previous historical, political, economic and cultural role of Eurasia.<sup>45</sup> The term Silk Road in modern times represents trans-Eurasian interactions and more and more inter-connectedness, thus, providing an economic flavour to the concept of Eurasia. The CARs are also building more linkages through trans-regional projects and moving towards Asian sub-regions. Such linkages, further, provide opportunities for creating more diplomatic partnerships as well. By strengthening such partnerships, the goal of preserving the Silk Road heritage can be achieved.

### EURASIA IN THE NEW GLOBAL ORDER

The above discussion on different contextualisations of Eurasia clearly reveals the significance of the region. This will grow further because the major geo-political trend in the present times is the economic integration of Europe with Asia through the Eurasian landmass. In fact, the term "connectivity" has become the catchword in this supercontinent. It is not only China's BRI or the Russian-led EAEU that is making headlines; rather, various other intra-regional projects are also making a mark. For instance,

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44. Timur Dadabaev, "Silk Road as Foreign Policy Discourse: The Construction of Chinese, Japanese and Korean Engagement Strategies in Central Asia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 9, 2018.

45. For details, see Viktor Eszterhai, "The Geopolitical Significance of One Belt, One Road from a Historical Perspective", November 28, 2017, <http://www.geopolitika.hu/en/2017/11/28/the-geopolitical-significance-of-one-belt-one-road-from-a-historical-perspective-2/>. Accessed on March 12, 2019.

**Rising intra-Eurasian trade flows, and changes in the economic geography of value and supply chains are decisively advancing the reconnection of the Eurasian space. The region and sub-regions which were considered as peripheral, are now becoming central bridging spaces because of the trade relations and linkages.**

existing transportation routes connecting Asia with Europe can be examined in three groups.<sup>46</sup>

- First, the Northern Route, which includes routes running across the territories of China, Kazakhstan and Russia and connecting with the European Union (EU).
- Second, the Middle Corridor that connects China to Europe through Kazakhstan, the Caspian Sea, Southern Caucasus, and Turkey.
- Third, the Southern Route, which runs from China through Kazakhstan and Iran.

Besides, the opening of the Baku-Tbilisi-Kars railway is an important development in the connectivity endeavours of Azerbaijan, Turkey and Georgia. Moreover, the Central Asian countries, along with Turkey and other West Asian countries are investing in the upgradation of their railways that includes new lines as well as new trans-national routes.<sup>47</sup> The opening of the Lapis-Lazuli Corridor is another important development which will help Afghanistan to reach out to the Central Asian, West Asian, South Caucasus and European markets. These are some of the examples which could help not only in the economic development of the region, but also lay the foundation for cooperation, peace, stability, and security of the countries involved. It would also indicate shifts in the global economy and Eurasia's reconnection. Rising intra-Eurasian trade flows, and changes in the economic geography of value and supply chains are decisively advancing the reconnection of the Eurasian

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46. ALTI Altay, "Turkey as a Eurasian Transport Hub: Prospects for Inter-Regional Partnership", <http://sam.gov.tr/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/sf-117-134.pdf>. Accessed on February 12, 2019.

47. "Turkey isn't the only regional power spending big on upgrading its railways. Throughout the Middle East and Central Asia, activity is heating up, with the investment thermometer reading as high as \$500 bn region-wide", November 9, 2018, <https://eurasiarail.eu/Articles/a-500bn-rail-spending-sprees-hits-eurasia>. Accessed on February 15, 2019.

space. The region and sub-regions which were considered as peripheral, are now becoming central bridging spaces because of the trade relations and linkages.<sup>48</sup> However, the caution here is that the region represents an area where any political change could lead to a change in the acceptance of the very concept of the BRI by that nation. For example, the CARs do have overlapping and mutually exclusive interests that could be crucial for the peace and security of the region.<sup>49</sup>

Further, the current international affairs are undergoing unprecedented changes, which have been brought about by the relative weakening of the

US dominance and rise of the non-Western powers represented by China and Russia. This state can be described as a new Cold War. In such a scenario, some scholars argue that Eurasia can emerge as the second pole against the West led by the US. The emergence of the Eurasian pole (i.e. Greater Eurasia) will make the new Cold War more complex and multi-level.<sup>50</sup> Further, Eurasia with its many emerging economies and vast energy resources is emerging as one of the most dynamic regions of the world. It also advocates a multipolar and pluralist world order through the instruments of regional and multilateral organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Eurasian Development Bank, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South

**Eurasia with its many emerging economies and vast energy resources is emerging as one of the most dynamic regions of the world. It also advocates a multipolar and pluralist world order through the instruments of regional and multilateral organisations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation and Eurasian Development Bank, Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) and New Development Bank to name a few.**

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48. Jacopo Maria Pepe, "Eurasia's Reconnection: Implications for Europe and Germany", December 15, 2017, <https://doc-research.org/2017/12/eurasias-reconnection-implications-europe-germany/>. Accessed on March 23, 2019.

49. "Eurasia on the Edge and its Global Meaning: The What, Why and How of the Eurasian Security", <http://trendsinstitution.org/Eurasia-on-the-edge-and-its-global-meaning-the-what-why-and-how-of-eurasian-security/>. Accessed on February 11, 2019.

50. Sergey Karaganov, "The New Cold War and the Emerging Greater Eurasia", *Journal of Eurasian Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2, July, 2018, pp. 85-87.

Africa (BRICS) and New Development Bank to name a few. From the *Critical Theory*,<sup>51</sup> it can be seen that international and inter-regional organisations play a crucial role in constituting historical blocs. Therefore, the analysis of this regional dynamism in Eurasia and its potential to become a new historical bloc deserves a close analysis.<sup>52</sup> In any such analysis, it would be interesting to bring out the competitive element within the regional organisations.

Another important component that demands attention is how the smaller powers of the Eurasian region see their relationship with the major powers. Specifically, the Caucasian countries, that see themselves as more European than Eurasian, are of particular significance, as the Caucasus is one of the most turbulent parts of the Eurasian region. Moreover, Eurasia, which is seen as an inter-connected economic, political and strategic concept in the context of globalisation, needs to be evaluated on the basis of how the weight and role of key components of this vast region are changing. Seemingly, the dynamic centre of the region is tilting towards the east and the conflict zone is moving to the south.<sup>53</sup>

Therefore, Eurasia—the vast landmass between Asia and Europe—needs to be understood along the conceptual building blocks of the concept of globalisation, the multilateral world order and the geo-political concept of the “core-periphery relations”.

Further, Eurasia is a land of movement, of interaction and connection, an exceptional corridor, the place where horses and chariots first came into use, a land that has been instrumental in bringing about a change in the world economic structure, accelerating changes in the word order and compelling both, the decision-makers and researchers, to reconsider the role that geography and geographic space play in international relations. Therefore, the region demands a closer and in-depth analysis.

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51. Marces Farias Ferreira, “Introducing Critical Theory in International Relations”, <https://www.e-ir.info/2018/02/18/introducing-critical-theory-in-international-relations/>. Accessed on June 4, 2019.

52. Hatice Hande ORHON ÖZDAÇ, “The Position of Eurasia in the Current World Order: An Emerging Historical Bloc”, <http://dergipark.gov.tr/download/article-file/347586>. Accessed on March 1, 2019.

53. Dmitri Trenin, “Revising the Concept Eurasia”, January 29, 2013, [https://www.rbth.com/opinion/2013/01/29/revising\\_the\\_concept\\_eurasia\\_22305.html](https://www.rbth.com/opinion/2013/01/29/revising_the_concept_eurasia_22305.html). Accessed on February 13, 2019.



### **CAN INDIA BE A PLAYER IN EURASIA?**

India is very well aware of the concept of Eurasia. The Eurasian division of the Indian Ministry of External Affairs deals with the significant part of this region. Perceiving Eurasia largely as the post-Soviet space, India has close cultural and historical linkages with the countries of the Eurasian region. However, the competitive and conflicting environment in and around the region makes India's task somewhat challenging. Therefore, India's approach towards the region needs to be viewed in the context of the current geo-political and geo-economic shifts at the regional and global levels, on the one hand, and India's bilateral/regional/multilateral engagement in the region, on the other. China's growing presence in the region and its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Russia-China equation (competition or cooperation), Russia's policy of 'pivot towards Asia', rising US-China confrontation, politics of sanctions and counter-sanctions, US-Russia confrontation, Russia-Pakistan equation, deteriorating security situation in Afghanistan, emerging uncertainties after the reimposition of sanctions on Iran by the Trump Administration, its global impact, changing equations among the countries of the region, etc. are important factors to be taken into account. These factors pose challenges as well as create opportunities for India to be a player in the region.

For example, India's dependence on Iran or the 'centrality' of the role of Iran is critical for India's connectivity with Eurasia. Iran is the pivotal link for the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC) project that connects India not only with Russia in the shortest possible time but also brings the Central Asian Republics and East European countries closer to India, thereby enhancing India's trade opportunities with them. Similarly, Chabahar port, which has already been operationalised, could also become a major link to move freight among India, Iran, Afghanistan, Central Asian Republics (Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan), Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and East European countries.<sup>54</sup>

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54. For details, see Dipanjan Roy Choudhary, "Chabahar Port Critical to Delhi's Eurasia Strategy & Connectivity Initiatives in Indo-Pacific Region", *The Economic Times*, December 26, 2018, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/chabahar-critical-to-delhis-eurasia-strategy-connectivity-initiatives-in-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/67262754.cms>. Accessed on February 11, 2019.

However, the recent US sanctions on Iran have put India in a very tight spot and made the situation very challenging for India. A significant amount of India's interests lie in Iran as well as in the United States; India, therefore, needs to adopt a very fine balance in its approach to deal with both countries.

Secondly, the Eurasian security architecture and the commercial routes are still defined by the China-Russia partnership. Both perceive the US and the Western presence on the opposite sides of the Eurasian landmass as a threat, i.e. the US' and its allies' presence in East Asia for China, and the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) for Russia. To strengthen their influence, China is going ahead with its ambitious BRI project, and Russia, with its Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Greater Eurasian Corridor. Seemingly, both are vying for the same space with their own different projects, but for the pursuance of their goals, they have developed a cooperative framework instead of competition. In May 2015, during Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia the two countries signed a "joint declaration on cooperation in coordinating the development of the Eurasian Economic Union project and the Silk Road Economic Belt and also pledged to strengthen regional economic integration and safeguard peace and stability on the Eurasian landmass".<sup>55</sup> So far, India's participation in any Eurasian connectivity project has been determined by its bilateral equations. This is evident in India's active interest in joining Russia's EAEU and contrastingly, its candid apprehension about China's BRI. Subsequently, the Chinese-Russian cooperation in the Eurasian region has led to another test of India's diplomatic abilities to manoeuvre within tight boundaries and obtain favourable results.

Therefore, to conclude, there are multiple roadblocks in India's aspirations in Eurasia, however, through projects like Chabahar and INSTC, India is trying to make its own space within this highly coveted region. In this endeavour, India must make its efforts more alluring by increasing its investments and including similar-minded countries.

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55. "China, Russia Agree to Integrate Belt Initiative with EAEU Construction", [http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off\\_the\\_Wire/2015-05/09/content\\_35527698.htm](http://www.china.org.cn/world/Off_the_Wire/2015-05/09/content_35527698.htm). Accessed on May 14, 2019.