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# **Logistical Spaces - IV**

## **The Asian Paradigm**



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**Logistical Spaces IV**  
**Connectivity as the New Asian Paradigm**

**Anita Sengupta**

**2016**



# Logistical Spaces

## Connectivity as the New Asian Paradigm

Anita Sengupta \*



*If you want to develop, build a road  
(traditional Chinese saying)*

In what is essentially a post Schengen world<sup>1</sup> regions and regional organizations are being replaced by logistical spaces that are rapidly emerging as the new components of power. Imagined in linear terms, often to the point of simplicity, these logistic and infrastructural visions have sought to reconfigure relations between sub regions as traditionally conceived. Parag Khanna in his book *Connectography* reflects this argument when he notes

Connectivity has replaced division as the new paradigm of global organization. Human society is undergoing a fundamental transformation by which functional infrastructure tells us more about how the

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world works than political borders. The true map of the world should feature not just states but megacities, highways, railways, pipelines, internet cables and other symbols of our emerging global network civilization.<sup>2</sup>

Moreover, the connection between strategic interests and connectivity initiatives has meant that regional and global connectivity is now the competitive site where geopolitical and political economic transitions will be played out. Highways, railroads, electricity networks, bridges and pipelines are the so called 'hardware' of these visions whereas reducing barriers to trade, standardizing customs duties and reducing the time to cross borders are the 'software' on which these short, medium or long term projects depend. These corridors of connectivity are essentially situated between historic routes and 'greenfield' developments and their effectiveness is related to their capacity to translate traditional routes into new logistic frameworks.

All transportational corridors have two components; they are both a spatial description of something happening on the ground and also the projection of something to be realized. As such they tend to shape a new imagination that follow existing supply chains but also the possibility of development powered by logistic connectivity. In recent times logistic strategies have sought to re-organize and consolidate politics/economics/cultures and everyday existence along the routes that they traverse. While the focus is on geo-politics and economy, specially their potential to develop business opportunities there is also the realization that it is the cultural interaction that these corridors will engender that will make them the gateway for mobility and interaction among people. This has been historically true as Buddhism was one of the most significant commodities to travel along the 'Silk Road' together with musical instruments and tea. Similarly, the Indian policy of Look/Act East is grounded in a re-discovery of the traditional Indian connect in South East Asia where trade enhanced cultural influence. Logistics is therefore as much about mobility as traditional transport geography and mobilities define logistic strategies as much as geo-political and political economic transformations. As Shaw and Hesse argue

Mobilities are about far more than just carrying people and/or commodities from A to B. Indeed mobility is seen not just as a means of providing access to workplaces and amenities but more broadly as a constitutive framework for modern society, providing opportunities and constrains—freedom and limitation, justice and inequalities and so on over time and across space.<sup>3</sup>

Rather than focusing strictly on the measureable aspects of movements mobility provides insights into the capacity of movement to create new assemblages of power, create identities but also shape the 'microgeographies' of everyday life.<sup>4</sup> While mobility technologies are promoted on the assumption that infrastructure provides a solution to problems of social or economic integration, transportation infrastructures (pipelines/roads/bridges/airports/communication linkages) may also become sites of disjunction. Mobilities, flows and spaces therefore become significant in understanding the imperatives within which logistics functions as also the occasional resistance and sensitivities that it encounters. Inexorable increases in human mobility and the impact of geography on travel and transport all lead to a varied understanding of what logistic strategies entail.<sup>5</sup> Here, the centrality of governance to geographies of transport is as significant as changing labour regimes and economic/ environmental/social concerns evident at local, regional and international levels to come to an understanding about possible future trajectories. In fact China's relentless pursuit of infrastructural alliances in terms of 'global good' has elevated infrastructure to the stature of 'security' or 'environmental protection' in a world where geopolitics is being played out in the matrix of

physical and digital infrastructure. Logistics therefore is as much about imagining as organizational modes, institutional setups and the actual corridors through which it operates.

This article is an attempt at examining logistic visions in an extended Indian neighbourhood with the idea that the emergence of new logistic spaces will be the marker of future Asian engagement generating new forms of circulation and reconfiguration of sovereignties. This reframing of spaces in logistic terms would also entail the re-organization of 'regions' as traditionally conceived. A significant indicator will be the emergence of large scale spaces of transit which will emerge as political and economic spaces in their own right and generate not just commercial activities but also social contacts. It will look into how logistical imaginations and infrastructural development interact, thereby reorienting the debate on Asian connections. It begins with an examination of the classic Mackinderian geopolitical vision where mobility was the determinant of global power and then goes on to examine how the institutionalization of mobility through a framework of corridors reframes this vision in contemporary terms. While transnational connections/flows and mega infrastructural developments attract attention, the many different pathways that local actors follow as they integrate and manage their everyday lives in the 'receiving' states of these logistic visions and the multiple relations that reconnect them to their places of origin also remain significant.<sup>6</sup> While there is attention on geopolitical strategy, resource utilization and power lobbying in the states these corridors traverse, there remain regular non-elite movements for economic/social/cultural/religious exchanges that also negotiate state borders and move beyond 'regional' confines. The motivation for these mobilities and the corresponding flow of remittances and commodity trade is the flip side of larger visions of logistical spaces that this article takes note of. It attempts this through an examination of this mobility and the particular transport vehicle that this trans-local mobility utilizes along a part of the Asian space through which these mega logistic projects traverse. In the background of these existing realities and imaginations the article concludes with an analysis of how the Indian state negotiates its logistic space through initiatives that seek to balance connections to South East Asia through its North East but also through an alternative North Western connectivity both of which are historically situated in past linkages but also anticipate future logistic patterns.

### **Imagining Spaces through Mobility**

Much as the world evolved from vertically integrated empires to horizontally interdependent states, now it is graduating towards a global network civilization whose map of connective corridors will supersede traditional maps of national borders. Each continental zone is already becoming an internally integrated mega region (North America, South America, Europe, Africa, Arabia, South Asia, East Asia) with increasing free trade coupled with intense connectivity across their thriving city-states.<sup>7</sup>

Focus on transportation capacity and the opportunities that they provide for increased global and regional investment is reminiscent of a Mackinderian world where control over transportation was the key to global hegemony. At the center of Mackinder's story was the relationship between physical geography and transportation technology. Mackinder claimed that there are three epochs of history, pre-Columbian, Columbian and post-Columbian. Each epoch is defined by what he calls 'dominant mobility of power'. With the era of geographical exploration and mobility at an end, Mackinder suggested that history was entering a post-Columbian epoch, an epoch of closed space where events in one part of the world will have rippling effects across the globe.<sup>8</sup> What Mackinder foresaw was that the traditional advantage of mobility enjoyed by the sea power was now being met in equal

measure by mobility on land brought about by the railroad and the motor vehicle. Nowhere would this have such an effect as in the closed heartland of Euro-Asia.

More than a century later the world hardly resembles the one that Mackinder wrote about. However, the geographical area that he had identified as the pivot continues to be identified as the globe's central arena and the emphasis on the significance of massive infrastructural projects across this vast space has been echoed in writings that have been considered to be of global consequence. Writing in 1997, Brzezinski begins his book with the statement, "Ever since the continents started interacting politically some five hundred years ago, Eurasia has been the centre of world power".<sup>9</sup> It is therefore not surprising that he goes on to emphasize, "how a globally engaged America copes with the complex Eurasian power relationships – and particularly whether it prevents the emergence of a dominant and antagonistic Eurasian power- remains central to America's capacity to exercise global supremacy".<sup>10</sup> He then reiterates, "...what happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and to America's historical legacy".<sup>11</sup> Echoing Mackinder who had argued, "...who rules the World Island Commands the World" Brzezinski writes that Eurasia is the chessboard on which the struggle for global primacy continues to be played. He then goes on to note that this struggle involves geostrategy, the strategic management of geopolitical interests.<sup>12</sup>

According to Brzezinski, the geopolitical issue today is no longer what geographic part of Eurasia is the point of departure for continental domination Geopolitics has moved from the regional to global dimensions, with preponderance over the entire Eurasian continent serving as the central basis for global primacy.<sup>13</sup> He goes on to argue that the United States, a non-Eurasian power, now enjoys international primacy, with its power directly deployed on three peripheries of the Eurasia continent from which it exercises a powerful influence on the states occupying the Eurasian hinterland.<sup>14</sup> However, Russia and China are the two most important countries whose presence might threaten US interests in Central Asia. In order to maintain this primacy, Brzezinski argues that Russia and China must not be allowed to combine forces thereby becoming a global power sufficiently strong to expel the United States from its post-Cold War prize of Eurasia. He notes that the replacement of Andrei Kozyrev with Yevgeni Primakov indicates a Russian interest in reviving links with Iran and China.<sup>15</sup> The alliance of China-Russia-India based on a model of Eurasian integration through massive infrastructural projects such as the Eurasian land bridge is another potential danger. However, China remains the principal adversary and Brzezinski suggests that restricting Chinese access to energy would ultimately be the determining factor in preventing China from becoming a truly global power. A more recent analysis by Robert Blackwell and Jennifer Harris<sup>16</sup> carries this argument further by noting that while America's substantial and diversified economic resources remain underutilized as a tool for grand strategy, China has successfully used geo-economics as an instrument to promote and defend national interests and to produce beneficial geopolitical results prompting the argument that rising powers must first turn to economic statecraft to buttress their geopolitical objectives. Geo-economic instruments including trade policy, investment policy, economic sanctions, cyber and foreign aid, monetary policy, energy and commodity policy are some of the instruments available to states and the interrelationship between them along with contextual features like the number and types of geo-economic targets, the goals sought and the selection of proper economic tools would determine the effectiveness of the state in the global financial market. Here, they argue China's geo-economic strategy and capacity to employ explicit and implicit economic coercion to reorient foreign policies in ways that support its geopolitical objectives has been significant.

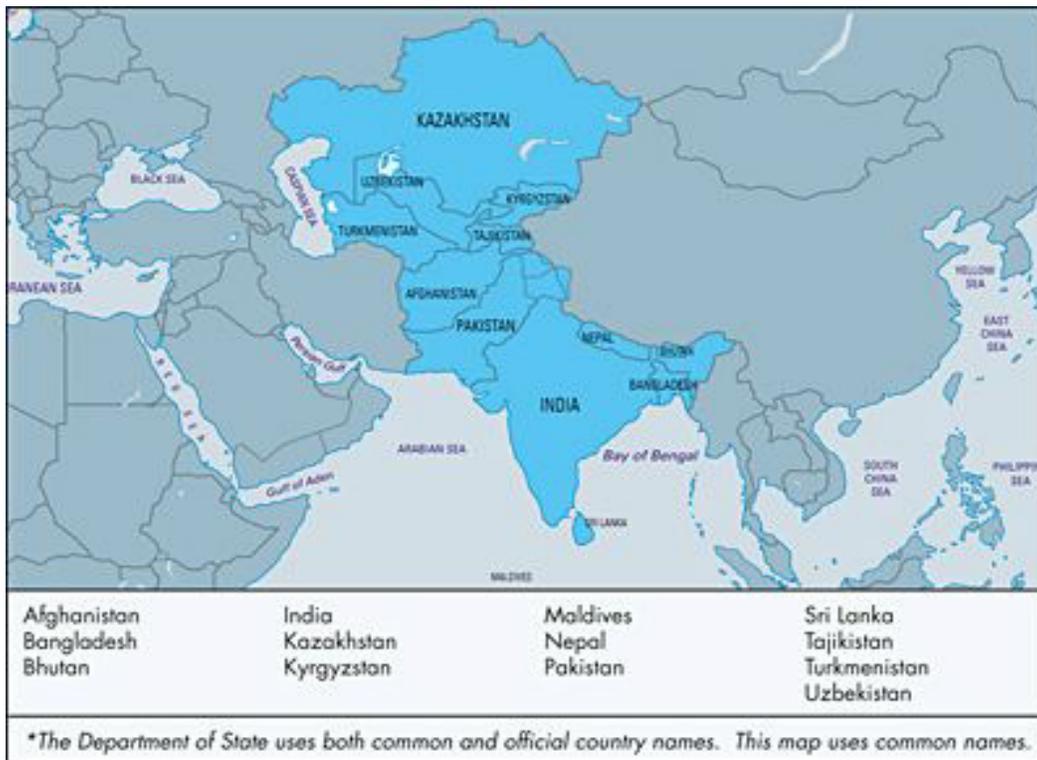
Once the setting for the historic Silk Road and host to a multiplicity of mobilities, Asia re-emerged as a useful case study for exploring the complex relationship between pursuing economic

development through trans-state linkages and promoting political agendas through securitization. In the post-Soviet context connectivity assumed central importance as did the development of inter and intra-regional trade networks. New routes and in the process new partners were sought for creating opportunities for a rethinking of traditional ways of conceptualizing partnerships within the Eurasian space. The renewed focus on Eurasia's connectivity infrastructure has its roots in the far older stories of travels from those of Marco Polo to the Mongol empire and the fabled Silk Road. Subsequent engineering advances and infrastructure has made possible what was only imagined in previous generations. Over a century ago global navigation and trade was reshaped by the construction of the Suez and Panama Canals. Today, the dream of Ottoman Sultans to connect European with Asian part of Istanbul became possible in 2013 with the construction of the Marmara tunnel. In modern times efforts to shape infrastructure across Eurasia have been underway for more than a century in Russian railway systems. Similarly, the Asian Highway and Trans Asia Railways initiative have been in place for nearly half a century. The popularly named New Silk Road initiatives refer to a variety of visions for formalizing transit flows across the Eurasian space and provide the justification for such approaches. The term Silk Road has been used by a variety of intra and extra regional players for the expansion of mobilities which require states to act as 'bridgeheads of connection and development'.<sup>17</sup> For international organizations like the United Nations, Asian Development Bank, Organization for Security and Co Operation in Europe and states promoting specific vectors of connectivity (China/Turkey/Russia/ US) impeding threatening or 'illegal' mobilities and promoting mobilities that augmented their economic positions and reoriented foreign and economic policies of Eurasian states towards them became the perceived goal of many of the Silk Road projects.

Constructing mobility technologies is an inherently political act involving financial, regulatory and technical relations that bring together the interest of actors at various levels of interest. The various 'New Silk Road' Initiatives provided opportunities for exploring the multifaceted impact of trans-state corridors of human/resource and ideational transit and were contingent on the assumed acquiescence of the participating states to varied modes of overland traversal in the interest of collective gain. Within the metaphorical frame of the New Silk Roads there were a number of strategies. The New Silk Road strategies planned by the United States and the European Union were premised on prospects for overland connection between China, India, the Middle East, Europe and Russia resulting in revenue for the Central Asian states and particularly sustainable development of Afghanistan after US withdrawal.<sup>18</sup> From the US perspective a South Asia-Central Asia transit corridor had been foreshadowed by the Northern and Southern Distribution Networks for provision of supplies for Afghanistan's military operations and included a number of infrastructural projects to facilitate the transport of resources.

The perspective was officially presented in 22 September 2011 in a speech by the then Secretary of State Hillary Clinton. She argued

For centuries the nations of South and Central Asia were connected to each other and the rest of the continent by a sprawling trading network called the Silk Road. Afghanistan's bustling markets sat at the heart of this network. Afghan merchants traded their goods from the courts of the Pharaohs to the Great Wall of China. As we look to the future of this region, let's make this precedent as inspiration for a long term vision for Afghanistan and its neighbours. Let us set our sights on a New Silk Road ---a web of economic and transit connections that will bind together a region too long torn apart by conflict and division.<sup>19</sup>



*South and Central Asia Division, Department of State, USA*

The strategic framework for this was provided by the Central Asia-Caucasus Institute (Paul H. Nitze School of Advanced International Studies, John Hopkins University) which visualized a Greater Central Asia linked to South Asia. The US Administration on the other hand looked at Central and South Asia as a single interconnected region. While the Institute put forward the conception of a new region it called Greater Central Asia linked to South Asia, the US Administration went further to formulate the conception of a new single South and Central Asia region held together by Afghanistan. Analysts like Yazmuradov note that the new regional approach was triggered both by domestic compulsions of Afghan and Iraqi developments and the geopolitical changes in Central Asia that undermined the US position there.<sup>20</sup> This conceptualization of a larger Central Asian region as a more viable unit is in fact evident in some Russian writings as well. In Russia, the political scientist Vyacheslav Belokrinitsky replaced the definition “Central Asia” with the term “Central Asian region” which includes the former Soviet Republics but also Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan.<sup>21</sup> While a difference between the components of the two perceptions of a larger Central Asian region is evident there is nonetheless a convergence on the need for a larger conceptualization reflecting the inter-connectedness of regions that seem to be at play. The ostensible reason for western efforts at encouraging trans regional mobility was based on goals of building/refurbishing infrastructure, improving connectivity for regional economic development but also broadly accepted normative reasons like opening up spaces for civil societies, rule of law and human rights. While references to “New Silk Road” has been absent from deliberations in the C5+1 (5 Central Asian States and the US) the five projects agreed upon (counterterrorism, business, transportation, energy and climate change) have much in common with previous initiative. While

capacity building, which is projected as the principal goal for the projects, may be beneficial the \$15 million pledged for the projects compare unfavourably with Chinese investments.<sup>22</sup>

The Chinese alternative vector of trade and transit, though in place ever since the independence of the Central Asian states, was articulated in terms of a consolidated 'Silk Road' during President Xi's multistate tour of the states. The explicit use of the term was presaged by years of intense economic engagement where trade grew from \$527 million in 1992 to \$40 billion in 2012.<sup>23</sup> Since this trade required infrastructural development it also offered a vector of mobility. This infrastructure took the form of rail lines, roads, airports and pipelines, one of the most significant of which are Kazakhstan-China pipeline, which is China's first direct import pipeline and the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to China via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. However, not all projects financed by Chinese policy banks are driven by commercial logic and the \$46 billion plan to finance an economic corridor through Pakistan linking the Gwadar port on the Arabian Sea to north west China is partly motivated by the need to find an alternative route for oil imports from the Middle East avoiding rising tensions in the South China Sea. Tom Miller, argues that Chinese officials privately admit they expect to lose 80% of their investment in Pakistan, 50% in Myanmar and 30% in Central Asia.<sup>24</sup> In contrast Russia lacks an official 'Silk Road' strategy though a number of other initiatives and most recently the Eurasian Economic Union has been an attempt at creating a common economic space.

The geopolitical function of what is termed as Central Eurasia has thus been reinterpreted keeping in mind requirements of regional cooperation and connectivity. One such reinterpretation examines it in terms of establishment of systemic ties between segments of the countries of Central Europe, the Central Caucasus and Central Asia. Arguing along these lines Eldar M Ismailov, Director of the Institute of Strategic Studies of the Caucasus, Baku, Azerbaijan, notes the necessity of arriving at an understanding of the historical and geopolitical developments specific to the Eurasian continent where he underlines the importance of Central Europe as the missing element that would allow the completion of the pivot area.<sup>25</sup> Given the importance of what is today one of the most significant functioning lines, the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan) and its orientation towards Europe, this is not surprising. Ismailov begins with the argument that the geopolitical situation of the 21<sup>st</sup> century has revived the conceptions formulated by Mackinder and Spykman. He then stresses what Mackinder had observed about the functional unity of Eastern Europe and the Heartland. He carries this argument forward to show how in every stage of the Heartland's development Eastern Europe has remained a spatial element of its structure. Ismailov traces the evolution of the 'pivot area' from the Hun Empire, through the Turkic and Khazar khaganates, the Arabian Caliphate, the empire of the Seljuks and Mongols, Timur's Empire, the Ottoman and Safavid Empires and the Russian and Soviet takeover of the region and shows in detail how at different times the Pivot expanded or contracted within the Empires which for several centuries replaced each other in its expanses. He argues that as a rule each of them left behind stable administrative-territorial units within which the historical evolution of the Pivot area unfolded. He argues that in the 21<sup>st</sup> century the function of the pivot area can be described as ensuring sustainable land contacts along the parallels (West-East) and the meridians (North-South).

## **Governing Connectivity**

Logistics is therefore integral to both the material and cultural aspects of connectivity and the dynamics generated by contesting logistic visions is likely to create competing networks that will reconfigure the way in which the world is imaged. In fact it could also fundamentally transform the way in which 'areas' or 'regions' have traditionally been conceptualized. When the world was analyzed

in the categories of bipolar interaction the presence of regional or sub regional subsystems was subordinate to the logic of a global division into two worlds. This exclusivity is today challenged by logistic visions reflecting contemporary geopolitics which is likely to recreate the context within which regions and 'regional' organizations are perceived.

This is reflected in Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev's definition of Eurasia. He argues

If we look at a geographical map then it is easy to notice that there is a consecutive vertical row of countries of Eurasia from Russia in the north to India in the south (Central Asian countries, Iran, Pakistan) that does not yet link either with the east or with the west. I would call this continuous belt of countries situated along the meridian of the centre of Eurasia the 'belt of anticipation'.<sup>26</sup>

Nazarbayev's "belt of anticipation" is interesting particularly since it indicates a vertical definition of the Eurasian space that is generally visualized as a horizontal expanse. This is essentially the logistic vision of a landlocked state which wishes to move out of the confines of traditional east-west routes of transportation. Much of the transportation linking Asia to Europe was historically conceptualized as east-west epitomized by the Silk Route. Of course this east-west corridor frequently had smaller north-south off shoots leading to southern ports.

The definition is also significant in terms of the actual states that are included, Russia, India and the countries in between, that is the Central Asian republics, Iran and Pakistan. The silences are, of course, more than important. The definition excludes Afghanistan, a state that is now sought to be identified as a link within the Eurasian space. In a sense, of course this vertical definition has precedence in a vision where a north-south linkage was conceptualized as an alternative transport route that would link Russia, Iran and India. The corridor was conceived as stretching from ports in India across the Arabian Sea to the southern Iranian port of Bandar Abbas where goods would then transit Iran and the Caspian Sea ports in the Russian sector of the Caspian. From there the route stretches along the Volga River via Moscow to northern Europe. Along with Russia, India and Iran this project was subsequently joined by Belarus, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Azerbaijan and Turkmenistan. The commencement of operations along the INSTC would mean that Indian containerized cargo for St Petersburg would travel by road and rail from Bandar Abbas to Astara in Azerbaijan for a forward journey up north that would touch upon the Azeri capital of Baku on the Caspian and Port Olya in the Volga delta. The route is designed so that goods could travel through a host of post-Soviet states to Europe and would reduce travel time by half. It would also link with the 240 km Indian built road corridor connecting Afghanistan with Iran. The intercontinental rail link proposed by Russia would reduce it further. Also while the actual operational costs will be clear once the lines become operational they would be significantly less than sea freight. These calculations do not take note of delays at ports of entry and assumes customs cooperation between states which in turn would be dependent on the stakeholders.<sup>27</sup>

Another alternative would be a north-south axis that then connects to the east-west one, thereby linking Central and West Asia to South and South East Asia. Late in 2005 the US administration introduced a novel idea about regional divisions by placing the Central and South Asian regions within the same division. The principles of the policy were outlined by the US State Department and reflected in the US National Security Strategy published in March 2006. This was a departure from the earlier US policy that regarded Central Asia as a separate region tied to the CIS and was in recognition of a trend in international affairs in the first part of the twenty first century where there is acknowledgement of a transformation of economic and political relations taking place throughout

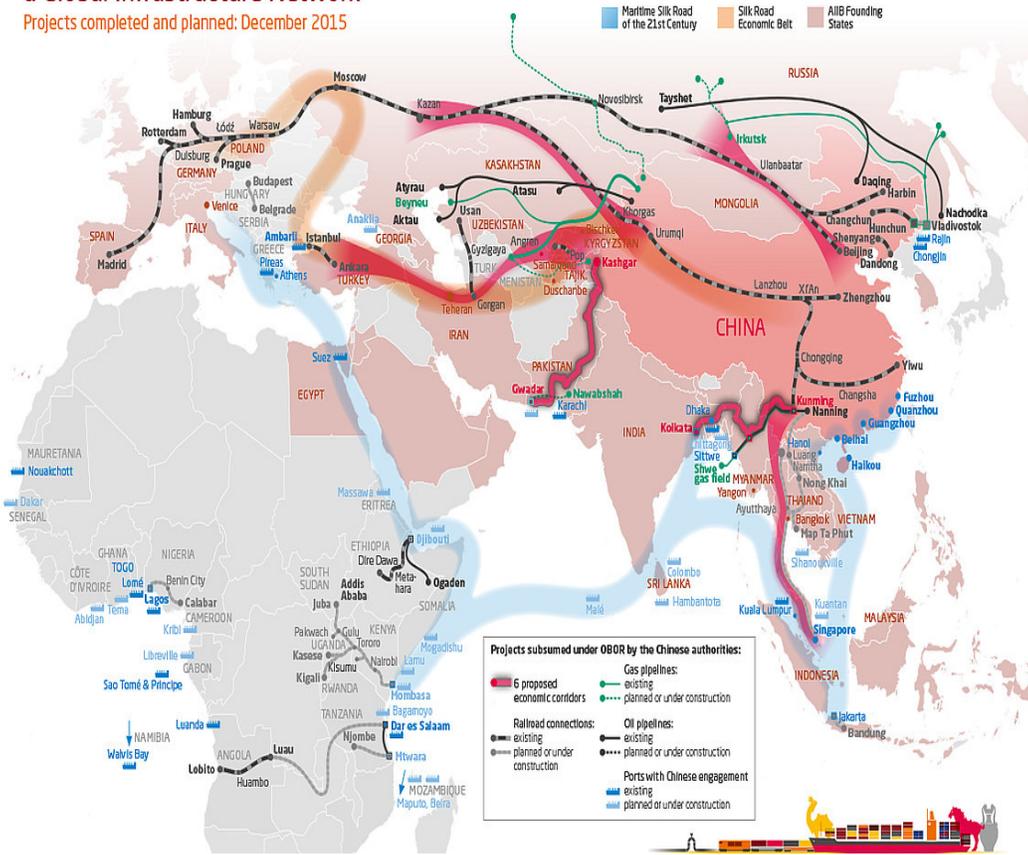
Southwest Asia, the Middle East and Eurasia. The goal was to formulate a concept to encapsulate the totality of these trends and this led to the idea of a 'Greater Central Asia' encompassing an area that included "India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran the countries of the Caucasus and the countries that were previously socialist republics in the Soviet Union and Xinjiang province of China as well as some other lands in this large and pivotal region." This was projected as a benign and equitable intellectual development that reflected the rich history of interaction in commerce and international affairs and deep rooted cultural commonalities and values.

Richard Boucher the then Assistant Secretary of State for South and Central Asian affairs noted that "South and Central Asia belong together" by virtue of Afghanistan, which lies at the centre of the region, and can be a bridge that links the two regions rather than a barrier that divides them. In fact this was also linked by a logistic vision, the Central Asian Infrastructure Integration Initiative that was launched in October 2005 and was designed to execute the implementation of the idea of turning Afghanistan into a link between Central and South Asia and integrate them into a single region. As part of the initiative priority has been given to the Almaty-Bishkek-Dushanbe-Kabul-Karachi highway, a transportational and energy corridor that would cross Afghanistan and tie Central and South Asia together. As part of this in early 2006, the US State department was restructured: Central Asia was taken away from the Bureau of European and Eurasian Affairs to become part of the Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs ---- an effort to integrate the region with its 'natural' neighbourhood. In Russia "Central Asia" has been replaced with the term "Central Asian region" which includes the former Soviet Republics but also Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. While a difference between the components of the two perceptions of a larger Central Asian region is evident there is nonetheless a convergence on the need for a larger conceptualization reflecting the inter-connectedness of regions that seem to be at play. It may be argued that this conceptualization is part of a larger global effort at creating regional configurations exemplified in Eurasia by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization. This requirement has meant that the geopolitical function of what is termed as Eurasia has been reinterpreted keeping in mind requirements of regional cooperation and connectivity. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century the function of the pivot area has been described as ensuring sustainable land contacts along the parallels (West-East) and the meridians (North-South) thereby contributing to consistent geopolitical and economic integration of large and isolated areas of the Asian continent.

There are today a number of connectivity projects that reflect this geopolitical thinking. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization will soon be joined by two South Asian states, China is set to invest \$46 billion in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor linking Kashgar to Gwadar and India will invest \$500 million in Iran's Chabahar port. Other regional connectivity projects include the Five Nations Railway Corridor (linking China to Iran via Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) and regional energy integration projects including CASA 1000<sup>28</sup> electricity transmission project, TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan, Pakistan-India) natural gas pipeline and TUTAP (Turkmenistan-Uzbekistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan) electricity transmission lines. Initiatives for integrating the South and Central Asian markets include the common Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM) which include projects like CASA 1000, TAPI, TUTAP.<sup>29</sup> Chinese led infrastructural projects include (a) Moscow-Kazan high speed railway (b) Khorgos-Aktau (Caspian port) railway (c) Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline (between Turkmenistan and China) (d) Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline, line D (extending the gas pipeline with agreements with Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan) (e) China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway (f) Khorgos Gateway (development of a dry port on the China Kazakh border)<sup>30</sup>

One Belt, One Road: With the Silk Road Initiative, China Aims to Build a Global Infrastructure Network

Projects completed and planned: December 2015



One Belt One Road

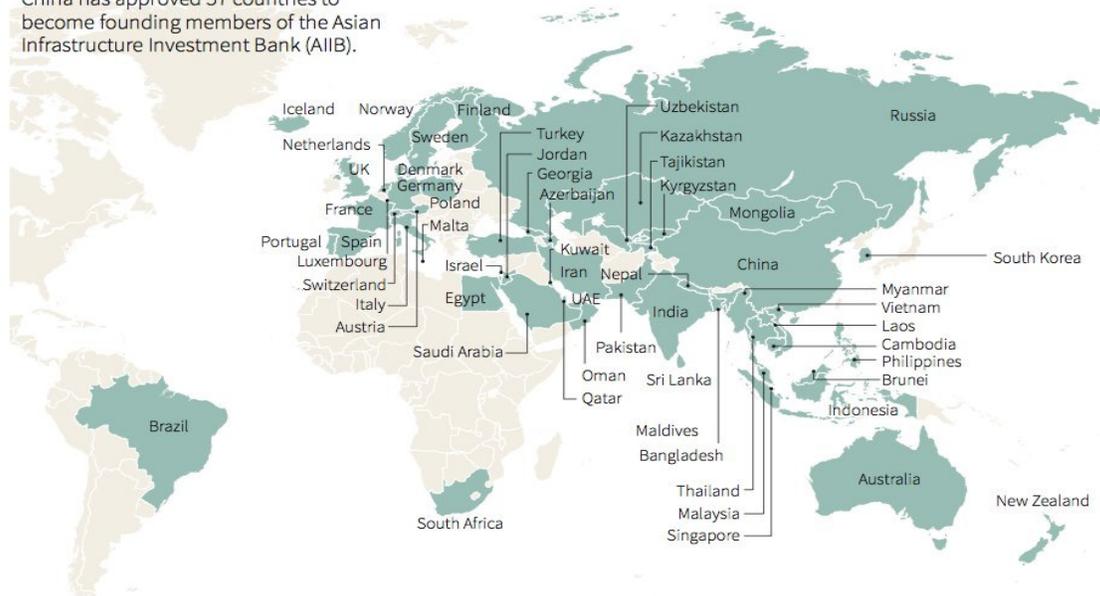
While this re-imagining presents various possibilities the overlapping of states, (no longer contained within clear bipolar divisions) in multilateral ‘regional’ organizations is another case in point. In fact institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which includes 57 non-contiguous Asian and European states including China and India may become a new ‘region’ in terms of significance. Some of these institutions have been created to support logistic visions and the AIIB itself is a recent example. This Chinese initiative supports China’s logistic vision of the One Belt One Road (OBOR) with the aim to bring South Asian economies closer to China, Central Asia and West Asia. Chinese economy had been growing rapidly for a long time, the important shift in growth pattern occurring at the time of the global economic crisis.<sup>31</sup>China’s response to this changing growth dynamic was partly external and partly internal. This period of excess capacity at home was the moment when China launched expensive new initiatives like the AIIB, the BRICS Bank and the One Belt One Road Initiative in order to strengthen infrastructure both on the westward land route from China through Central Asia and on the southerly maritime routes from China through Southeast Asia

and on to South Asia, Africa and Europe. Compared to the post War Marshall Plan, as an initiative OBOR is projected as an instrument to create a continuous land and maritime zone where countries will pursue convergent economic policies, underpinned by physical infrastructure and supported by trade and financial flows, The inclusion of people to people links is a recognition that soft power will play an important role in creating congenial political environment for sustaining the initiative. The OBOR policy document further states that the initiative is designed to uphold ‘open world economy and the spirit of open regionalism’, an obvious counter to the more exclusive US led mega economic blocks in the making the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership (T-TIP). Deeper economic integration within Asia is embedded in the larger framework of China’s attempt to build rail, road and port infrastructures across Central Asia, Afghanistan and Pakistan, thereby dramatically shortening cargo transport time between Asia and Europe/the Middle East and Africa. Another important motivation is the development of the relatively underdeveloped southern and western Chinese provinces. OBOR has a transcontinental (Silk Road Economic Belt) and maritime (Maritime Silk Route) component. Much of the transcontinental route passes through areas of traditional Russian influence and regions where Russia is attempting to recreate a common economic zone in the form of the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU).

It is therefore significant that there is a proposed amalgamation of China’s Silk Road Economic Belt and the EEU and setting up of a dialogue mechanism which is likely to create a synergy that would cover connectivity, trade, energy and raw material production in the region. There are in addition two significant energy projects linking the two states, “The power of Siberia” pipeline and the Altai gas pipeline. During the Putin-Xi summit that took place in Moscow on May 8, 2015, the leaders of Russia and China signed a joint declaration “on co-operation in coordinating the development of the Eurasian Economic Union with the Silk Road Economic Belt. The declared goal was to build a common economic space in Eurasia, including a free Trade Agreement between the EEU and China. While the positive implications of the connection is clear there remains the issue of implementing the merger of an institutionalized body like the EEU with what is essentially still an idea in the making. There is also the fact that since their interests overlap in Central Asia, multilateral formats would have to be developed for discussions. Also mechanisms would have to be developed to implement joint projects on EEU states, Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia. The institutional framework developed for the EEU free movement of funds, goods, services, and labour) would mean that implementation of these rules in the territories of the non EEU states that are within the purview of the SREB will be problematic. However, despite problems this is a synergy that India would have to take note of as it moves towards a free trade agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union. Though the SREB has been generally well received implementation could be problematic. India in particular is concerned about the maritime element of the route that moves through the Indian Ocean though it also presents possibilities of cooperation in corridors like Iran. While the strategic implications of OBOR has been viewed with concern it remains a fact that OBOR is underpinned by the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), the BRICS New Development Bank (NDB) and the proposed Shanghai Cooperation Financing Institution and all of these include or will shortly include India.

## AIB founding members

China has approved 57 countries to become founding members of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB).



Source: The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

J. Pong, 19/05/2015

REUTERS

### *AIIB Member States*

While global logistic visions, that span entire continents and beyond is one part of the contemporary logistic story, the other part of logistics is the multiple alternative corridors that span these same spaces. Too numerous to enumerate or categorize they nonetheless influence the functioning of the larger networks and occasionally even dispute their logic. In fact the significant geographical challenges to connectivity in the areas that are the operating environments for these infrastructural projects mean that these alternative logistic arrangements may provide viable arrangements where larger projects fail to materialize. In fact large scale infrastructural projects have been subject to scrutiny for increasing host country debt burdens, the high maintenance cost of low quality products and inadequate environmental sustainability which are difficult to predict and may have unintended consequences.<sup>32</sup>The much advertised Sino-Afghan Special Railway Transportation (that connects China to Afghanistan and is part of OBOR trade corridor that connects China to Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan and Iran) for instance, ran into trouble when it arrived in Hairatan and had to return empty on its way back to China as Uzbek authorities forbade cargo from arriving into their country from Afghanistan citing security reasons. According to the report from Radio Free Afghanistan, Uzbekistan wants goods to leave the Afghan border city of Hairatan on ships instead of rail and cross the Uzbek border via the Amu Darya where it can be screened by Uzbek security forces. Only then would the cargo be reloaded into the Sino Afghan train.<sup>33</sup> This circuitous route would create delays for Afghan trade with China and had not been anticipated earlier. Keeping such unintended consequences in mind, the next section will look into alternative corridors in a small segment of the region through which the New Silk Roads will operate in the

Ferghana Valley that today spans three states of Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. While a part of this mobility is traditionally entrenched in the region's economy and social contact a part of it is today the result of stagnating economies and the resultant movements that have resulted as a consequence.

### **Alternative Corridors**

In an interesting essay named "Travels in the Margins of the State, Everyday Journeys in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands", Madeleine Reeves describes the journey of Saodat-opa from the village where she spent her married life to her childhood home where her parents and brothers live. Saodat opa had been married to Illkhom aka thirty years ago when they had met as foreign language students in Leninabad, now Khujand and had left her family home to live with her husband. The two hundred kilometer distance separating the two villages had never been considered large till the establishment of independent state borders and the attempt of the state to assert territoriality and foster the perception of 'otherness'. As Saodat opa travels through Batken in Kyrgyzstan to cross into the Tajik border transformation in everyday geographies become apparent.<sup>34</sup> Restrictions at state borders have become a part of everyday reality for people in the Ferghana Valley who wish to move from one part to another to get to the local market, visit friends or relatives who now happen to be citizens of a different state or even to reach ancestral burial grounds. While Saodat opa deliberately crosses over to Kyrgyzstan (to avoid visa checks on the Uzbek-Tajik border) from where she crosses the border to Tajikistan, sometimes a bus journey from one part of the country to another requires crossing back and forth over international borders no fewer than six times in the course of a fifty kilometer journey with some of the stretches of alternating jurisdiction just a few dozen meters in length.<sup>35</sup> Reeves argues that the transformation of everyday geographies is a reality for the many individuals who live at 'the margins of the state'. It is mediated at the local level by a large reservoir of common experiences and shared cultural practices. It is also reflective of how everyday life generates its own spaces and transformations. In certain situations it also generates the vehicles of transformation. While part of the journey that Reeves undertook with Saodat opa was in 'shared cars/taxis' with others who were travelling along the same route and in a car that was travelling along the road anyway (which also meant frequent changes of vehicles and negotiation of prices and bribes at borders) the transport in many such typical journeys is the minibus locally known as *marshrutka* (locally these are known by different names --- for instance *dolmush* in Uzbekistan) which is a common sight in Central Asian urban and rural landscapes. The International Association of Public Transport classifies them as one form of "informal transport" and they represent a deviation from the Soviet era tramways and trolleybuses. Their present widespread presence is the result of the breakdown of the public transport systems of the Soviet era. Vladimir Sgibnev and Andrey Vozyanov argue

Marshrutkas mirror and forge particular patterns of social and cultural settings and are thus part and parcel of the reconfiguration of urban space in post- Soviet Central Asia. <sup>36</sup>



*Marshrutka*

As transport options marshrutkas appeared in Soviet cities in the 1930's. Regular taxis were assigned fixed 'marching routes' – from where they took their name, yet could generally be hailed and stopped at any location en route. It was a comfortable yet expensive option on major through fares or a cheaper alternative to a taxi when headed for 'exceptional' locations such as train stations, airports or beaches. In the 1990's trolleybus traffic became irregular with lack of spare parts and neglect of overhead wiring leading to frequent breakdowns. Unstable electricity supply also made them unreliable as a means of transport. As new needs new possibilities and new forms of social networking evolved, new marshrutka routes opened.<sup>37</sup> As Sgibnev and Vozynov argue, with their multilocal types of emergence, fragmented management and fluidity marshrutkas embodied how mobility co-produces space.<sup>38</sup> While new trajectories of mobility had appeared by the mid 2000's much of this mobility was about travelling for seasonal work, on which a significant part of the livelihood in southern Ferghana has begun to depend. Labour migration from the Ferghana was significant and the movement was towards Russia and Kazakhstan.<sup>39</sup> This seasonal mobility provided the short term safety valve that the transitional economies required and train and bus stations from the southern periphery of the post-Soviet space became the hub for the movement of people. While there are varied reasons for this mobility including business and social networking/rural to urban mobility/ education, marriage and global youth lifestyles, a typical story would read like this.

Shukhrat Berdyev's story (In *Diary of a Gastarbeiter*<sup>40</sup>) is a familiar one of a middle aged Uzbek school teacher who in the post-Soviet era is faced with the prospect of travelling to Moscow to work as a loader at the Tyoply Stan market.<sup>41</sup> His experiences in the market as a loader, which include his reception and help from fellow country-men in the market, his existence on the edge of legality and

the nightly encounters with the police are in sharp contrast to his first trip to Moscow in the summer of the Olympic Games when as a student but also a Soviet citizen he had enjoyed the city in all its glory, The Central Asian *gastarbeiter* experience follows a familiar trajectory. A stint in Moscow, followed by experiences in the Russian countryside as a labour (in Shukhrat's case as a carpenter) intercepted with news about violence and the looming presence of the Russian mafia boss. It is a story of repeated return, practically every year if not to Moscow then some other location (in Shukhrat's case Siberia) despite the dangers of aggression and fraud in a system that offers no legal protection. But it is also a story full of unexpected developments as Shukhrat, like many others enters into 'civil marriage' with a local woman with the knowledge and support of his Uzbek wife Gulsara. There is always the lurking threat of being replaced with local unskilled labour despite the conviction that Russians would not be interested in the menial labour contributed by the Uzbeks and the Tajiks. Shukhrat's diary is also incomplete indicating at one level his continuing visits to Russia and on the other the ongoing global movement of illegal labour as an enduring reality.

Shukhrat's story has several layers. It reflects on an economy where seasonal work as *gastarbeiter* becomes a necessity to support families and particularly families with growing children, the social acceptance of this necessity and its consequences as also helplessness in the face of hostility and the lurking fear of becoming a victim of that hostility. But it is also a story that clearly indicates the existence of well-established informal institutions of support and therefore the fact that Shukhrat's *gastarbeiter* experience is neither isolated nor recent. The necessity of this labour is recognized at the local level and as Shukhrat moves away from Moscow the lack of dignity that he endured there is significantly reduced. However, there is also a complete lack of legal recognition of this numerically significant migrant group bringing into focus the eternal dilemma of both sending and receiver countries about this trans-national movement.

Stagnating economies leading to the devaluation of the ruble has also meant that migrants are now sending back much less money than before as the ruble to dollar rates has suffered nearly 50%.<sup>42</sup> This together with the introduction of the new rules of obtaining work permits means that immigrants from Central Asia are leaving Russia in large numbers.<sup>43</sup> In fact most familiar immigrant stories are of return as even those who had migrated in the mid 2000's are now attempting to look for alternatives in their native state. While reports indicate that up to 70% of the migrants are on the move, the Russian reaction is that this is a temporary phenomenon as the labour market in the native states, whether it is Uzbekistan, Tajikistan or Kyrgyzstan do not have the capacity to absorb this labour.<sup>44</sup> It is being argued that many migrants go back home for the New Year and come spring the movement would be reversed. While returning to the native state may not be an option, there is apprehension that that migrant movement from Russia may head for the states like Syria and Iraq to join the jihad movement led by the ISIS which is reported to pay large sums of money.<sup>45</sup> Many young Central Asians migrants, faced with humiliating social conditions turn to Islam as a means to surpass ethnic boundaries and claim honour and respect from Russians. Islam becomes an important means of organizing life, as well as securing hygiene and moral behavior. Mosques are increasingly used and understood as central places for social, educational and political activities. After the prayers groups form around activists who raise awareness on various issues particularly those related to migration and politics in the Muslim world.<sup>46</sup> The involvement of this group of migrants in the West Asian conflicts seems plausible given their disenchantment with their current situation. In any case, as Schroder and Stephan-Emmrich argue there is evidence of the 'institutionalization' of mobility which touch upon everyday economies and social networking, religious convictions and youth lifestyles, education and ethnicity and illustrate how translocal contexts evolve from both practices of place making as also from transgressions of national borders and linguistic, cultural and geographical

boundaries.<sup>47</sup> Stories of translocal livelihoods that transcend ideas of a fixed 'nation-state' or 'areas' and question the logic of the performative state particularly at borders often draw upon pre-Soviet identities and frame the mobility in terms of connections that have a resilient heritage.

Such stories are about the variable permeability of borders and the possibilities that opened up for border dwellers to profit from different political spaces and the economic models on the Uzbek and Kyrgyz side of Ferghana. The following story is of a man who referred to himself as Ferghana Kyrgyz, and used his lineage as a Kypchak to enable him to get along with the market owner, a fellow Kypchak, in Batken, Kyrgyzstan and his Uzbek passport (he had grown up in Ferghana, Uzbekistan) for his trans-national trade.

Each week Mohammad would buy 300 kilograms of goods from the markets in the Ferghana city in Uzbekistan. Like many of those coming from Uzbekistan he traded in locally manufactured Uzbek foodstuff that could be sold at a considerable markup in Kyrgyzstan.....chocolates, white sugar, biscuits, local *rachki* sweets, yellow lump sugar, macaroni, oil and tea. He would take his load by bus as far as Burbalyk, a small Uzbek border village that borders the village of Kyrgyz Kyshtak, a place notorious in official Uzbek media as a site of cunning and 'uncivilized' illegal trade. There he had an acquaintance on the border, who is a relative of one of the families whose home is located right on the border, the back and front gate functioning as an informal parallel crossing point (chernyi vkhod) to the official border post. For 20 Kyrgyz som (about 50 US cents at that time) his acquaintance would load the goods at Burbalyk into his car and take it through his relative's yard to Kyrgyz territory on the other side of the border. The acquaintance transports it as far as the Burgundu canal running along a stretch of the detour road....Mohammad himself meanwhile goes through the official post a few kilometers away giving the customs officers a cigarette or two "in order to maintain relations" before rejoining his acquaintance at the agreed point at the canal. There another friend who drives a truck back and forth regularly along the detour route meets the two later on in the day and picks Mohammad up and takes him and his goods to Batken. There are plenty of trucks passing this way, Muhammad explained, and if his friend does not show up he simply flags down another Kamaz and negotiates a price for his journey to Batken. <sup>48</sup>

In fact the reason for much of this transgression and the operation of alternative routes and transports is identified in the demolition of formal routes by the state. A classic example is the 2003 story of the border closure between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan. In January 2003 Uzbekistan announced the closure of the pedestrian bridge over the Kara Suu as a quarantine measure to prevent the spread of disease from Kyrgyzstan. There was no clear idea what the disease in question was but the three meter stretch of the bridge over the Kara Suu that was Uzbek property was dismantled leaving the remaining nine meters (three neutral and three belonging to Kyrgyzstan) dangling.<sup>49</sup> The dismantling of this bridge, on which much of the border trade and livelihood depended, led to emergence of alternative transport arrangements for crossing the twelve meter canal. Large inflatable tires were used by transporters to transport people and goods across the canal delegitimizing state authority and bringing to light the arbitrary nature of control at the borders. It is interesting that much of the narrative around this 'illegal' crossing was seen as a 'noble act' to deal with the vagaries of a state which has very little knowledge of life of 'border persons'. These numerous 'detour roads' also necessitate a better understanding of borders as integrated systems involving flows and channels but also as points of limit. The many examples of 'border markets' or 'haats', as they are referred to in South Asia, also underline the significance of local economic zones that larger logistics spaces will traverse.

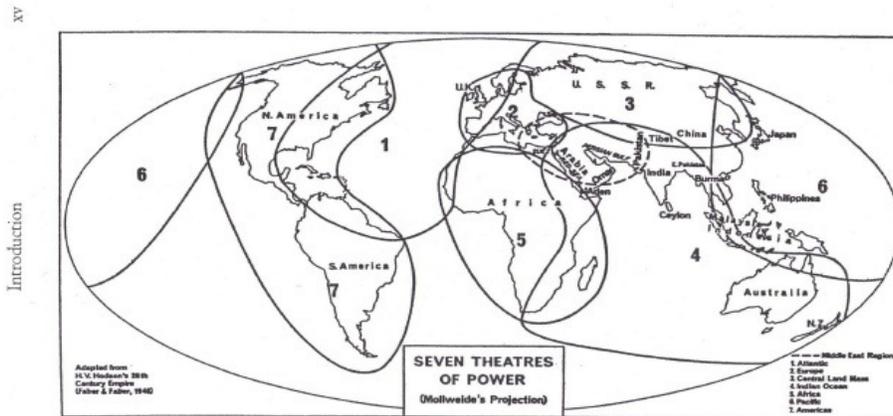
It is in the backdrop of these complexities, both in terms of the emergence of transcontinental logistic spaces and numerous 'Silk Road' strategies but also the various 'slip roads'

that local mobilities traverse that India would have to negotiate its own logistic space. Here, there has been constant negotiation between its spaces to the East and South East and its alternative connects in the West and North West based on its ‘pivotal’ geographical position allowing access to both its east and west on the one hand and to maritime and continental routes on the other. This recognition of the subcontinent’s geospatial centrality, brought into focus in the years leading to the demise of the British Empire, is the starting point for the last section of this article.

### New Silk Roads and the Indian Alternative

Sir Olaf Kirkpatrick Caroe, British India’s leading geopolitical thinker during the final days of the Raj had served as foreign secretary to Britain’s Government of India throughout the Second World War. He was afterward Britain’s last Governor General of the North West Frontier Province, which lies along the border with Afghanistan in present day Pakistan. Caroe’s career spanned the transition from an era of World War to one of Cold War coinciding with the onset of decolonization and the rise of air power as an organizing conception of global strategy. Caroe carefully studied and followed these developments and emphasized underlying continuities in the pattern of world power. At stake was nothing less than global supremacy. Of course Caroe was not alone in identifying this transcendence. Lord Curzon imagined a “chessboard upon which is played out a game for global domination” and of course the imagery of a “grand chessboard” resonates even today as a metaphor.<sup>50</sup>

## Caroe’s Seven Power Circles



Map 1. Caroe's Seven Theaters of Power (Olaf Caroe, "Arabia Felix and the Indian Ocean: A Study in Political Strategy," *The Round Table*, no. 216 (1964). Reproduced by kind permission of Taylor and Francis Publishers.)

### Caroe’s Seven Power Circles

What is interesting is that Caroe, like Mackinder emphasized the permanence of geography versus the vicissitudes of empire and ideology. Caroe described a map of the world divided into “Seven Theatres of Power” – Atlantic, Europe, Central Land Mass, Indian Ocean, Africa, Pacific and America.<sup>51</sup> Like Mackinder he also hinted at a binary division of the global space and emphasized that it was Britain’s control of the of the “Indian Ocean Theatre” that had during the 19<sup>th</sup> century worked to check Russia’s absorption of the colossal “Central Land Mass Theatre”.<sup>52</sup> The central land mass is to a large extent coterminous with Mackinder’s pivot (later heartland) area. However, while Mackinder identifies the state controlling the ‘heartland’ as ‘commanding the world’ Caroe argues that as a counterpoise to Soviet and increasingly Chinese power consolidating in the Asian heartland, India would remain pivotal in the maintenance of a global balance between land and sea powers. This of course was not surprising given the context within which he was presenting his ideas and his own position within it. It is important to bear in mind that in the last reformulation of his theory, Mackinder had envisioned a global balance where the heartland (Russia) and the mid-Atlantic nations (America, France and Britain) would combine to balance China and India.<sup>53</sup>

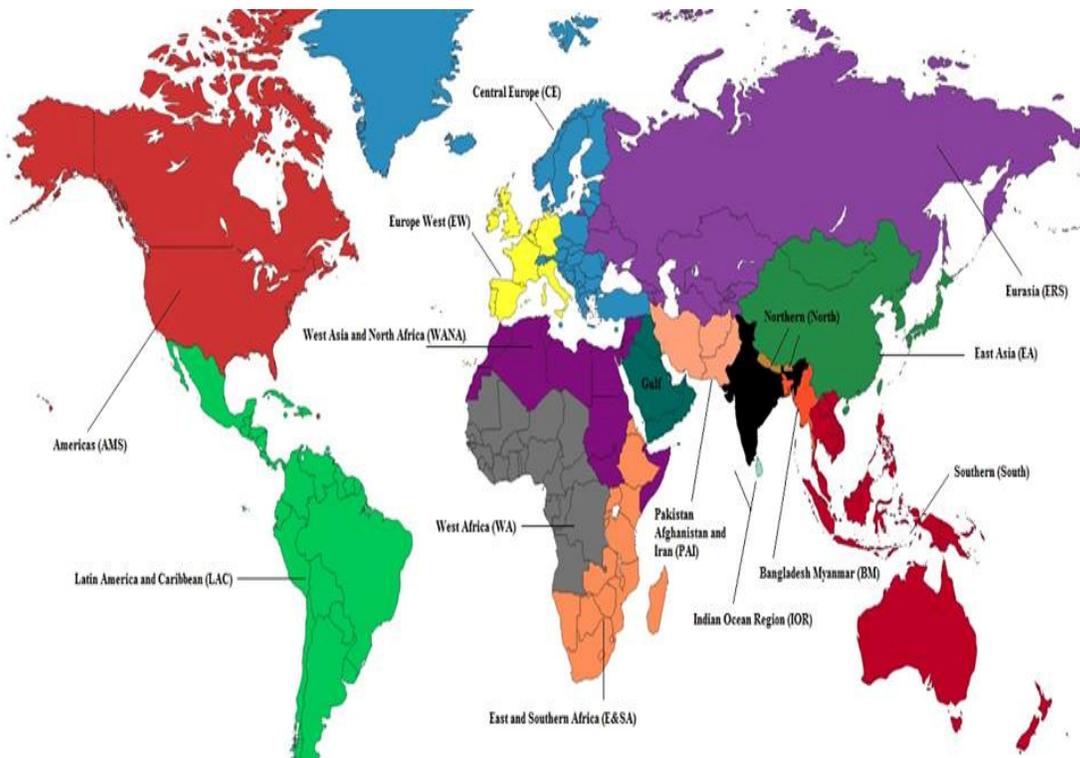
Peter John Brobst argues that the ‘Great Game’ continued to be played out just as Caroe had predicted. Caroe recognized the subcontinent’s geospatial centrality when others typically located South Asia on the world’s strategic periphery. He believed that Russian land power posed a traditional and future danger to international stability. But when many tended to fear an implacable enemy, Caroe imagined the long term vulnerability of the Soviet Union’s multi-ethnic empire in the heartland of Asia. He foresaw the resurgence of China as a great power when conventional wisdom discounted that country’s potentialities separate from external organization. Caroe warned that Afghanistan and the remote Pathan borderlands of what is today Pakistan formed a political fault zone of global significance. He anticipated the resilience of Islam in the face of communism and secularizing ideologies more generally in an era when fashions were disposed to dismiss religious motivation as a spent force. And Caroe explained the importance of the Persian Gulf in relation both to world oil production and as a base area well situated for the staging of Anglo American forces throughout the western Indian Ocean and up into Central Asia. Brobst notes

In short even though the geopolitical vision that Caroe had articulated failed to sustain the empire it had once animated – hence our difficulty in perceiving its resilience --- the Great Game continues to drive the dynamic of global power and strategic competition in Asia today and presumably tomorrow.<sup>54</sup>

It is in the background of this ‘pivotal’ position that Caroe predicted for South Asia in general and India in particular that the Indian alternative to focus on the eastern and western reaches of the Indian Ocean and the sub continental landmass south of Eurasia but linked to it, assumes significance. The ‘Connect Central Asia’ initiative has to be viewed within this context where both the traditional continental trade routes and the maritime multi modal routes would come into play. There also remains the alternative to connect Indian initiatives with other existing (like Turkey-Iran-Pakistan railway) or proposed routes (branches of the Silk Road Economic Belt). A multi modal link to Central Asia through the Iranian port of Chabahar could then link through existing and newer links to Russia and Europe. These include both transport corridors like the INSTC and pipeline projects like TAPI. The potential for both if linked to the South East Asian states would be manifold. Similarly the BCIM corridor could link to a broader Asian network. The development of a network of Indian Ocean ports to serve as regional shipping hubs for littoral states with connecting highways and rail routes would mean leveraging India’s location in one of the most strategic stretches

of ocean space. The launching of a Spice Route, Cotton Route and the Mausam Project, all of which are attempts to tie together countries around the Indian Ocean assumes significant in this context. At the macro level the aim of Project Mausam is to re-connect and re-establish communication between countries of the Indian Ocean world which would lead to enhanced understanding of cultural values and concerns while at the micro level the focus is on understanding national cultures in their regional maritime milieu. The aim is not just to examine connections that linked parts of the Indian Ocean littoral but also the connections of these coastal centers to their hinterlands. The 'Spice Project' aims to explore the multi-faceted Indo-Pacific Ocean World collating archeological and historical research to document the diversity of cultural, commercial and religious interactions in the Indian Ocean-extending from East Africa, the Arabian Peninsula, the Indian sub-continent and Sri Lanka to the Southeast Asian archipelago. The broader aim is to connect these with 'Information Silk Route' where telecom connectivity between the countries would be made possible. Partly propelled by the advancement in informational technology in India and partly by the fact that connectivity on the ground has been restricted by political connections these strategies need to be visualized as integrated aspects of both domestic and foreign policy.

It is here that the story of India's natural connect to its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia comes into focus. Complicated by policy decisions and what C Raja Mohan refers to as "inward economic orientation of socialist India and the neglect of connectivity and commerce at and across frontiers"<sup>55</sup> it remains the first of the concentric circle to which India would need to reconnect. Raja Mohan goes on to argue that Modi's India has made an attempt to compensate but the scope of its initiative is no match to Chinese efforts to reconfigure the economic geography of the continent. The inclusion of both Sri Lanka and Nepal as dialogue partners in the SCO is a recent political expression of Chinese efforts at inclusion of the sub-continent and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor a classic geopolitical statement. While a change in mindset about visualizing its neighbourhood as a 'backyard' is a necessity there also remains the need to rethink its strategy of political involvement, learn to compete with other powers when its interests in the neighbourhood is challenged but also collaborate where necessary before India can hope to regain its leverage.<sup>56</sup> The prescriptive logic of this cannot be denied and leads to the question of why 'regionalism' remained a non-starter in the region. While the fractured history of the subcontinent is part of the reason for the tenuous nature of South Asian connections Partho Ghosh argues that it also remains a fact that a clear concept of the region never emerged either in Indian academic and strategic thinking or in the West.<sup>57</sup> He goes on to argue that the fact that South Asia as a region has remained in the periphery of Indian concerns is evident in organizational set up of the MEA where there is no separate division for the region though one division called SB and BC Division deals with matters related to SAARC/BIMSTEC/and border connectivity. In an interesting table Ghosh shows how the various South Asian countries have been divided among the PAI (Afghanistan and Pakistan)/BM (Bangladesh)/Northern (Bhutan and Nepal) /Indian Ocean (Maldives and Sri Lanka) Organizational divisions within the MEA which actually reflects geographic and strategic logic but obscures the concept of South Asia.<sup>58</sup> Interestingly this 'geographic' logic could be a precursor to a more useful 'logistic' strategy in the neighbourhood that would look beyond 'regional' connects to contacts that had been historically flourishing but also show future prospects.



*Organizational Divisions in the Ministry of External Affairs, GOI*

With the recognition of the fragility of connects in the immediate neighbourhood connections were sought with regions to its north and west that go back to antiquity and where there had traditionally been exchange of populations at different levels - as traders, scholars, and religious preachers. Travel was facilitated by the large number of entry points. In the middle of the 19th century, Mohan Lal quotes forty routes between the two regions.<sup>59</sup> Four main exit points existed. The starting point for a journey to the northern most extremity was from the valley of Kashmir, to Leh, Yarkand, Kashgar, then onto the Ferghana Valley. The second exit point was Kabul, from where traders, principally from the Punjab, and generally known as Lahoris, assembled before going on to Balkh, Khulm, Kargan, Kunduz, and other cities on the Oxus. The third exit point was Multan. From Multan the merchants could generally go on to Kandahar in Afghanistan. From there they could go on to the Persian territory directly or take the Kandahar-Ghazni-Kabul route to Bukhara. The Indian merchants using Multan as the point of departure were known as Multanis, though they hailed from a much wider area, which roughly covered western and lower Punjab as also Rajasthan. Another group of Indian merchants were known as Shikarpuris, and derived their name from Shikarpur, a small town in Sindh. They either went to Multan or straight to Kandahar from where they took the road either to Persia or to the Uzbek territory.<sup>60</sup> Trade flourished particularly for groups like the Shikarpuris who developed elaborate credit networks and letters of credit that was accepted across the entire region. Politically many of these places are now no longer accessible to India, bringing to the forefront the necessity of connects with its immediate neighbourhood as a precursor to connectivity to a wider region.

The contemporary connect to the wider region has been visualized through the Connect Central Asia Policy launched in 2012 as an alternative infrastructure and transport connectivity plan that seeks to enhance trade and educational rights as also encourages more joint commercial and security initiatives with Central Asia. It is also part of the North South Transport Corridor on which there was emphasis in the Foreign Trade Policy 2015-20. The aim is to involve wider Central Asia wherever possible and with this in mind expand land routes to include Armenia, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Although Central Asia is a significant part of the Belt and Road Plan India faces connectivity challenges regarding land routes to Afghanistan and Central Asia. This limits direct communications and as part of the effort to relieve these connectivity bottlenecks there is today greater emphasis on participation in multilateral regional organizations, the SCO being an example. Quite apart from the concerns about connectivity adding to regional tensions rather than diffusing them<sup>61</sup> there remain concerns about the practical delivery of enhanced connectivity. For example when the Yiwu to Madrid train was launched in 2014, the cargo had to change tracks three times due to gauge differences. There also needs to be broader discussions on the interaction and harmonization of tariff systems (Such as those of the WTO, the Eurasian Economic Union and The European Union) and about the kinds of goods that will be transported. For freight to be cost effective it would have to focus on high value goods. There also remains the rationale behind the soft loans given by China for infrastructural developments. Given the fact that these are not necessarily based on commercial logic it could ultimately have an effect on common funding agencies like the AIIB.<sup>62</sup> There also remains the possibility of access to infrastructure being blocked by countries with poor bilateral relations or internal political rivalries.

Alternative arrangements are also in the pipeline. The recent escalation of tension following the terrorist attacks in Uri on September 18 and the subsequent inability of Pakistan to hold the SAARC Summit in Islamabad on 15-16 November 2016 has led to suggestions from Pakistan about the possibility of creating an alternative greater South Asian economic alliance which would include 'China, Iran and the neighbouring Central Asia states'. Senator Mushahid Hussain Syed described the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as the key economic route linking South and Central Asia.<sup>63</sup> The Gwadar port would be the nearest warm water port not only for China but also the landlocked Central Asia states. This new regional arrangement that would also suit Chinese plans could face obstruction from other south Asian states like Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka that would have little interest in a land route so far from their borders and Bangladesh and Sri Lanka which have their own ports. This arrangement would potentially benefit Afghanistan the most. However, Afghanistan has recently shown reluctance towards measures that restrict Indian privileges and would be hesitant to join arrangements that hurt Indian interests. It is interestingly Afghanistan's presence in SAARC which justifies Pakistan's argument that Central Asian states should be a part of greater South Asia, and justifies American strategic thinking that has sought to create a greater South Asia as a viable unit for the region.

## Conclusions

While the image that the Silk Road evokes is generally romantic visions of desert caravans carrying exotic commodities the recent Chinese plan has been seen as an opportunity that needs to be carefully negotiated. While being cautious in endorsing what is presented by the Chinese as *fait accompli* particularly because India feels that the Maritime Route is a repackaging of the 'string of pearls' strategy and is unhappy about the fact that part of the proposed China Pakistan corridor will pass through Pakistan held Kashmir there is also hesitance in criticizing a plan that is being projected as a trans Asian developmental alternative. And of course India is a part of the financial institution developed to support the initiative.

The alternative seems to lie somewhat along the lines suggested by Samir Saran, “For every belt that they create and every road that we create can we create a slip road that connects Indian opportunities to the larger global market rather than reject it outright? Can we use their institutions for our advantage?”<sup>64</sup> Unfortunately the BRICS Summit in Goa, which could have become a platform for discussing possibilities of connecting to larger Asian projects, was reduced to discussions of bilateral issues where India focused mostly on international terrorism. Logistic possibilities, however, took centre stage at the India-Russia summit where the possibilities of India’s association with the EEU were emphasized and there were discussions on the Energy Bridge and the hydrocarbon pipeline between Russia and India. This pipeline can only take two routes, either via China or Central Asia-Afghanistan-Pakistan. Since these projects involve Russia, China and India who are BRICS members the Goa summit would have been an opportunity to further discuss them. Linkages between the INSTC and OBOR could also have been proposed. This limited understanding of Asian economic and security architecture would impact upon initiatives and organizations where India and China seek to future collaborate like the SCO and associated financial institutions.

Given the global reality of a China centered trade network overlapping with a Russian led economic community engulfing both Asian overland and maritime routes on the one hand and the TPP representing the rules and regulations that could govern global trade on the other either the development of an logistic alternative or connecting with the existing frameworks would be an essential enabler for India’s agenda of economic development and urbanization. However, one needs to take note of the fact that neither is a foregone conclusion and a great deal of uncertainty surrounds their future. Serious concerns about the ecological and social impact of connectivity seem to be clouding the future of the China centred trade network and the Russian led economic community. Similarly, India’s Act East policy in a newly created Indo Pacific space is another work in progress that awaits conceptual clarity but also policy consensus among a large number of stake holders including sub regions, cities, ports, civil society actors and nodal agencies. A meticulous balancing act between these realities call for recognition of India’s pivotal geographic position enabling developments both on the South East and East but also towards the West and Northwest and would require an integrated and coordinated approach which would make use of past linkages, present assets and also the possibilities of future development. While the translation of logistic visions into strategic spaces cannot be taken for granted, taking note of changing global networks, linking with other Asian logistic frameworks, keeping in mind the ‘slip roads’ that local mobilities traverse are just some of the imperatives that India would have to keep in mind as it negotiates its own development in a future that belongs to fluidity.

## Notes and References

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<sup>1</sup>The reference to a post Schengen world, in this article is in the context of the political crisis that the European Union today faces exemplified by the faultlines between Germany and debt ridden south European states like Greece and Portugal but also by the clashes on issues like banking regulations, border control and most significantly migration policy. Conflicts in the Middle East has driven millions of migrants northwards and the EU is embroiled in disputes over how to apportion refugees turning nationalist leaders inwards as the best way of protecting their states from what is identified as an onslaught. Brexit is just one of the manifestations of this crisis and reflects the internal turmoil and intense debates about survival in what was identified as the classic example of a regional organization.

<sup>2</sup>Parag Khanna, *Connectography: Mapping the Future of Global Civilization*, (New York: Random House 2016), Prologue, Kindle version.

<sup>3</sup>Jon Shaw and Markus Hesse, “Transport geography and the ‘new’ mobilities”, *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers*, New Series, 35: 3 (July 2010): 306.

- <sup>4</sup> Tim Cresswell, “Mobilities I: Catching Up”, *Progress in Human Geography*, 35 (2010): 551.
- <sup>5</sup> Richard Knowles, Jon Shaw and Iain Docherty (eds) *Transport Geographies: Mobilities, Flows, Spaces* (Wiley-Blackwell 2008).
- <sup>6</sup> The idea of the ‘receiving societies’ is borrowed from Philipp Schroder and Manja Stephan-Emmrich, “The Institutionalization of Mobility: Well Being and Social Hierarchies in Central Asian Translocal Livelihoods”, *Mobilities*, 11: 3 (2016): 420-443.
- <sup>7</sup> Khanna, *Connectography*, Chapter 1 From *Borders to Bridges*, Kindle version.
- <sup>8</sup> Gearoid O’ Tuathail, “Introduction: Thinking Critically About Geopolitics”, in *The Geopolitics Reader*, edited by Gearoid O’ Tuathail, Simon Dalby and Paul Routledge. (London and New York: Routledge 1998)
- <sup>9</sup> Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard, American Primacy and Its Geostrategic Imperatives* (New York: Basic Books, 1997): xiii.
- <sup>10</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, xiv
- <sup>11</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 194.
- <sup>12</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 31.
- <sup>13</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 39.
- <sup>14</sup> Brzezinski identifies three peripheries of the chessboard, west, south and east. For details see Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 34.
- <sup>15</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 115.
- <sup>16</sup> Robert D Blackwell and Jennifer M Harris, *War by Other Means: Geoeconomics and Statecraft*, (MA: Harvard University Press, 2016)
- <sup>17</sup> Alexander C Diener, “Parsing Mobilities in Central Eurasia: Border Management and New Silk Roads”, *Eurasian Geography and Economics*, 56: 4 (2015): 377.
- <sup>18</sup> The US Department of State in the section Diplomacy in Action underlines four key areas of support. (a) Regional Energy Markets: which include support for CASA -1000 regional electricity grid/support for energy transmission lines, hydropower plants and 1000 megawatts to Pakistan’s power grid (b) Trade and transport: 3000km of roads built or rehabilitated in Afghanistan/support for Kazakh and Afghan accession to WTO/technical assistance to Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement and Cross Border Transport Agreement between Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Afghanistan (c) Customs and Border Operations: increasing trade/reducing cost of crossing regional borders/streamlining customs procedures at seven Afghan border crossing points (d) Business and People to people: funding of university studies for Afghan students in Central Asia/sponsor Central Asia-Afghanistan Women’s Economic Symposium and South Asia Women’s Entrepreneurship Symposium/organised trade delegations. For details see [www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/](http://www.state.gov/p/sca/ci/af/newsilkroad/) Accessed 9 August 2016.
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- <sup>20</sup> Atajan Yazmuradov, “The US’s Greater South Asia Project: Interests of the Central Asian Countries and of the Key Non-regional Actors.” *Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 5, 41 (2006) The events of May 2005 in Andijan was followed by an SCO declaration on 5 July 2005 where there was a call for a deadline for foreign military presence in the region and Uzbek request for removal of US troops from the Karshi-Khanabad base.
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- <sup>25</sup> Eldar M Ismailov, “Central Eurasia, Its Geopolitical Function in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century”, *Central Asia and the Caucasus* 2:50 (2008).
- <sup>26</sup> N.A. Nazarbayev, *Sniat’s Evrazii ‘polias vyzhidaniia’*. Interview in *Kazakhstanskaia Pravda*, Almaty, October 21, 1995, cited from Ilya. Vinkovetsky, “Eurasia and its Uses: the History of an Idea and the Mental Geography of

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<sup>27</sup>PratimRanjanBose”On a railroad from Russia to Iran”, *Business Line*, (13 July 2016) Accessed 13 July 2016.

<sup>28</sup>CASA 1000 will export available summer electricity surplus from Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan and Afghanistan. The main financing bodies are WB, IDB, EIB and USAID.

<sup>29</sup>Zabihullah Mudabber, “Afghanistan’s Role in Central Asia-South Asia Energy Projects”, *The Diplomat*, (July 12, 2016) Accessed 14 July 2016.

<sup>30</sup>For details see Jack Farchy, “China Seeking to Revive the Silk Road”, *The New Trade Routes: Silk Road Corridor*, (May 9, 2016,) [www.ft.com/cms/s/2/e99ff7a8-0bd8-11e6-9456-444ab5211a2f.html#axzz4GoBv0t4g](http://www.ft.com/cms/s/2/e99ff7a8-0bd8-11e6-9456-444ab5211a2f.html#axzz4GoBv0t4g) Accessed 9 August 2016.

<sup>31</sup> For details see David Dollar, “China’s Rise as a Regional and Global Power: The AIIB and the One Belt One Road “, *Horizons*, No 4 (Summer 2015).

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<sup>33</sup>Mariam Amini, “Chinas ‘Silk Road’ Railway hits a snag in Afghanistan” (13 October 2016) <http://www.cnbn.com/2016/10/13/chinas-silk-road-railway-disrupted-by-uzbekistan-security/html> Accessed 14 October 2016.

<sup>34</sup>Madeleine Reeves, “Travels in the Margins of the State, Everyday Journeys in the Ferghana Valley Borderlands”, in Jeff Shahadeo and Russell Zanka (eds) *Everyday Life in Central Asia Past and Present*(Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>35</sup> Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014): 43, where she describes a bus journey from Batken in Kyrgyzstan to Ak Sai a Kyrgyz border town with Tajikistan.

<sup>36</sup>Vladimir Sgibnev and Andrey Vozyaniov, “Assemblages of mobility: the marshrutkas of Central Asia”, *Central Asian Survey*, 35: 2, (2016): 277.

<sup>37</sup> For details of a case study in Khujand see Sgibnev and Andrey Vozyaniov, “Assemblages of mobility”, 276-291.

<sup>38</sup> Sgibnev and Andrey Vozyaniov, “Assemblages of mobility”, 287-88.

<sup>39</sup>Upto 27% of the population of Uzbekistan, 18% of the population of Tajikistan and 14% of the population of Kyrgyzstan are labour migrants. Most are men and over 50% do menial work. While at one time the movement used to be seasons, due to economic crisis the movement has become more chaotic. See *International Organization for Migration: Kazakhstan*, [www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/where-we-./kazakhstan](http://www.iom.int/cms/en/sites/iom/home/where-we-./kazakhstan) Accessed 24 June 2016.

<sup>40</sup> The word *gastarbeiter* was used in Germany to define the unskilled and semi-skilled migrant labours from Turkey and other countries. Though no longer used in Germany, the Russianized plural version, *gastarbeitery* is used for migrant workers from Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan to Russia and Kazakhstan. However, in contrast to the *gastarbaiter* in Germany who were brought in legally as contract workers for a fixed term and offered legal and economic protection, these migrants have no job contracts or work permit.

<sup>41</sup>Mumin Shakirov, “Diary of an Uzbek Gastarbeiter”, *Open Democracy* (March 18, 2009) <https://www.opendemocracy.net/article.../diary-of-an-uzbek-gastarbeiter>, Accessed February 2, 2014

<sup>42</sup> With fewer dollars entering Uzbekistan, the Uzbek sum has fallen 15% against the dollar on the black market. The official exchange rate has fallen by about 11%. See “Uzbekistan: Rouble’s rout Breeds Uncertainty for Central Asian Markets”, *Eurasianet Weekly Digest*, (23 December, 2014).

<sup>43</sup> For a typical migrant stories see Shaun Walker and Alberto Nardelli, “Russia’s rouble crisis poses threat to nine countries relying on remittances”, *The Guardian* (18 January, 2015). Aziz a migrant from the Ferghana notes that “life is miserable enough anyway, the only reason to be here was the money, I think it is time to go home”. See also Vladislav Schnitzer “Trials and Tribulations of Uzbek Gastarbeiter”, *The Moscow Times* (15 May 2004) and “Uzbekistan: Rouble’s rout Breeds Uncertainty for Central Asian Markets”.

- <sup>44</sup> Ivan Komarov and Anastasia Verseneva, “Priezhenie iz Srednei Azii Massovo Pokidayut Possiyu”, *Gazeta.ru*, (21 January 2015).
- <sup>45</sup> *Tsentralnaya Azia: Kuda Nodatsya Trudovomu Migrantu*, *Deutsche Welle*, 21 January 2015, [www.dw.de/p/1ENPF](http://www.dw.de/p/1ENPF). See also P Stobdan, “ISIS in Central Asia”, *Issue Brief, IDSA*, 22 October 2014, where he notes that the possibility of Central Asian migrants joining the ISIS remains significant. Concerns in the region are less today about the return of the Taliban and more about the return of trained ISIS jihadis. However, no common strategy exists to deal with them. Also Bayram Balci, “From Ferghana Valley to Syria ---The Transformation of Central Asian Radical Islam”, *Eurasia Outlook*, 25 July 2014 who argues that it is mostly Uzbeks of the ‘diaspora’ that is Uzbek migrants from Russia, but also Uzbeks from Kyrgyzstan who are getting involved in jihadi action in Syria.
- <sup>46</sup> For a detailed discussion see Sophie Roche, “The role of Islam in the lives of Central Asian migrants in Moscow”, *CERLA Brief*, No 2 (October 2014)
- <sup>47</sup> Schroder and Stephan-Emmrich, “The Institutionalization of Mobility”, 437
- <sup>48</sup> Cited from Madeleine Reeves, *Border Work: Spatial Lives of the State in Rural Central Asia*, (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014) 153
- <sup>49</sup> Reeves, *Border Work*, 160.
- <sup>50</sup> Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*.
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- <sup>58</sup> Ghosh, “Region Without Regionalism”, 117
- <sup>59</sup> Mohan Lal, *Travels in the Punjab, Afghanistan and Turkistan to Balkh, Bokhara and Herat and a Visit to Great Britain and Germany*, first published in London in 1846, second revised edition (Calcutta: K.P. Bagchi, 1977)
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