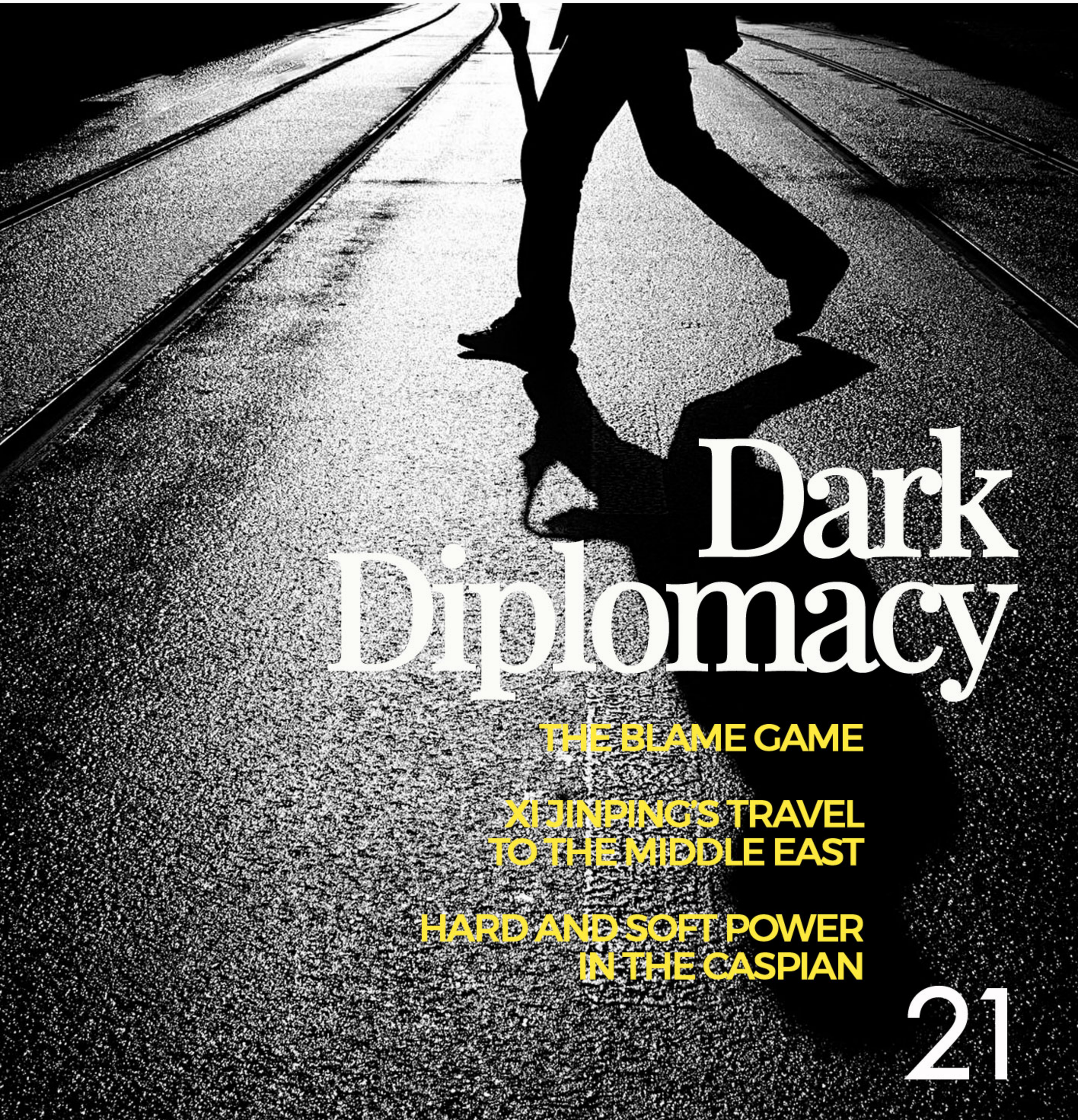
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Dark Diplomacy

THE BLAME GAME

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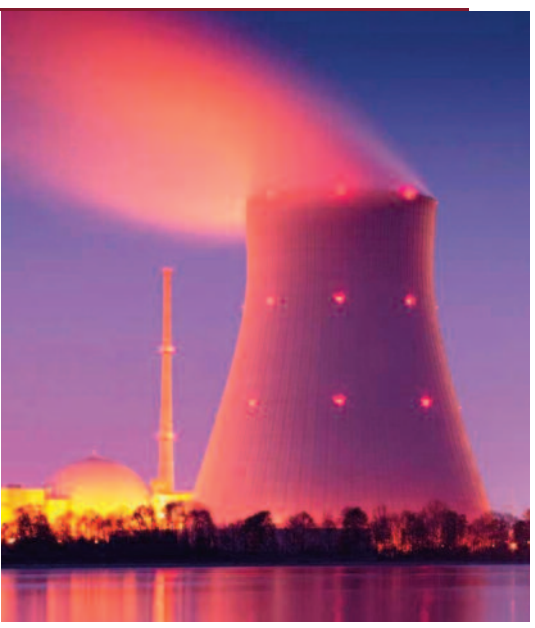












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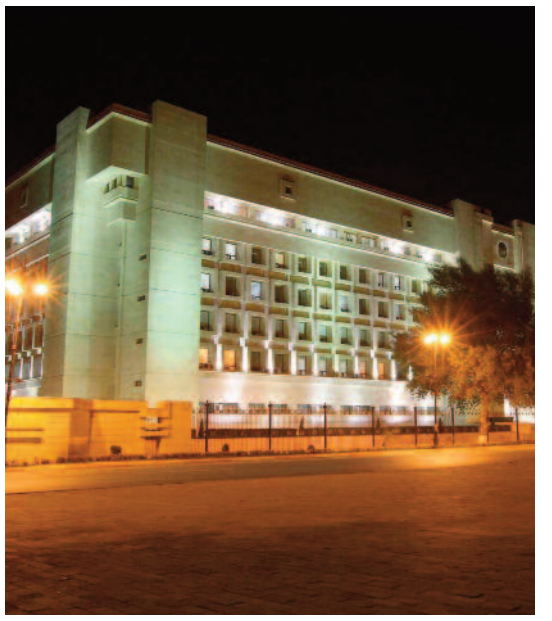
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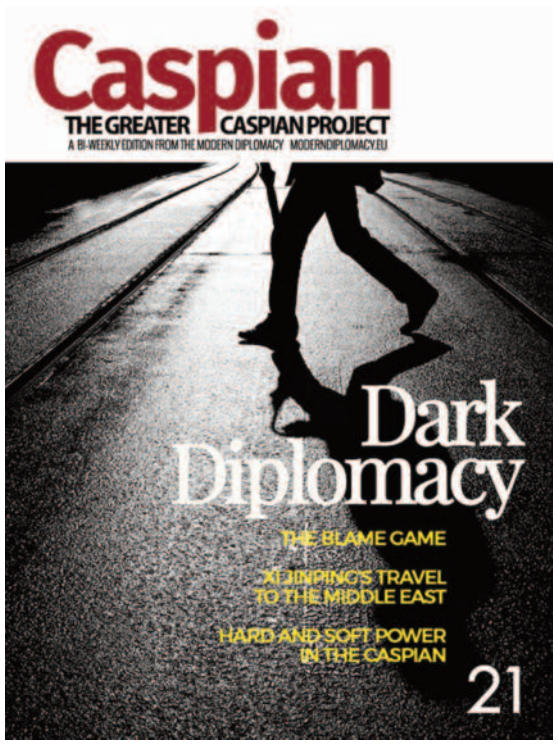


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THE GREATER CASPIAN PROJECT

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"The society that separates its scholars from its warriors will have its thinking done by cowards and its fighting by fools"

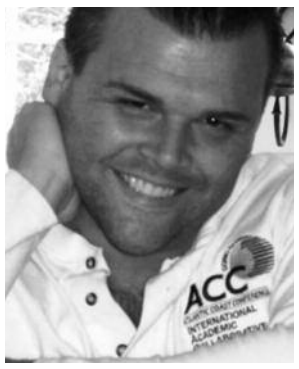
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DARK DIPLOMACY



Prof. Dr. Matthew Crosston

Senior Editor,
Director, The Caspian Project

For the most part the world views diplomacy as a positive tool for peace and cooperation. Indeed, in its ideal form this is its proper function. But it is not its sole function, nor does it operate only within the boundaries of pure politics. This issue of the Greater Caspian Project shows how darkly vibrant diplomacy (in this case simply defined as a country's pursuit of its interests through interaction and negotiation) can be across every spectrum of the human condition. In fact, I would dare say that diplomacy in the 21st century is utilized quantitatively more often for self-interested state motivations and objectives than for pursuing globally-recognized consensus values. The articles given to the reader herein illustrate this richly.

Everything from pipeline diplomacy (the TAPI and the Power of Siberia) to caviar-flavored diplomacy (human rights reporting across the region) to African diplomacy (how Russia engages the continent) to spy diplomacy (Azeri intelligence issues at the local level) to hard, soft, smart diplomacy (the Russian and Iranian interpretations) are included in this issue, affording our readers an ever-expanding thematic and geographic tapestry through which to better understand the home region of the Caspian.

Keep in mind that the use of the term 'dark diplomacy' in the title of the issue is not necessarily meant to be pejorative. Rather, it is simply a nod to how politics across this great region tend to get played out, not only from the key littorals and expanded neighbors, but even by the great powers swooping in temporarily at a distance. Everyone has an angle. All states have an agenda. No actor is without self-interest. This fuels the concept of dark diplomacy. Even when intentions are good and long-term objectives pure, an accurate reflection of present-day reality is only achieved by one's willingness to get down below the surface of high-minded values and the integrity of ideals. As it turns out, I think our readers will find out the greater Caspian region has great wealth when it comes to the currency of dark diplomacy.



THE NUCLEAR POWER IN THE MIDDLE EAST

Strategic and economic significance

GIANCARLO ELIA VALORI

Advisory Board Co-chair Honoris Causa

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He holds prestigious academic distinctions and national orders.



If we look at the latest data, the OPEC countries – or anyway the Middle East countries - are those which are investing more resources in nuclear power. Iran, for example, was the first State to directly place a nuclear reactor into the electricity grid for civilian uses in 2011.

Despite the JCPOA recently signed by Iran with the P5+1 which, however, will certainly not stop the Iranian military-civilian research, the Shi'ite country is playing on nuclear power, together with the other countries, for the following reasons: a) nuclear power makes available crude oil quantities which shift from the internal market to foreign sales; b) nuclear power extends the life cycle of oil wells, most of which are now aging, since it reduces domestic demand; c) the use of nuclear power allows a civilian-military "dual use ", independent and autonomous from the old regional alliances, which are now all definitively under crisis.

Hence, in addition to manage the deal with Iran rationally and advisedly, it will be necessary - in a very short lapse of time – to reach a series of bilateral agreements on nuclear power with the other Gulf and Middle East countries - an idea which I do not think is widespread in the current strategic debate.
In this particular case, Iran will use nuclear power for military purposes when it has it, or rather when it has a "threshold" threat, which is what really matters, as a strategic substitute for a large conventional force which is lacking in Iran.
The Shi'ite country has a strategic rationale linked to asymmetric warfare and proxy wars, like those of the Hezbollah in the Lebanon - the structure created by Iran to hit Israel with a hybrid war that the Jewish State cannot oppose with the same techniques.
Or nuclear power is seen as a "game changer", even only as an ultimate and credible threat, for a non-conventional clash in which Israel is present.
Or a part of the Sunni world.

Therefore, the rationale of Iran's nuclear power is to force the Jewish State into an asymmetric war in the regions opposing it and outside its borders, in a context of international - but mainly tactical - isolation.What matters, however, is not the technical ability to actually produce, have and show a series of nuclear devices, but the ability to manage - in the shortest possible time – the transition from an acceptable level for the Non-Proliferation Treaty to the typical one of the operational nuclear power.
Incidentally, the Italian signature of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) in May 1975 marks the start of the end of its independent and autonomous foreign policy.
And to think that Italy wanted to walk out of the Non-Proliferation Treaty at the G8 Summit held in Birmingham in 1998.

The NPT is used to clip the wings of the Euro-Western and Mediterranean countries, while India and Pakistan which, with their nuclear tests threw the Birmingham G8 Summit in turmoil, rightly view the NPT - like the other Arab and Islamic countries which are currently at the nuclear threshold - as one of the edicts in Manzoni's novel The Betrothed.
Just think of what would have happened in the Mediterranean currently under fire if we had had an effective level of nuclear deterrence, managed according to the customs, usages and codes agreed upon.
Hence Iran remains at the so-called nuclear threshold, where India and Pakistan, North Korea and, of course, Israel have been for long time.



In fact the JCPOA equalizes the level of maximum threat, namely the nuclear threat, between Israel and Iran. Iran as a threshold power is exactly what the Iranian leaders wanted. This causes a revolution in the Middle East strategic equation and, hence, in the European and NATO one.

If the Shi'ite Republic has a threshold power and if, meanwhile, the civilian use of nuclear power still allows nuclear testing (which is possible on the basis of the JCPOA), the Jewish State is turned into a strategic hostage. I do not know whether Western signatories to the agreement with Iran have been fully aware of this - but I somehow doubt it.
The purely economic obsession, typical of Western diplomacies, has blinded the minds of Western leaders.

If Israel is deprived of its supreme threat, it becomes targetable and vulnerable at conventional level, where the Israeli structural limits are evident and unavoidable. It would have been better to sign an agreement with Iran allowing to better control also the military sites of the Shi'ite State, in addition to reducing the amount of fissile material for "civilian" production, which is currently too high and guarantees alone the threshold effect of the Iranian nuclear power. All we need to do is only shift it. The data on the distribution of nuclear plants, globally, is still particularly important.According to the IAEA, in September 2010 - the date of the last survey - nuclear facilities totaled 441 in 29 countries. The share of nuclear power in energy production is higher in Europe (27%) while, in 2010, South Asia and the Middle East were, in fact, at zero.

Today, however, as many as 65 new States show an interest in nuclear energy, and among them, at least one fifth is located in the Middle East. The Gulf Co-operation Council's will to go nuclear dates back to 2007, while also peripheral Arab nations and, above all, the non-oil countries (such as Jordan) are paving the way for widespread nuclearization.

The projects currently under consideration report the operation of 90 nuclear reactors to be placed in 26 sites in thirteen countries of the region by the end of 2030. Six Middle East countries, namely Bahrain, Egypt, obviously Iran, Jordan, the United Arab Emirates and Yemen are planning to build a nuclear power plant by the end of 2017. If all goes according to the Iranian and Russian wishes, Yemen should host a nuclear site - not falling within the JCPOA regulation - right in front of the Saudi coast. While, however, we have noted some geopolitical conditions for the establishment of the Middle East Sunni and Shi'ite countries' nuclear power, it should be recalled that the shift to nuclear power has also internal motivations.

Firstly, there is the demographic and economic growth which needs low-cost and abundant electricity. Moreover, in a situation characterized by a slowing down in energy consumption from hydrocarbons in Europe and in the other industrial countries. From 1980 to 2010, the demand for electricity grew throughout the Middle East by five times, but also the global demand for electricity is expected to grow by 61% between 2010 and 2050.
In said period, the demand for electricity in the Middle East is expected to rise by 114%. Obviously, with nuclear power, the Middle East countries also want to present themselves as potential exporters of electricity, as well as hydrocarbons, in addition to meeting their domestic demand.

On the other hand, cheap and abundant energy is inevitable for the very future and survival of the countries in the region. In Saudi Arabia 50% of electricity consumption is used for air conditioners, for obvious climate reasons. No to mention the sea water desalination plants needed for the local population's life.

If the OPEC countries of the Middle East do not free themselves from dependence on their own sources of energy from hydrocarbons, it is obvious that - at a time of shrinking international oil markets and lower structural prices - it will no longer be possible to maintain social peace or to afford the same costs for the survival of the population. In the Emirates, for example, 97% of electricity production depends on natural gas, while in Egypt 70% of the "wonderful electric light" - as the Futurists called it - is produced by gas, which is either an unmanageable cost or, even worse, an unmanageable bond with those who supplies it to poor countries.
Even in Iran gas is worth 67% of total energy production, while currently Iran's regulated nuclear power accounts for less than 6% of the total energy produced.

Obviously, as already noted, nuclear energy is used to support the exports of hydrocarbons: the proceeds from the sale of natural gas and oil, for example, are worth 85% of revenues in Qatar and Saudi Arabia, while Iran - and this is a key factor of its strategic autonomy - acquires only 60% of its revenue from the sale of hydrocarbons abroad. The more or less explicit war in the Middle East will be won by the last country having the ability to sell gas and oil to the West. The country which will last longer with its active oil wells, will be the real hegemonic power in the region. The fight has already begun.

If each country has its own nuclear system, the "sword jihad" inside the Middle East will soon have no longer reason to exist

In the OPEC cartel, which is now ever less important to manage prices, the equivalent of our "wars of succession" has arrived. Oman, which is not a member of the Vienna cartel, is the largest oil producer outside the oligopoly dominated by OAPEC, the Arab and Sunni sub-cartel established in 1968 with a deal, still relevant today, including Kuwait, Libya and Saudi Arabia.

But nuclearization is a real bargain even for the Arab or Islamic net energy importers, such as Turkey - or, at the time, Jordan - which want to reduce the costs of gas acquisition from Russia and Iran, countries which are always less in line with President Erdogan's hegemonic designs. Furthermore, if each country has its own nuclear power plants, the danger of violent energy disruptions, due to the jihadists or to other reasons, is largely diminished.
If each country has its own nuclear system, the "sword jihad" inside the Middle East will soon have no longer reason to exist.

Moreover, it is also worth taking note of a critical date: the time of the Egyptian, Jordanian and Saudi resumption of nuclear energy production coincides with the one according to which the JCPOA between the P5+1 and Iran will enable the latter to resume some research activities - even of a military nature - in the nuclear sector.

Therefore the strategic equation is clear: the Russian Federation will have an interest in managing the nuclearization of the Greater Middle East - and its presence in Syria is a sign in this regard - while both the European Union and the United States will remain linked to the very important oil market.
They will also be conditioned by the nuclear power internal to oil producers.
Nevertheless, in this case, a new variable will appear on the crude oil and natural gas prices: their economic and strategic connection with the quantity and the cost of production of nuclear energy within the crude oil producing countries.



HARD AND SOFT POWER IN THE CASPIAN

Russian and Iranian Objectives



TAYLOR MORSE

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Two of the five states that border the Caspian Sea can be considered hegemonic in the region: Russia and Iran. Although this is beneficial to these states, it is a threat to American interests since these states are also adversarial to the US.

The first reason that Russian and Iranian control over Caspian Sea resources is a threat to the US is that it will increase their hard and soft power influence around the world. The second reason is that Russian and Iranian growth in the Caspian Sea will also increase their ties with one another, laying the groundwork for a troublesome alliance against the US. Hard power utilizes military force and economic might to attain a desired outcome in international relations. Soft power is the ability to shape the preferences of others to your desired outcome. Through newfound power from Caspian Sea resources Russia and Iran will strengthen these hard and soft positions in the world.

Hard power is typically referenced for its capacity to wield military might or the threat of it to pursue foreign policy goals. However it is the economic side of hard power which will be a tool in Russia and Iran's respective arsenals if they are able to control the flow of resources out of the Caspian Sea.

Russia has already shown its willingness to utilize economic hard power for its foreign policy goals. In the ongoing crisis in Ukraine, Russia cut off natural gas supplies to apply pressure on the new anti-Russian government. When many European states tried to resell the gas that they had received from Russia to Ukraine, Russia threatened to cut off their gas supplies unless they abandoned that plan. The European states complied. Being that Russia supplied around 43% of Europe's natural gas at that point, increasing dependence upon Russian gas from an influx of natural gas from the Caspian Sea will only increase European compliance with Russian policy.

Similarly, Iran is preparing a natural gas pipeline that may include Caspian gas that will go through Pakistan. This will allow Iran to put pressure on its American adversary through economic hard power in Pakistan, which has stated that it is not deterred by the threat of US sanctions if it does business with Iran. Being that Pakistan is the main logistical hub for the US effort in Afghanistan it seems that America is being foreign policy 'outflanked'.

The soft power gains made by Russia and Iran if they control the Caspian Sea's natural resources will occur both unintentionally and intentionally.

The threat of Russian and Iranian control of the Caspian Sea extends far beyond economics

Soft power will be gained unintentionally merely through the interaction of Russia and Iran with their customers. For example, the power of Russian business to provide natural gas jobs in NATO countries would predispose more people within these states to pro-Russian attitudes that are contradictory to NATO's traditional anti-Russian stance. There will also be efforts to intentionally gain soft power influence. Iran already exerts soft power to pursue its foreign policy through portraying itself and its allies as 'the oppressed,' which will only be furthered by the new opportunities Caspian resources provide. The major American security guarantee in Europe, NATO, would be compromised if its dependence on Russian Caspian gas was threatened to be cut off. Similarly in Asia, Pakistan's realist foreign policy allows it to absorb and deflect US pressure in favor of Iranian Caspian natural gas.



Although Russia and Iran are pursuing the Caspian Sea's resources for their own realist self-interests, their respective stakes in the Caspian Sea will grow the military ties between them. This is problematic for the US since these states are both adversarial to the US and their shared security priorities will increase their respective global capabilities. The groundwork for their mutual goals of security across the Caspian Sea has already been created. Russia just concluded a sale for delivery of multiple S-300 air defense missile systems to Iran which is designed to target advanced aircraft (which is what the West would utilize in any military action against it).



Also the Russian Caspian naval flotilla has recently traveled south to conduct joint trainings with Iran, necessary for any joint defense of the Caspian Sea. This groundwork will only be expanded to possibly include contingency plans for the defense of the Caspian Sea, joint command structures, and joint covert action, which Iran is already capable of in the Caspian region.

Deepening their military bond via Caspian Sea resources would serve to further ties between Russia and Iran in general. Iranian ports in the gulf would be open to the Russian navy, easing their force projection across the Middle East and subsequently help project its hard power there. The Russian military would have access to Iranian military bases which would politically and militarily frustrate any attempt by the West to enforce any deviation from the new Iran nuclear accord. Therefore the threat of Russian and Iranian control of the Caspian Sea extends far beyond economics and goes into projecting Russian power into the Middle East and solidifying Iran's domestic defense against the West.

The Caspian Sea's natural resources are ripe for takeover by its two regional powers, Russia and Iran. If they are able to dominate control of these resources, American interests far beyond the greater Caspian region and across the Middle East would be threatened. Through the exploitation of both hard and soft power, Russia and Iran will be able to increase their capacity to attain foreign policy goals that are often contradictory to US policy. Therefore it is imperative for the United States to start making control of Caspian Sea resources a far more important national security agenda than it presently is. Preventing Russia and Iran from totally controlling the Caspian Sea and its resources may be in the short-term a maneuver that increases tension in the region, but from Western perspectives it will facilitate their own agenda long-term more efficiently.





MILLENNIAL IRAN

Change or status quo?

STEPHEN SARTY

Stephen Sarty is a graduate student in the International Security and Intelligence Studies program at Bellevue University in Omaha, NE, USA. He is a former U.S. Marine and has lived and worked in the Middle East for the last 23 years.

Domestically, nationalism in Iran is high as it has produced some of the greatest artists, physicians, poets, and mathematicians that history has ever seen and Iranians see themselves as still being able to contribute to those rich traditions in the future.
This nationalism has been at odds, however, with the "revolutionary" state that emerged out of the Islamic Revolution, as Iran began to base many of its domestic and foreign policy decisions on Islamic objectives versus Persian cultural ones. Long a contributor, culturally, on the world stage, it has been Iran's willingness to support and often-times forge various radical Islamic Shia movements in its own image that ultimately led to its isolation from the world stage.

Initially, post-revolution, the Islamic Republic Party dominated within all branches of government. In the years since, however, this has radically changed and there are now literally hundreds of various groups all vying for a piece of the pie. The core issue between the various factions more recently has been split along the divide of whether to create a state based on a purity of Islamic principles and to lead the way for Islamic nations against the West or to create an Islamic state that is independent but also interacts with the larger global community economically and politically on more friendly terms. In the years directly following the revolution, Iranian policy was driven mainly via the hardline conservative side of the house. This approach, however, is under attack, as the recent JCPOA indicates.

The new millenial generation of Iranians, as the revolution moves further into the rear-view mirror, is pushing for a return of Iran to its cultural place in the world and an improvement of the economic situation. The most recent election of President Rouhani, who ran on a moderate platform, would appear to indicate this generational shift. Rouhani's election was seen as a direct reflection of the Iranian public's growing impatience with the economic hardships brought on by decades of sanctions and political exile from the global community and served as a warning shot to the hardline conservatives. Running counter to this is the Ayatollah's concern for both ensuring that he remains firmly in power and that he can groom his successor. Given the widespread pressure towards reform and the widening splits in political parties, the appointment of the next supreme leader will undoubtedly be a controversial but crucial transition.

Strategically to the outside world Iran occupies an important geographical space. That it possesses immense oil and natural gas reserves and controls access to the main oil routes out of the Arabian Gulf has made it a ripe target for foreign intrusion over the course of history. It is also a major bridge between Asia, Europe and the Middle East, so good relations with Iran is essential to a number of the surrounding states. As a result Iran has often resisted attempts at coercion globally, especially when it came to Western nations, as that was viewed as an attempt to control Iran against its own best interests.

In the years directly following the revolution, Iranian policy was driven mainly via the hardline conservative side of the house

Because of this much of what fuels its bitter political policies toward Western powers is based on the perceived "meddling" of various foreign entities in its affairs pre-revolution. The paranoia against outsiders, like the CIA having a hand interfering internally in Iran, is used by those in power in Tehran to control uprisings and label them as being under the direction of these outside agents. Additionally, although Persian and proud of that distinction, Iranians possess many of the same traits found in Arab tribal culture, which can create opportunities for internal dissension and manipulation. This has always stunted the rise of a true opposition force within the country.

The need to balance the social and economic needs of the people while keeping intact revolutionary ideology is essential to the Ayatollah retaining his position at the top of the pile. As we've seen in other Arab states in the region there is tremendous pressure from within to "westernize" or at least engage the global community.

The younger generation in these nations has a tremendous will to participate in modern technologies that come directly into conflict with the more conservative ways of the ruling religious faction. To prevent internal strife the religious leaders of Iran must find ways to adapt and accommodate their people. The fear here is that in doing so it creates a radicalization on both ends of the spectrum, which is evidenced all over the region.

On the religious side factions like ISIS, the Taliban, and al Qaida resisted the influx of western values and culture and used the poverty created by years of sanctions and war as propaganda against the West, while those who seek to increase ties to Western outsiders simultaneously exert ever greater stress on the ruling institutions with their demands and needs. On this opposite side we see many young students, women, and others who have been either oppressed or are simply tired of the poor conditions openly revolting against leaders who would seek to keep them isolated.

Leaders on both sides within Iran appear to be walking a fine line as they work through discussions with the West. While they must not show weakness that would lessen national sovereignty or "honor," they must also find a way to appease the increasing domestic pressure to improve economic conditions.

In its quest to continue its role as a regional hegemon, Iran's leadership faces many challenges, with none more important to its survival than those it faces domestically. With memories of the 1979 Revolution fading into the distance and its leadership keen to remain firmly in control of the nation, the Ayatollah and Iran's assortment of political players need to look for ways to address an increasingly failing economy, an unfriendly global environment, and stifling segments of remaining sanctions, as these factors all push to destabilize the country into internal strife. It is not an impossible task, however, and Iran can well learn from the successes and failures of other nations who have faced, or are facing, similar pressures.

The learning of WHICH lessons, however, is a matter of the perspective one takes and is of major importance when looking at Iran. Looking through the lens of the Ayatollah, the lessons learned would likely be drawn from nations where the control of the country remained firmly in the hand of a single dictatorial type leader, whereby success was defined in the ability to retain power and dominance.

Conversely, if one determines success by what is best for the state as a whole and its movement toward a more open and free society with greater global acceptance and connectivity, then the resultant path is radically different. This then is the real challenge facing millennial Iran and its future: will it be within a theocratic framework of managed politics guided by Islamist ideology or will it move to replace such staunchly traditionalist thinking and move away from its current theocracy, becoming a much more progressive and engaged member of the global community? This could very well be the key crucial question facing the entire Middle East for the next generation.



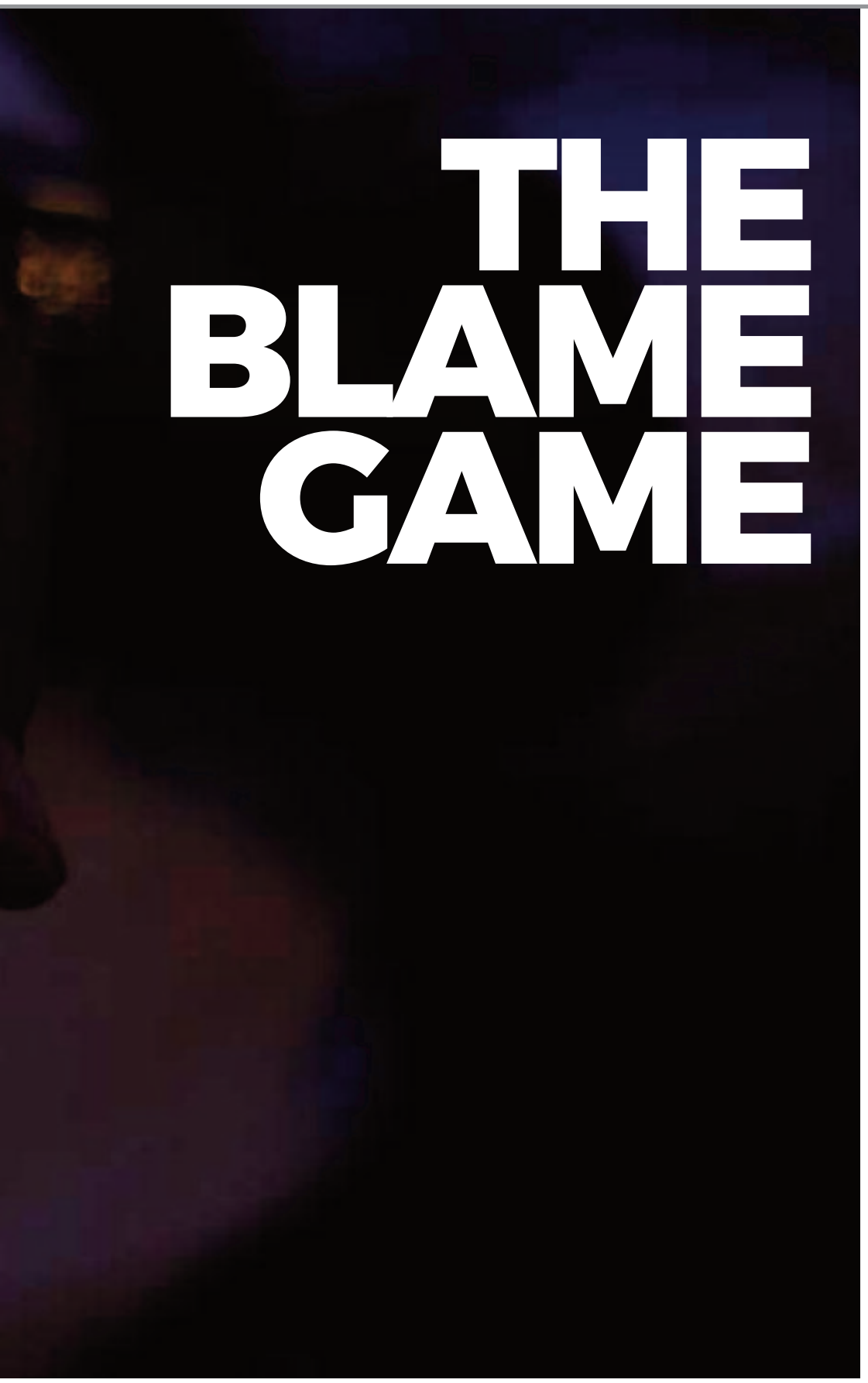


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THE BLAME GAME

Finding Fault in Greater Caspian Human Rights

A wonderfully informative, if also somewhat depressing, report has just come out from The Foreign Policy Centre, based in London, where the effort was made to understand why there seems to be a lack of transparency and accountability across Parliamentarian International Organizations as concerns recognizing and documenting and challenging human rights abuses across the Post-Soviet space, including the Greater Caspian region.

More specifically, the investigation capitalized on access to data and personnel within the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) and the OSCE Parliamentary Assembly (OSCE PA). The chief purpose was to basically assess the assessors: were the organizations put in charge of supposedly overseeing the proper development of human rights and civil governance across the former Soviet Union actually doing their duties effectively and compellingly. If not, why?

Together with previous studies conducted by fine organizations like the European Stability Initiative in Germany, the overall conclusions are not inspiring. The relatively famous concept of 'caviar diplomacy' (which has been written about at length in a previous issue of our own Greater Caspian Project), where favors are performed or misdeeds are forgiven or dismissed in exchange for personal gifts and benefits, has seemingly been accented by a veritable plethora of other complicating factors, all of which serve to undermine the proper promotion of human rights and good governance across this great region.

dark diplomacy, unfortunately, seems to be just as prevalent in the overseers as the overseen

These complicating factors in addition to 'caviar diplomacy' break down as follows:

LACK OF KNOWLEDGE: In short, most Parliamentarians across Europe put in charge of a particular country often have no direct experience or educational training on said country. Perhaps worse, efforts to 'engage and learn' can often be relegated to extremely short trip visits with highly 'managed' excursions organized by country authorities that, obviously, have a vested interest in showing the Parliamentarian in question the rosiest of pictures and most progressive of achievements. As a result, reports produced by the international organizations tend to be terribly skewed and inaccurate.

BELIEF IN 'THE POWER OF PERSUASION' THROUGH ACTIVE ENGAGEMENT: This is something akin to a political neo-paternalism, where the European actors in question believe that the only way to evolve and progress 'emerging democracies' is to give them benevolent guidance and engagement. In other words, success depends on the Western Europeans being able to show the 'ungovernables' how to govern. Even if done with the best of intentions, it is easy to see how quickly this tactic can go off the rails in terms of respect and responsibility. Even weaker seems to be the belief that there is a direct causal link between 'dialogues' and 'structural change.' So far, at least, that causal link seems decidedly thin.

CIRCLING THE WAGONS: For Parliamentarians there seems to be an 'empathizer' element for their fellow Post-Soviet/Greater Caspian legislators, in that they recognize their learning peers often face far harsher and more critical political crises, barriers, and obstacles. Consequently, this empathy identification is incurring a forgiveness quotient on transgressions against human rights and civil freedoms, or at least the ability to 'understand' how some slips can occasionally happen. In America, this would most often be categorized under the rubric of 'not wanting to throw the baby out with the bathwater.'

PARTIES OF THE WORLD UNITE: Many parties across Europe forge international alliances with each other. As time goes by, some of these partnerships form deep ties as literal bridges between East and West. There is at least compelling anecdotal evidence to suggest that some of these bridges have induced negative consequences, where members of the European bodies seem willing to be less harsh on violations when taken by members of sister organizations and parties. The European People's Party, for example, took a light-handed approach to human rights violations in Georgia when the sister party United National Movement was in power.

When UNM fell out of power and moved into the opposition role, however, EPP suddenly seemed more enthusiastic and vociferous about touting governmental transgressions coming out of Tbilisi. This same trend also tends to make very weird alliances of disparate groups with wildly varying agendas and interests. In the confusion, local populations will suffer from bad governance that never gets called out.

The most colorful example of this is how the European Democrats group brings together Britain's Conservative Party, Turkey's ruling Justice and Development Party, Azerbaijan's ruling New Azerbaijan Party, and some of Armenia's ruling elite parties. This kaleidoscope of political agenda-confusion only seems to create a lack of coherence and consensus on rulings over human rights and good governance.

POLITICAL 'REALISM': In this case realism is just code for foreign-policy-strategic-business-as-usual. As in, a country in the West, while sincerely being concerned about human rights and good governance in all states, is not going to be so concerned about it as to limit, constrain, or hinder its own pursuit of national interests and security. So whether it is the prioritization of new economic opportunities, trade, and investment or some country forming a strategic lynchpin in a greater global security plan against terrorism, it is clear that human rights and good governance are 'flexible priorities' that will rise and fall according to the importance of other states' considerations of their own *realpolitik*.

ANTI-IMPERIALISM: This is something of a rather strange international version of American 'political correctness' in the late 20th century. In this case we have a strange unity between the radical left and the radical right, laying claim that any Western nation giving lectures or making demands about human rights 'standards' is akin to a moral imperialism and an ignorance of unique cultural traditions.



The implication being that the so-called less-developed political cultures of the former Soviet Union/Greater Caspian region need to be left alone to develop their human rights standards at their own pace and in line with their unique cultures. Amazingly, this has some traction with Parliamentary bodies across Western Europe.

"ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL": To utilize a political cynicism, this finding indicates that how much a Parliamentarian cares, or does not care, about human rights abuses in any given country is a direct reflection of how big or how small that country's diaspora may be within his/her own constituency back home.This obviously creates a wildly diverse sliding scale of empathy and importance, with none of the assessment values based on empirical reality or critical gravity. Rather, it is just about whether or not the Parliamentarian in question can politically afford to pay attention to it or ignore it.

Rather, it is just about whether or not the Parliamentarian in question can politically afford to pay attention to it or ignore it. Too often, whichever version plays best with the home crowd seems to be the option that carries the day.

"CAVIAR-FLAVORED" DIPLOMACY: Unlike the previously mentioned caviar diplomacy, which is a simple and brazenly open system of corruption via bribery, extortion, and/or blackmail, caviar-flavored diplomacy is perhaps a level below but still ultimately detrimental. In this case it describes political/economic/diplomatic behavior that is clearly inappropriate and unethical but is not immediately transactional in nature. This usually involves a tit-for-tat quid pro quo, where in exchange for a Parliamentarian's willingness to look the other way or not criticize too harshly an improvement in personal networking contacts will occur or lucrative economic opportunities will be promised.

There is some evidence that this is becoming favored over straight caviar diplomacy simply because there is at least some element of plausible deniability for the Parliamentarian, as the payoff comes later on, thereby making it harder to draw an explicit link between a particular vote and the benefit.

What we can ultimately see from these findings is that the tendency in the West to shake its diplomatic head in disgust at the lack of progress on important issues like human rights and good governance across the greater Caspian region is insincere, as it is not taking place in a political vacuum. Many of the structural barriers like corruption and lack of institutional history are not only being exacerbated by the very people meant to be responsible for improving the situation, but it is arguable that the conditions sometimes become worse because of the involvement of the overseeing group from the West. We should try to remember this whenever we read the unfortunate reports coming out of the region on human rights and proper governance: dark diplomacy, unfortunately, seems to be just as prevalent in the overseers as the overseen.

(*) *For the full report, please see: Institutionally blind? International organisations and human rights abuses in the former Soviet Union, edited by Adam Hug, Foreign Policy Centre, London, February 2016.*

the European actors in question believe that the only way to evolve and progress 'emerging democracies' is to give them benevolent guidance and engagement



TERRORIST THREAT IN CENTRAL ASIA

One problem, different approaches

ALESSANDRO LUNDINI

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Terrorism and security have newly become one of the top priorities in post-Soviet Central Asia. States are discussing how to face the threat of a strengthening of the terrorism and, in particular, of the Islamic State. The attention to this phenomenon has been growing in relation to the Russian involvement in the Syrian war and the risk of a "contagion" that, from North Africa and Middle East, could affect Central Asia.

Both internally and regionally, during 2015 there have been discussions about anti-terrorist measures to implement and focused on the security aspects. But, actually, what is the level of the threat the states are facing?

The possibility of a strengthening of the radical groups is concrete and different elements prove it

In the face of concerns expressed by national governments, sources and analyses point out a more intricate reality that needs to be examined more in depth. The possibility of a strengthening of the radical groups is concrete and different elements prove it. There are no certain figures, but it is estimated that from these countries diverse thousands of youths joined ISIS or other Islamic radical groups in Syria and Iraq. Their presence is considered to be around 1.500-2.000 militants, up to a maximum of even 4.000 people.

Official numbers, in fact, could also hide governments' strategy to underestimate or exaggerate the number of foreign fighters, in order to purse their own internal purposes in facing radical groups. Beyond these figures, what concerns is the possibility of an "expansion" of the Caliphate in the Eurasian region that could take place also with the adhesion of indigenous militias to ISIS, its ideology and its strategy.

An example of such risk comes from the pledge of loyalty made by the radical Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan last August. However, it is not only a matter of ISIS, because another factor to be considered is the evolution of the fighting in Afghanistan. Taliban, indeed, could represent a potential element of instability for bordering countries, like Turkmenistan.

In the face with this situation, the Russian Federation is trying to play its role of leading actor in the region for security issues through the definition of a common anti-terrorism policy, involving all other Central Asian states. Moscow has direct interest in limiting the expansion of islamist groups, in stabilising bordering countries and in reducing the proliferation of radical elements in its territory. In addition to Central Asians foreign fighters, what worries Moscow is the presence of 1.500-3.000 Russian citizens in war zones. Moreover, Russia itself has become a land of recruitment for jihadist movements, which acquire new militants from the emigrants resident in the large Russian cities, where tough living conditions pave the way for cultural and social marginalization and the split up between young Islamic workers from the rest of the society. This evolution has made the Russian, the third language – after Arab and English – in Islamic State's propaganda and recruitment activities.

By its own side, Moscow has military bases and the lead of the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the most important regional security structure. In the last CSTO's summits (in Dushanbe and Moscow) it has been underlined the risk for the five Central Asian states and Russia, but the path to a common anti-terrorist initiative it's not easy.



CSTO doesn't include two key states like Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Moreover, central Asians are wary over a possible return of Russian influence in the region. This concern is in part emerged with the constitution of the Eurasian Economic Union, but is much stronger in relation to the possibility of a Russian-led common defensive policy, because it could be interpreted as a blow to the sovereignty of these countries.

So, even if the issue of a coordinated policy is always on the agenda, the answers against terrorist threat have assumed different faces. Elaborated on the root of problems, prof. Anis H. Bajrektarevic reminded us recently in his seminal piece 'No more War on Terror, please': "But, terror is a tactics, not an ideology. How can one conduct and win war on tactics? – it is an oxymoron."

Turkmenistan, for example, has maintained his neutrality position and repeatedly underlined its will to protect the integrity of the state from any kind of intrusion. Even if it is one of those states forced to face the major threat - since reports pointed out incidents at its Afghan borders - Turkmenistan is contrary to any kind of "intrusion" in its sphere of sovereignty.

Only in recent days, Ashgabat reached an agreement with Russia for security cooperation, which include the control of Turkmen-Afghan border, in order to limit eventual border crossing by Taliban forces. In other cases, instead, the menace might be used as an instrument through which governments can crack down opposition groups. Among states "suspected" of these practices there is Tajikistan.



The country suffers hundreds of young in the forces of the Caliphate and recently even one of the most influential military officials, Colonel Gulmurod Khalimov, abandoned institutional ranks to join ISIS. Tajik President Emomali Rahmon described the Islamic State "the 21st century plague" and started a crackdown on Islamic groups highly criticized, starting speculations about the real nature of the governmental intentions. Many suspects, in fact, that some measures – like the disbandment of the opposition movement Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan, the ban of veil for women and the strong invitation for the men to shave their beard – have little to do with security issue. In Uzbekistan, where President Karimov is conducting a years-long war against terrorism, government decided to implement new anti-terrorist measures.

Kazakhstan, instead, has chosen another path. Recently, Astana declared to have allocated more resources for security apparatus, but there is more. Contrary to the other Central Asians republics, Astana has taken up the idea of a regional cooperation to this issue.

Speaking to the 70th UN General Assembly last September, President Nursultan Nazarbayev advanced a proposal (previously presented in SCO summit in Ufa) for the creation of an "anti-terrorist global network" under the aegis of the United Nations and with the involvement of regional defense structures, like CSTO. Kazakh President underlined that global threats requires global answers, stressing the necessity to re-unite the different alliances constituted in order to coordinate them. A vision – this – that brings Russia and Kazakhstan even closer on security issue. Another element to underline about Kazakh strategy is the role conceded in its anti-terrorism law to social and cultural factors, in order to prevent the spread of religious radicalism and extremism. Only years to come will say if this particular approach will give its results.

The necessity of a common answer should start also by the consideration that the Eurasian one presents itself as an increasingly significant key region. The attention toward Central Asians states is determined by their relevance as raw materials suppliers,

their strategic transit routes and importance for the political stability: single States' instability – due to the rise of domestic radical groups or to the return of foreign fighters - can produce an impact on the whole area and even on Russia and China.

At the same time, is necessary a thought-out look about the real entity of the issue. Many reports indicate that Central Asians states are lesser in danger than other regions' countries. According to the 2015 "Global Terrorism Index" Central Asia is less in danger than Europe. Eurasian states have "good performances" not only in respect of the most troubled nations, but even of their more influential neighbors, Russia and China. The five former Soviet Central Asian states have been included in the "lowest impact of terrorism" and "no impact" categories, ranging from 83rd rank (of 162 countries classified) of Kazakhstan to the last position of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

This standing can result exaggerated, especially in a phase in which terrorism is living a rising trend, but it can help to value the relative stability of these countries. Moreover, it can help in understanding that disproportionate reactions can lead to counterproductive effects in medium-long term. In some cases, restrictions and repressions seems to respond to necessities of internal politics. The real risk is that such measures might contribute to an increasing expansion of radicalism and dissatisfaction with the institutions. Poverty, social and cultural marginalization, ethnic discriminations, lack of efficient politics and the increasing economic difficulties in these states are among other factors able to strengthen radical groups beyond the "religious ideology".

Russia is trying to play its role of leading actor in the region for security issues through the definition of a common anti-terrorism policy

The answer can't include only security aspects, because fundamentalism can grow for economic, social and cultural reasons. In this regard, the aforementioned Kazakh law on anti-terrorism, with its comprehensive attitude toward the issue, could represent a viable approach in the fight against religious extremism and radicalism. Only time, however, can say if this kind of solution can work and if Central Asia can prevent the rise of terrorism and instability.

AZERI INTELLIGENCE

Dealing with Handcuffs and Hindrances

TIM WOBIG

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He has been in the military for almost 15 years, 8 of them in the Marine Corps and is now an Army Captain. Having served in Afghanistan and as a Team Leader for Weapons of Mass Destruction, he is now a Company Commander for a Sustainment Brigade in California.



Azerbaijan has been known to have more natural resources than most nations. However, it is its geographical location and history that sometimes has been more important in understanding its Intelligence Community. Since 1967 the Azeri Ministry of National Security was headed and influenced by the less than popular Soviet KGB. Until 1967 the security authorities of the republic had been headed only by non-Azerbaijanis. In the same year General Heydar Aliyev was appointed as chairman of the KGB of Azerbaijan.



In October 1991, after the Republic of Azerbaijan gained independence, the Ministry of National Security of the Republic of Azerbaijan was established on the material-technical basis and staff of the State Security Committee.

This intelligence agency, which we will refer to from here on out as the MNS, has numerous departments of communication. The MNS frequently deliberates and bases its decisions on the methodologies within the internal State authority established under the Republic of Azerbaijan, better understood as the Milli Majlis, which relatively recently changed how long a President could hold office. Now the President can be reelected as many times as necessary while the country is at war. Before this amendment, the President could only hold office for up to three terms, each having a five year period. Understand that each Parliamentarian deputy, all 125 of them, are put into position by the President. There are no debates about putting laws into Congress or by Congress. Rather, the influence of political clans takes precedence.

One of the more recent discussions on corruption was the firing of Eldar Mahmudov, the Minister of National Security.
The President, Ilham Aliyev, did not give a reason as to why he was fired nor was he required to. "Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev has dismissed his powerful security minister in an unexpected move against an official who was widely seen as an Aliyev loyalist. Aliyev announced the dismissal of National Security Minister Eldar Mahmudov in a decree that was published on his website. He did not provide any explanation for the decision.

The 59-year-old Mahmudov had served at the post since 2004. Opposition politicians complained that Aliyev's failure to explain the reason for Mahmudov's firing showed that there was no transparency in the country's political decision- making process. Critics have long accused Aliyev of authoritarianism, corruption, and rights abuses. Aliyev also dismissed his previous national security minister, Namig Abbassov, in July 2004 without providing any reason."



The political and economic system in Azerbaijan is largely based on a pyramidal web of patronage

Compounding these events was the fact that the editor of the most popular newspaper within the country reporting on the story was related to the President himself. The political clans mentioned earlier are extremely important in understanding the powers of the President, which thereby impact the intelligence-gathering techniques and strategies of the MNS.

"The political and economic system in Azerbaijan is largely based on a pyramidal web of patronage. Clans, mainly based on regional origin as well as the ruling elite, keep the system intact to secure their financial and power interests.

Two clans, the Nakhichevanis and Yerazi, have dominated politics for decades. Heydar Aliyev had his origin in both clans, which gave him a strong powerbase. The Aliyev family stands on the top of the pyramid and makes sure that key positions in all spheres of society are taken by the closely related and like-minded. This structure has developed into extensive bureaucracy and corruption. Corruption in all spheres of society poses the largest threat to the functioning of the state. Most ministers have bought their jobs and many are directly related to the president. Moreover, membership of the president's party, YAP, is a precondition for state employment."

Consequently, the Azeri nation is mired in a situation that it really cannot control, nor is it able to voice its opinion to the authorities for fear of being incarcerated on charges that are often fabricated.
"There are limitations to freedom of expression and assembly and the rights to liberty and fair trial. The authorities have arrested dozens of political activists on bogus charges, imprisoned critical journalists, broke up several peaceful public demonstrations, and adopted legislation that further restricted fundamental freedoms. Torture and ill-treatment continue with impunity. The authorities did not effectively investigate credible allegations of beatings, threats, and other abuses in custody made by several arrested political activists."



These difficulties and restraints that form the background noise of MNS functioning are producing ill-advised impacts that put the people of Azerbaijan at risk. The MNS thus operates within an area that is consumed by a history of corruption and severe limitations on its impartial independence. The MNS gathers intelligence on its own people and these surrounding influential countries: Russia, Turkey, Iran, Israel, and Syria.

Imagine the pressure, if you can just for a moment, being an agent within the Ministry of National Security. With no ability to perform your duties impartially or objectively and with your own personal livelihood obviously tied to how well you honor allegiance to the Presidential clans, the MNS ends up being largely just another subjective arm of manipulation by the President.

When such corruption and bias is allowed to not just exist but actually blossom within the intelligence community, then it is not just the civil liberties of the people or the general level of freedom of Azerbaijan that becomes compromised: the actual national security of the country vis-à-vis the global community becomes undermined. The future of Azeri national security and perhaps the very legitimacy of its intelligence community, in the form of the MNS, have a long road of revision and reform in its future if Azerbaijan wants to truly play a bigger role regionally across the greater Caspian with integrity and effective power.

THE POWER OF SIBERIA PIPELINE

Multiple Layers of Complex Geopolitics

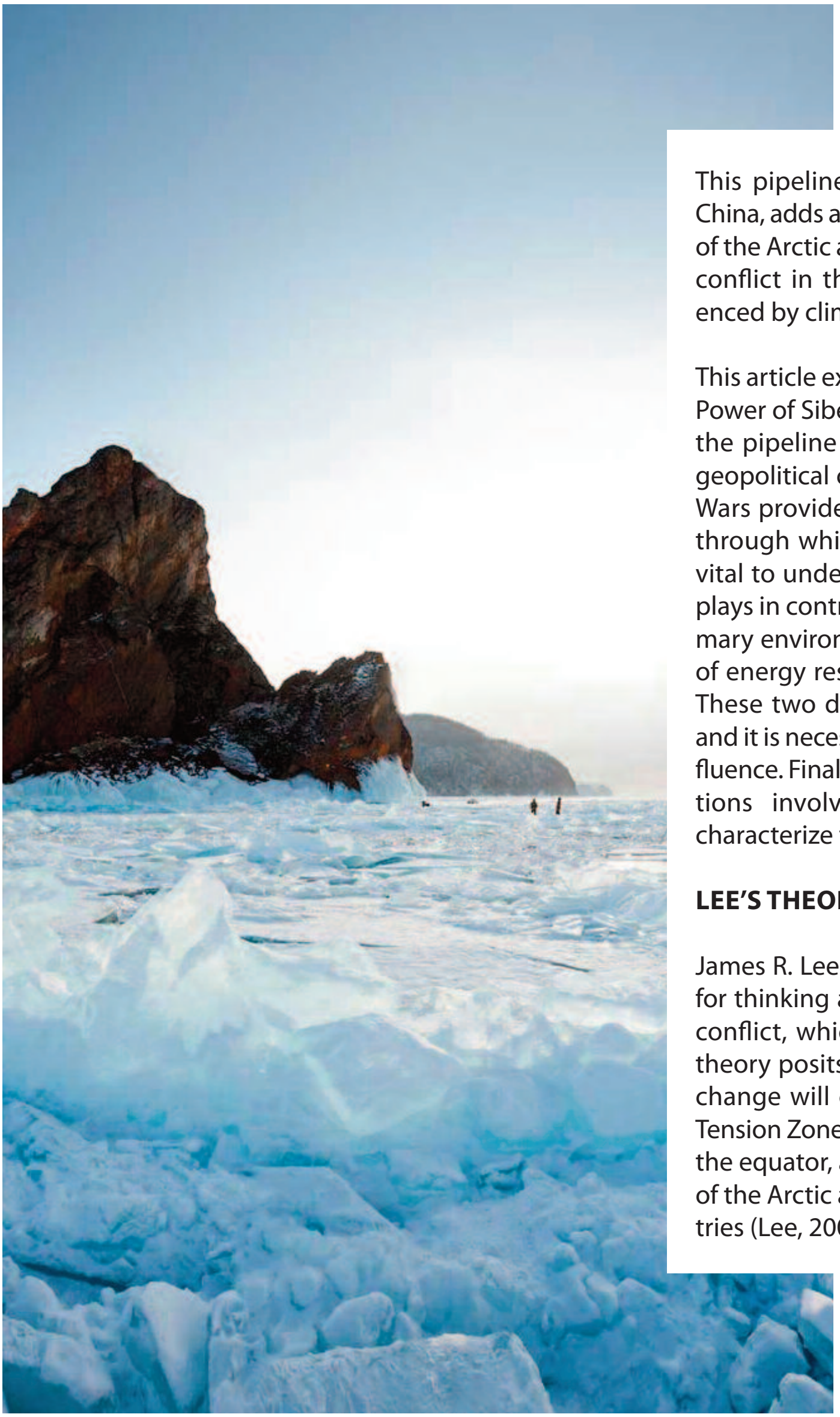
ALEXANDER S. MARTIN

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The Power of Siberia pipeline is particularly well-suited to exploring the convergence of energy resource scarcity and climate change and that convergence's impact on international relations and potential conflict.

Gas production for the pipeline begins in Russia's Irkutsk region, and will stretch from there through Kharabarovsk to Vladivostok, ultimately for exports to the Asian-Pacific region (Gazprom, 2014). In 2014, officials from Russia and China signed a 30 year contract "to supply pipeline gas from Russia to China via the eastern route," stipulating that Russia will annually supply 38 billion cubic meters of gas to China (Gazprom, 2014).



This pipeline, and the deal between Russia and China, adds additional complexity to the geopolitics of the Arctic and will contribute to the possibility of conflict in the Arctic region, which will be influenced by climate change.

This article examines the potential conflict over the Power of Siberia pipeline. It is first necessary to put the pipeline into theoretical, environmental, and geopolitical contexts. Lee's theory of Hot and Cold Wars provides an excellent theoretical framework through which to understand this issue. It is also vital to understand the role that the environment plays in contributing to future conflict. The two primary environmental factors are shrinking reserves of energy resources and the melting of Arctic ice. These two developments are, in this case, linked and it is necessary to understand their combined influence. Finally, the geopolitical dynamics of the nations involved will be analyzed in order to characterize the threat.

LEE'S THEORY OF COLD WARS

James R. Lee (2009) has developed a useful model for thinking about how climate change influences conflict, which he terms Hot and Cold Wars. This theory posits two types of zones in which climate change will contribute to conflict, the Equatorial Tension Zone which is comprised of countries along the equator, and the Polar Tension Zones, made up of the Arctic and Antarctica as well as nearby countries (Lee, 2009).



The Equatorial Tension Zone will experience Hot Wars, while the Polar Tension Zones will experience Cold Wars. Cold Wars are conflicts of expansion in which rising temperatures cause previously inaccessible resources to become available, as a result of which relevant states engage in competition over those resources.

Potential conflict involving the Power of Siberia pipeline will be characterized by the elements of a Cold War. It is designed to transport natural gas from Russia and "will be filled with gas from Yamal, the gas-rich peninsula in the Russian far north" (Staalesen, 2014). Yamal has a maximum annual gas production "comparable to the volume of Gazprom's current gas supplies to the domestic market and exceeds twofold the volume of [exported] gas." Furthermore, as Arctic ice melts, offshore development will be possible and is projected to begin after 2025 (Miller, 2015).

When compared to the criteria for a Cold War, the Power of Siberia pipeline displays each necessary element. Having established the Power of Siberia pipeline within a theoretical framework, it is worth exploring its environmental impacts.

ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS

The first and perhaps most pertinent environmental influence on potential conflict involving the Power of Siberia pipeline is the melting Arctic ice. In 2015, Arctic sea ice was at its lowest recorded winter maximum (Smith-Spark, 2015). Counterintuitively, researchers at NASA have found that the thickest Arctic ice sheets are melting faster than the thinner sheets, and these areas are most heavily concentrated north of Russia (Gran & Vinas, 2012). According to Lee's Cold War theory, as these resources become available, the nations who begin to exploit these resources increase their likelihood of coming into conflict.

When compared to the criteria for a Cold War, the Power of Siberia pipeline displays each necessary element

The most recent "Energy Outlook" published by BP assesses that while global energy demand will decrease by 2035, China will still be a principle driver of demand growth (BP, 2014). The International Energy Agency estimates that by 2030 China will have a larger gas market than the European Union, while its total energy demand by 2040 is nearly double the demand of the US (International Energy Agency, 2015). This demand places Russia and the Power of Siberia pipeline in a privileged position vis-a-vis China's rising energy demand.

The strategic value of energy resources is illustrated in the increasing tendency of states to take national control of oil companies, forming what are known as national oil companies (NOCs). Rising awareness of and concern for depletion of energy resources has led to states taking a mercantilist approach to energy resources (Klare, 2009). Energy resource competition has already led great powers to intervene militarily in weaker states, but the likelihood of great power conflict is also increasing in indirect ways (Klare, 2009). Aside from general trends toward conflict, the particular geopolitical tensions concerned with the Power of Siberia pipeline have a particular contribution to the likelihood of conflict.

GEOPOLITICAL DYNAMICS

The agreement that Russia would supply China with natural gas from the Power of Siberia pipeline was signed in the wake of widespread, largely Western international condemnation and application of sanctions against Russia as a result of its military interventions in Ukraine. This highlights the international tensions that characterize the Power of Siberia Pipeline. The combination of economic conflict between Russia and the West, and cooperation between Russia and China, reflects and amplifies the geopolitical tensions that existed before the creation of the pipeline.

A concept common to both is the notion of a multipolar world order (Turner, 2009). Russia has pursued this goal in several ways, most recently with the formation of the Eurasian Economic Union at the beginning of this year (Michel, 2015). China likewise has established a number of economic challenges to Western supremacy.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), designed to function like the International Monetary Fund, includes "a quarter of the world's nations, 16 of the world's largest economies, and includes countries in Europe and in Latin America." (Tiezzi, 2015) In the context of Russia's and China's revisionist ambitions, and Russia's international isolation, the Power of Siberia pipeline offers a chance for the two powers to strengthen each other's strategic positions. This will embolden both nations in their challenge to the West. On the other hand, as energy resources become increasingly scarce, Russia's access to and control of Arctic resources will increase the likelihood of conflict over these resources.

CONCLUSION

It is clear that the confluence of climate change and geopolitical tensions are increasing the likelihood of conflict between Russia and China on one side and the US and its Western allies on the other. The theory of Cold Wars predicts that as warming temperatures in the Polar Tension Zone rise, Arctic resources will become more available, resulting in competition and conflict. In the case of the Siberian Power pipeline, the resource involved is natural gas, a critical energy resource. Diminishing energy resource reserves is already raising tensions between major powers. Finally, preexisting rivalries between the West and Russia and China will be exacerbated by climate change and resource scarcity. In the middle of all of this will likely be the Power of Siberia pipeline, something that very few global analysts seem to be focusing on right now.

"The strong do what they have to do and the weak accept what they have to accept"

Thucydides

MD+

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THE TAPI PIPELINE

The Politics of Energy Balancing

ANDY DEAHN



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There is a new energy rush among many Greater Caspian states, one that continues to focus on breaking free of the heavy Russian influence while also diversifying their supply chains.

However, in the continual game of energy politics, many geopolitical and geostrategic foes have been born. One such nation, Turkmenistan, is spearheading an energy initiative that will both diversify and expand its customer base while at the same time release itself from Russian authority.

In addition to being a landlocked country and a former Soviet Republic, the nation is also the richest Caspian state in natural gas and untapped energy resources. Yet the nation has also struggled throughout the past in diversifying its export transportations. This issue stems back into the 1980s and 90s when Russia attempted to exert its influence throughout Central Asia by occupying Afghanistan. During this time Russian gas giant Gazprom refused to sign an energy deal with Unocal - a previous petroleum explorer and marketer based in California - over a Trans-Afghanistan pipeline, due to U.S. support for the mujahideen, a move it believed was aimed at undermining Russian influence in the region. Moreover, Gazprom's chief executive at the time, Rem Vyakhirev, declared that Russia would not allow Turkmenistan or Kazakhstan to export its oil and gas through non-Russian pipelines. This was aimed as a move that would eradicate any form of Russian influence or energy developments throughout Central Asia in the near or far future.

While projects like the aforementioned Trans-Afghan pipeline failed to develop and efforts to build the Trans-Caspian pipeline are continually stalled due to political contestations, on December 13, 2015, a deal outlining the details to build the Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India (TAPI) pipeline was signed.

Russia and Iran may observe the TAPI pipeline as a hindrance to their own economies

This ratification hopes to allow the destination countries to break free of those political and economic chains that have restricted Turkmen gas from diversifying its transport routes and becoming independent of Russian influence. Nevertheless, this may come with a price of its own.

The timeline to begin operations is set for the year 2019 and will hold a cost of over $10 billion USD, from which Turkmenistan is the leading sponsor. The TAPI pipeline will have the ability to transport an estimated 33 billion cubic meters (bcm) per year. But with all the hype and allure of generating energy independence, diversifying exports, and expanding each destination country's energy infrastructure, there has also been a lack of foreign investments as well as various geopolitical ramifications tied to these attempts at building another pipeline.

The TAPI pipeline is alive today due to Turkmengaz's 85 percent stake in the project—leaving the remaining 15 percent stakes split equally among the destination countries.

Turkmengaz is the national gas company of Turkmenistan and the largest gas company in Central Asia. Its lead investment depicts Turkmenistan's prioritization to generate energy diversification and independence, which the nation believes are necessary to keep pace with its domestic productions that are slowly surpassing its current export capacities. Before 2011, Russia was Turkmenistan's main market for imports of natural gas. However since 2011, China has become the recipient of the bulk of Turkmen natural gas exports. This was made possible by the willingness of China to create the necessary environment. Since these expansions, two-thirds (45 bcm) of natural gas has been transported annually to China, with the rest being split between Iran (9 bcm), Russia (9 bcm), and Kazakhstan (0.5 bcm).

This new China pivot presents two geopolitical problems. First, this shift away from Russia may aggravate regional tensions as Moscow may observe this move as one that once again attempts to undermine its influence across the Greater Caspian and Central Asian regions.



Second, even if the TAPI pipeline allows the sponsor nations to escape the grip of one of the largest Caspian powers—Russia—they may find themselves shackled to the dominance of Beijing, a move that would only replace one great power with another. China is already closing its economic grip on the project, seeking to assist in financing Pakistan's 5 percent stake through its $46 billion USD investment project known as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. Furthermore, Afghanistan, which already has limited financial resources and a security situation that presents multiple dilemmas, must raise 3 percent of its own financing before the Asian Development Bank will provide the rest.

Undoubtedly, the single most important consideration during the development and construction phase will be to stabilize the security situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In addition, territorial conflicts and boundary disputes stemming from Pakistan and India over Kashmir must be quelled in order to attract more outside investors and improve the overall security situation.

Russia and Iran may observe the TAPI pipeline as a hindrance to their own economies and may surreptitiously exacerbate the security issues stemming heavily from Afghanistan and Pakistan. This may lead the two nations to indirectly economically and politically suppress the effort to build what some are calling "The New Silk Road", perhaps rendering the TAPI pipeline nothing but a pipe dream.

Despite the various historical tensions, conflicts, and uncertain security equation throughout the destination countries, the success of the TAPI pipeline may be more possible than it seems. This is because Turkmenistan's president Gurbanguly Berdimukhammedov, has actively pushed each country's leader to move the project forward, offering them a direct, unobstructed investment in another pipeline project originating at the world's second-largest natural gas field—the Galkynysh natural gas field in southern Turkmenistan. It would be against any of the destination countries' best economic interests to muddy the waters of an opportunity this large.

Moreover, the political will of each nation and the economic prospects for the region could be balanced against the long and still powerful grip of Russian energy controls. In short, the TAPI pipeline is not just a quick-fix solution to energy independence. Rather, it is a calculated, coherent, and long-term energy focused strategic vision for the Greater Caspian state of Turkmenistan and the Central Asian states of Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India.



GIANCARLO ELIA VALORI

Advisory Board Co-chair Honoris Causa

Professor Giancarlo Elia Valori is an eminent Italian economist and businessman.
He holds prestigious academic distinctions and national orders.



Historically, the Silk Road was established during the Han dynasty, between 206 B.C and 220 A.D., after the long Chinese exploration of Southern and Western Asia which had started at least two thousand years before.

As the original myth of Eurasia's foundation has it, it was in those areas - among nomadic and warring populations - that the Son of Heaven became, for the first time, a shepherd of sheep flocks, and escaped the wild beasts which wanted to kill him and then devour the whole Han dinasty.

XI JINPING'S TRAVEL TO THE MIDDLE EAST

President Xi Jinping, the new Son of Heaven, embodying positive forces both at political and mythical levels, followed again the Silk Road and hence returned to the Middle East, by visiting Iran, Saudi Arabia and Egypt. This was meant to rebuild the original strategic projection of China's First Red Empire – hence to make China regain its ancient role based on the philosophical principle of "All under Heaven".
The visit to the three Middle East countries was paid by the CCP Secretary on January 19-22, 2016, on the occasion of the sixtieth anniversary of the mutual recognition between China and the Arab League. Until 2015 Saudi Arabia was the most important China's crude oil supplier - a position currently held by Russia as primary seller.

The travel to these three Arab and Islamic countries is the first visit paid by the CCP Secretary in 2016 and this makes us understand the special importance that Xi Jinping and his China attaches to the commercial, political and strategic relationship between China and Iran, Egypt and Saudi Arabia. As is well-known, Xi Jinping' strategic project is the new Silk Road, which he called "One Belt One Road".

Xi Jinping's project was made public in October 2013. It is divided into a maritime part and a land part, which will both connect China with Central and Western Asia, the Middle East and finally Europe. To put it in a metaphor of the Taoist sages - and Mao Zedong was so – the void (of power) of the United States and of the European Union itself, completely devoid of a real foreign policy, will be "filled" by a link with China and Eurasia on the part of the Sunni and Shi'ite Islamic world.

In Asia, where it originates, the new Silk Road will be connected with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and with the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar Corridor (BCIM). After the globalization which was an Americanization, the Chinese-style globalization will prevail, which will unite all the losers of the first globalization by tying them at first to Eurasia and later to China itself.
Since the diplomatic recognition between Russia and Saudi Arabia in 1990, trade has increased by 230 times, up to 70 billion US dollars in 2014. Currently, in Saudi Arabia, 160 Chinese companies operate not only in the oil sector but also in the logistics, transport and electronics sectors.

China wants to support the Arab world with a stimulus to the domestic production differentiation and the reduction of those economies' oil dependence. For China, the relationship with Saudi Arabia is the strategic link with the Sunni country closest to the United States which, however, does not want to be tied hand and foot to the United States.
Saudi Arabia has every interest in dealing with China so as to avoid having only North America as counterpart – a relationship and a situation which, devoid of any counterbalance, would obviously be less favourable to Saudi Arabia.

The most important project binding China and Saudi Arabia is the Yarseef refinery which is worth 10 billion US dollars, 62.5% of which funded by the Chinese Sinopec. President Xi Jinping has defined Yanbu - the Red Sea port where the Yarseef refinery is located – as the regional point of arrival of the Silk Road and, at the same time, the axis of the new Saudi industrialization. Another essential aspect of Xi Jinping's visit to Saudi Arabia is the idea of establishing, by 2017, a Free Trade Zone together with the Gulf Cooperation Council, another component of the "Silk Road" which, in these areas, connects its maritime way and its land stretch.

Later, in his visit to Egypt, the CCP Secretary followed up the themes already developed during the visit paid by the Egyptian President, Al Sisi, to Beijing in December 2014. The idea is to implement a "comprehensive strategic partnership" based on 15 major projects, to the tune of 15 billion US dollars.These projects are related to infrastructure and transport, considering that Cairo and the Egyptian coast will be the Mediterranean point of arrival of the new maritime Silk Road.

Other investments in the "comprehensive strategic partnership" regard the Egyptian energy sector while, during Xi Jinping's visit, additional 21 new investment projects were defined with an additional soft loan to this country equal to 1.7 billion US dollars, managed by some Egyptian banks.
A geopolitical level, Xi Jinping's attention is mainly focused on the Egyptian and Shi'ite region, with a probable mediation between Iran and Saudi Arabia which has materialized during the Chinese leader's visit. This means that China fears the expansionism of the Isis/Daesh "Caliphate" and, above all, the return of hundreds of Uighur foreign fighters living in Xingkiang. At diplomatic - and probably at operational - level, China has supported Egypt in its fight against the Qaedist jihadist area, at first, and later against the Caliphate jihadist aera in the Sinai. It will certainly distribute its investments across the Middle East, based on the each country's ability to fight against the jihad.

If Europe and the West will not be able to support the new autonomous development of the Middle East - and we can currently perceive all their limits in this regard - this region will become - between Russia and China - the Southern and maritime part of Eurasia. This will be the new Sino-Russian Heartland which will hegemonize the Mediterranean region and much of the "great European plain", as the French philosopher Raymond Aron called it.

Another significant geopolitical sign is that Xi Jinping urged Al Sisi's Egypt to participate, as observer, in the next G20 Summit to be held in Beijing next September. The last Middle East country visited by the Chinese leader, was the Shi'ite and not Arab nation of Iran.

Obviously Xi Jimping came to preserve the Chinese position reached in Iran, but also to support Iran in its strategic differentiating from Europe and NATO

Xi Jinping was the first leader of a world power to visit Iran after the lifting of sanctions, to which the Chinese and Russian activity within the P5+1 contributed significantly. It is a very important symbolic fact.

Certainly China has never taken the sanctions against Iran into account. In fact, as early as 2014, China has replaced Germany as first business partner of the Shi'ite country, with a bilateral turnover exceeding 70 billion US dollars. Obviously Xi Jimping came to preserve the Chinese position reached in Iran, but also to support Iran in its strategic differentiating from Europe and NATO, as demonstrated by the open support he showed during some interviews in Iran for the presence of Shi'ite forces in Syria. Unlike many naïve Western experts and the even more childish leaders of a gutless Europe believe, the Syrian issue is not the fight against a "tyrant" such as Bashar al-Assad so as to restore a very unlikely "democracy". In the Middle East democracy is imposed to make a country strategically "viable", which means devoid of reactions to the operations carried out by other players on the field. Therefore the real Syrian issue is the fight against those hegemonizing the Greater Middle East in the future. It may be Turkey, which wants to conquer Syria's vast Sunni area for its mad neo-Ottoman dream.

Or the Russian Federation along with Iran, which will annex the Shi'ite and Alawite Syria to the corridor stretching from Ukraine to the coast towards the Black Sea and the Eastern Mediterranean basin. Or finally Saudi Arabia, which wants to manage its own "Sunni and Wahhabi International" so as to dominate the whole Middle East region and its oil, without the constraints of OPEC, which is now a residual cartel.Xi Jinping, however, proposes to Iran a greater Chinese presence in the local banking and financial sector, the building of seven fast railway lines to be connected, in the future, with the networks already existing in China and, of course, a greater Chinese presence in the Iranian oil and gas sector.



According to Chinese analysts, trade between China and Iran is expected to increase tenfold, up to reaching 700 billions a year by 2017.
Hence, considering all the actions undertaken in the three Middle East countries he visited late January, the core of Xi Jinping's operation is the creation of a joint Free Trade Zone between the three countries with China's support – a topic we have already raised at the beginning of this article.

This is a move intended to rebalance the free trade agreement between the United States and other 11 Pacific countries, as well as to fill Western Europe's "void" throughout the Middle East.
China has reached the free trade agreement with all the six Persian Gulf countries, namely Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait and Oman.
China wants to put enemy countries together so as to mediate in a credible way.
The agreement is supposed to be signed by the end of 2016.
Hence the "void" of the United States and of an ever weaker and inward-lookingWest, obsessed by the idea of "exporting democracy" or by a naïve, self-defeating and self-destructive "geopolitics of values", is "filled" by a China exporting economic support, political influence and credible skills and abilities to mediate between all regional players.



RUSSIA`S ACTIVITIES IN AFRICA

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In its end-of-year official report, the Russian Foreign Ministry indicated that Russia, as a permanent member of the UN Security Council, has made a substantial contribution to resolving conflicts and crises in Mali, Somalia, Sudan and the Central African Republic and many other African countries.Russia also provided targeted humanitarian relief aid to Guinea, Sierra Leone, Liberia and Cameroon. The report, however, did not state the total amount that was spent on humanitarian aid to Africa in 2015.

Russia has made a substantial contribution to resolving conflicts and crises in many African countries

In 2015, Russia's financial and material support was overwhelming. With regards to health, Russia's contribution to the international effort to fight the deadly Ebola virus in West Africa (mainly in Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone) was estimated at around $60 million, according to an international department head of Russia's health watchdog Rospotrebnadzor.

Russia continues participating in the joint effort to create a vaccine against the Ebola virus, which is expected to be ready for mass use in early 2016, the director of the Health Ministry's department Marina Shevyreva said. According to the World Health Organization (WHO), the deadly Ebola virus has killed some 11,300 people in West Africa. Last February, to ease the situation of refugees who have been streaming from neighboring states into Cameroon, the Russian government delivered provided food aid for refugees amounting to US$ 2.5 million (1.3 billion CFA francs).

According to statistics issued by the Cameroon government and the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, around 300,000 refugees from Nigeria and the Central African Republic have sought refuge in Cameroon. The Republic of Burundi on May 13 last year saw a coup attempt and as a result threw the country into chaos. Burundi descended into violence after President Pierre Nkurunziza announced he was running for a third term. The decision to run for a third term in office was seen by opponents as a contradiction to the constitution. Coup leader General Niyombare is currently on the run. The failure of their coup bid and re-election of Nkurunziza have not stopped the unrest in the country.

Over the past years, Russia has played pivotal roles in helping resolve many multi-faceted conflicts on the continent. For instance last September, there was a three-way consultation, the first time within this format, with the participation of Sudanese Foreign Minister Ibrahim Ghandour and South Sudanese Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Minister Benjamin Barnaba, to utilize the "Moscow platform" to continue the dialogue on the issues that remain in the relations between the two states. The joint meeting made some important decisions by the Sudanese and South Sudanese foreign ministers, above all, regarding the need to implement – to the maximum degree and as soon as possible – all the provisions of the document on the inter-Sudanese settlement that were signed over the past two or three years.

Russia welcomed the efforts to stabilize the situation in the Republic of South Sudan, where a conflict has been ongoing since 2013, as well as the signing of a peace agreement between the South Sudanese government and the opposition last August.

Russia supported them to continue advocating for a political, diplomatic settlement of all outstanding issues, among other things, by following a corresponding approach at the UN Security Council. Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, meeting separately with the Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation Ministers from Rwanda, Congo and Madagascar last year, stressed Russia's preparedness to boost humanitarian aid to natural and man-made disasters regions as well as continue helping to find lasting solutions to conflicts in Africa. "We agree that various conflicts in Africa require heightened attention of the world community and the UN, primarily in order to support the approaches of Africans who know better than others how to approach complicated issues on their continent,"

Lavrov told Rwandan Louise Mushikiwabo during a joint media conference held last October in Moscow. They further shared opinions on the events in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and the African Great Lakes Region as a whole, the Horn of Africa, the Central African Republic and South Sudan.As always, Russia has agreed on the need to contribute to the subregional organizations on the continent and to continue consolidating the peacemaking potential of the African Union (AU).

In addition, Russia regularly provides funds for the annual training of about 80 peacemakers from African countries. "We will help strengthen the peacekeeping potential of African countries in the form of training peacekeepers from African countries and helping them equip their peacekeeping contingents," Lavrov said in January last year after talks with Burundi Foreign Minister Laurent Kavakure. In all discussions and consultations held throughout 2015, both African and Russian sides have had in-depth exchange of opinions on key issues on the African agenda with a particular focus on easing crisis situations in Africa. Russian President Vladimir Putin stressed at a previous ceremony when receiving credentials from ambassadors of several foreign countries, including diplomats of several African states, that Russia has planned to give all necessary humanitarian assistance to conflict-stricken African countries.