

I Report dell'IsAG

July 2017

The Geopolitics of Uzbekistan

A Threatened Autarky amid a Eurasian Heartland?

Authors: Nickolas Wathke, Aidan Johnson, Mohammad Kayali, Amanda Simon, Ty Simons, Kendyll Taylor, and Olivia Towner

Editor and Co-Author: Prof. Phil Kelly

108



Abstract

The unique physical setting of Uzbekistan, an exposed and dependent location within central Eurasia, invites a geopolitical description, the goal of this essay. The interest of the authors lies in utilizing the concepts of “heartland” and “autarky,” both terms intersecting and reinforcing, along with additional concepts, to portray the contemporary foreign affairs of this newly-independent, centrally-positioned, but vulnerable Islamic country. A common theme throughout will direct to Uzbekistan’s resident liability caused by its isolation, an interior placement within an immense continent that will encourage an eventual dependency erasing its current autonomy. In addition, the authors’ intent will be to test appropriate theories, in this case, as taken from the classical geopolitics model, for bringing deeper insight into international events, those being within the realm of the geopolitics of Uzbekistan. For example, will a heartland motif offer further understanding into the regional setting of Uzbekistan? Does the concept of autarky or self-sufficiency contribute new light into the country’s security? Similar queries will be exhibited to offer the reader a wide assortment of classical geopolitics methodology that will contribute to a deeper study of the regional setting of Uzbekistan and its neighbors.

Keywords: Uzbekistan, Eurasia, Geopolitics, Heartland, Autarky, Russia

Language: English

About the authors

NICKOLAS WATHKE		TY SIMONS	
AIDAN JOHNSON		KENDYLL TAYLOR	
MOHAMMAD KAYALI		OLIVIA TOWNER	
AMANDA SIMON		PROF. PHIL KELLY	

Le opinioni espresse in questo report sono esclusivamente dell’Autore e non rappresentano il punto di vista dell’IsAG.
Any opinions or ideas expressed in this paper are those of the individual author and don’t represent views of IsAG.

ISSN: 2281-8553

© Istituto di Alti Studi in Geopolitica e Scienze Ausiliarie

Contents

Introduction	4
1. Part One: Uzbekistan’s historical, physical, and contemporary political and economic setting.....	5
2. Part Two: Selected classical concepts and theories descriptive of Uzbekistan’s Geopolitics.....	7
2.1 <i>Heartland</i>	8
2.2 <i>Autarky</i>	8
2.3 <i>Landlocked country</i>	9
2.4 <i>Hydropolitics</i>	9
2.5 <i>Borders/ frontiers -- national/ regional unity</i>	10
2.6 <i>Country shape and size</i>	11
2.7 <i>Natural resources/ trade</i>	11
2.8 <i>Contagion</i>	11
2.9 <i>Balance-of-power</i>	11
2.10 <i>Central pivotal position</i>	12
2.11 <i>The “new” great game</i>	13
2.12 <i>Great powers ties</i>	13
3. Conclusions	13
Works Cited.....	14

Introduction

The present essay enlists two classical geopolitical concepts, heartland and autarky, as neutral methodological tools for describing the basic platform of the contemporary international relations of Uzbekistan. Uzbekistan's place, in the remote expanses of central Eurasia, in addition to its leaders' isolationist policies and questionable attempts at self-sufficiency, may expose the nation to a dependency and to an external Great Power's sphere of influence, the most probable threat of domination being Vladimir Putin's Russia.

A heartland locates within a continental setting, its interior position a lever for extending impact outwardly. Most traditional configurations (Mackinder 1904) show sufficient pivotal power within this region for the resident state or coalition to subdue areas on its margins and to extend its sovereignty outwardly, a reflection of the region's unity, resources, and core placement. Nonetheless, that central core can be of diminished power as well in a contrasting heartland design, for instance, in the Charcas triangle of Bolivia as outlined by Lewis Tambs (1965), where the weakness of that state toward consolidating authority over its lands allegedly wetted the territorial appetites of larger neighbors, Brazil most prominently, seen in its alleged intent for absorbing that area and for extending a stronger authority into the continental center. Hence, the two pivotal designs, both fitting a heartland depiction, differ in their direction of thrust - the traditional Halford Mackinder format with a Russian leverage outwardly and the Charcas with a weak center attractive to others' interventions. The authors suggest the Bolivian example of South America best resembles the present description of Uzbekistan's plight due to the country's inability to consolidate its unity and stability in domestic politics and its failure to organize a regional resistance, these all to ward off a likelihood of external control.

Autarky portrays isolation and non-involvement in regional affairs, an intentional self-sufficiency bent on shielding sovereignty from threatening absorption by outsiders. In Uzbekistan's case, that isolation also is intended to protect a repressive ruling oligarchy by suppressing and weakening any local opposition

and by allowing the continuation of the political monopoly that has brought two decades of authoritarian dictatorship since its independence from Soviet rule. This isolation, we believe, does not render to Uzbekistan a firm security to external threats or to domestic tranquility because the country may not be able to depend upon the immediate status quo or upon the international community for its independence. Its repressive government may tend toward eventual polarization resulting in popular upheaval and dysfunctional tendencies, creating vulnerability to the interventions of neighboring Great Powers.

In sum, the distinctive geopolitical environment of Uzbekistan, with its two primary descriptors, heartlands and autarky, shows an encircled and vulnerable landlocked state amid an isolated status in which its leaders have attempted to maintain the nation's sovereignty while continuing their own authoritarian rule. We believe such an attempt will fail, the two conditions, an exaggerated self-sufficiency and a heartland susceptible to invasion, both functioning in tandem that may help expose the country to an eventual dependency toward Russia, or to a lesser potential, toward China.

For fully outlining this scenario, other geopolitical concepts beyond heartland and autarky likewise will be introduced to provide this review with further means for probing the country's station within the vast spaces of central Eurasia, these further labels including balance-of-power, balancer and bandwagoning states, buffer state, central pivotal position, contagion, country shape and size, borders/frontiers, demography, dependency, distance, divide-and-conquer, encirclement, Great Power ties, hegemon, hydropolitics, influence spheres, key nation, landlocked, lintel state, Monroe Doctrine, more borders-more conflict, natural resources/trade, new great game, off-shore balancing, pan-region, rimlands, shatterbelt, unipolarity, and world island. (A glossary for most of these classical geopolitical theories can be found in Kelly 2016, 173-185.) Such classical geopolitical tools should allow for a better understanding into the evolving and complex landscape Uzbekistan now must face for its security, stability, and prosperity.

This essay's approach will adhere to the classical geopolitical methodology of attaching selected theories to pertinent events. But to note a contrasting approach that may add extra depth, the authors felt it rewarding to review a *Geographical Journal* article by Nick Megoran (2004: 347-348), who raised the topic of Uzbekistan also as a heartland but from a postmodern or "critical" perspective. As an extension of "Mackinder's 1904 'pivot' designation," Megoran cited several reasons for what he asserted has raised a new interest toward the original heartland theory, Uzbekistan now that focal pivot: central Eurasia's higher birth rates, its significant resources that have created "higher living standards than any of its Muslim neighbours," and its resurgent Islamist nationalism, all coinciding with a "renewed interest in the geopolitical legacy of Halford Mackinder after the breakup of the Soviet empire and the creation of new states in the Eurasian core."

Rather curiously, Megoran's interest instead seemed to have lain wholly with "deconstructing" the three scholars he introduces for their supposed faults in depictions of Mackinder and of Uzbekistan's current geopolitics. His technique enlisted exclusively the postmodern "critical geopolitics" approach as his prime guide for interpreting the country's foreign relationships, neglecting further examination of the traditional thesis as appended to Uzbekistan as raised in the article's title. For instance, a prime example of his slant follows (p. 349):

Polelle reads Mackinder's pivot paper not as a morally neutral unearthing of eternal spatial verities, but as a way of depoliticizing imperialism to represent the interest of the British state in apparently scientific language, and also as the projection of an idealized image of what British identity ought to be.

To repeat for emphasis, Megoran critically deconstructs the alleged greed and corruption he sees in the Uzbekistani political system, then continues with reviewing this same corruption and repression in the three writings of the Uzbek, Russian, and American authors he

outlines. Such a route by Megoran, in his pejorative ranting against the three allegedly "defense intellectuals" and "civilian militarists," clearly demonstrates a post-modernist attack on the legitimacy of classical geopolitics (Kelly 2006), presenting, we believe, a misleading and distorted depiction of Uzbekistan's immediate geopolitics and of Mackinder's usefulness in analyzing the country's position.

From the Megoran piece, the authors of this essay find little of substance that could be applied to an understanding of Uzbekistan's regional advantage and/or of its plight. In overcoming this void, the present essay sets out to correct such lacking by describing in traditional and neutral terms more consistent interpretations of the country's spatially-grounded international settings. We remain convinced that the classical geopolitical path via Mackinder, Tams, and others will bring good insights into the unique geostrategic position of Uzbekistan as a resident within the core of the Eurasian world island. Accordingly, Part One below will illuminate pertinent features of Uzbekistan's physical, socio-economic, and political backgrounds, followed in Part Two with a series of the geopolitical concepts noted above that may provide a deeper view into said background. A final conclusion offers possible outcomes relative to the significance of the country's placement within central Eurasia and the policies of its elite to protect and to promote its independence within their continued despotic rule.

1. Part One: Uzbekistan's historical, physical, and contemporary political and economic setting

Early Iranian and Chinese migrants first permanently settled the territories now comprising Uzbekistan, these basically trading peoples administering significant wealth along the ancient Silk Route between Europe and China. Alexander the Great conquered some local outposts in 327 BC but he failed to tame a popular resistance that rallied against his occupation. Later during the 13th century, the Mongol conquest under Genghis Khan devastated the extant populations, leaving much of the area totally razed. Tamerlane continued

the destruction a century later, followed by Arab and Muslim invaders who subsequently brought some calm and civilization to the region. Finally, in the early 19th century, expansion of the Russian empire absorbed what is today, Uzbekistan, the tzars vying successfully against England during the alleged “Great Game” era of competition for control of central Eurasia. In 1924, Uzbekistan became joined to the Soviet Union, and a majority of citizens later fought against (but some with) the German invasions of World War II. Independence as a nation-state came in 1991 with the collapse of the Soviet Union, Uzbekistan then declaring itself a republic. Uzbekistan is a “doubly-landlocked” centrally-located Eurasian country, bordered by five other Islamic neighbors, all without ready access to oceans – Afghanistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. The authors find this isolated facet, without good access to outside sources, as a geopolitical liability. The state holds less space than most of its neighbors in land surface, but exhibits a large population with some 32 million citizens. Very dry in climate, just ten percent of land is arable. Cotton remains the prime agricultural export, but the resultant income has lowered due to the declining reserves of water for irrigation. The ill-advised water-management of the Soviet era, and this continued since then, has caused seriously-polluted and depleted rivers and Aral Sea that have reduced the former productivity that once yielded significant profits to this sector (Spooner and Krutov). The economy does not reflect a healthy vibrancy, distinguished by traits of poverty, illegal migration, smuggling, corruption, and crime, and of deficiencies of capital, technology, trade, and investment.

In resources, the country is relatively well-endowed, albeit with largely underdeveloped mineral reserves. Uzbekistan holds the fourth largest gold deposits in the world and its uranium ranks twelfth worldwide, with additional reserves of oil and natural gas. Yet, little productivity is apparent in these sectors. Chinese and Korean firms have financed a limited amount in minerals exploitation, although neither contributor has so far

appeared to show a major interest in expanding its involvement. Eighty-five percent of the nation’s peoples speak Uzbek, with about a third of them below the age of fourteen. Sunni Muslims represent the predominant religion, with literacy almost universal and with human slavery four percent of residents, mainly workers in seasonal cotton production. Another ten percent of workers are employed beyond the country’s borders as migrant aliens who are unable to find sustainable incomes domestically. Uzbekistan is polarized in several realms. These conditions and their liabilities are discussed below.

Several human rights associations have called the nation an “authoritarian state with limited civil rights” (Danby, 1). Islam Karimov first inherited the mantle of government following the Soviet’s fall, and he ruled corruptly, harshly, and authoritatively from the 1991 independence to his death in late 2016. He is succeeded by Shavkat Mirziyoyev, a follower of Karimov who will probably perform a similar political repression but show a possible closer association with Putin. Civil protest arose in 2005 that was put down with several hundred persons killed. During the initial years of the US intervention in Iraq and Afghanistan, the governors of Uzbekistan permitted the United States to utilize the air base in Karshi-Khanabad, but this alignment was reversed, shifting to a more balanced stance between the Western powers, China, and Russia after 2004. The present governance of repression appears to intersect with an isolationist foreign policy, the one reinforcing the other. In this respect, Nick Danby (2016, 2) argues that current president Mirziyoyev likely will continue “Uzbekistan’s relationship-averse foreign policy, and [consequent] fear of potential domination by a more powerful nation [that] will lead to a less economically progressive and geopolitically competitive country,” one that could suffer an unfortunate orientation toward Russia that will assist Putin’s designs for dominance over the entire expanse of central Eurasia.



Figure 1- The Central Asian Cooperation Organization (CACO) consists of Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan

2. Part Two: Selected classical concepts and theories descriptive of Uzbekistan's Geopolitics

Classical geopolitics stresses placement of a state, region, or resource that impacts upon a country's foreign affairs (Kelly 2016, 23-25). It highlights geography or territorial/maritime space for its foundation, concerned specifically with relative locations and positions of countries as affecting their international behaviors. In contrast, as raised above, advocates of "critical geopolitics" see inherent to traditional geopolitics the elites' subjugating and exploiting of peoples and states, with "classical geopolitics" submissively acting as a compliant tool for this violence. The critics gain evidence to this exploiting via "de-constructing" or exposing the greed-laden "scripts" and "metanarratives" of states' leaders. In contrast, the classical version provides students and states-persons a neutral and ubiquitous tool via formulation of theory for understanding foreign relationships and for offering prescriptions for policy questions. Here, one should rely upon theory where the

critics reject all theory as biased. To emphasize for the reader, the classical, and not the critical, pertains to the discussions raised in the pages that follow.

Below will be exhibited that same variety of classical geopolitical concepts and theories as outlined above, all meant to assist in describing more deeply and more complexly the international behavior of Uzbekistan. The authors first will define selected country traits and then link pertinent theories with the intention toward expanding our investigation into this nation's contemporary foreign affairs. Application of theory-to-event is a difficult task, one necessitating study, patience, experience, and skill. Yet, the approach should reap rewards if done consistently and where appropriate.



Figure 2- Uzbekistan and neighboring Islamic Republics

2.1 Heartland

We begin with Halford Mackinder's original heartland thesis, one largely ignored by Megoran. Basically, four points (Kelly 2017, 218-219) would outline this Eurasian core: (1) a central continental space that yields to the possessor a security via isolation and distance from coastal and peripheral invaders; (2) a ready access to interior resources; (3) a regional unity created by new technologies, primarily railroads; and (4) a leveraging ability to expand outwardly from the center to the outer territories with the possibility of continental or even global empire at hand.

For Uzbekistan, these criteria correspond well only to the first of the above four points. The nation locates in the continental center, being surrounded by similar weak and ill-governed Islamic landlocked states. Although possessing more resources than its immediate neighbors, its wealth yet does not come in sufficient heartland amounts to command a regional dominance. Similarly, the country lacks strong internal unity, and in power it cannot spread its authority over neighbors, let alone over the entire Eurasian core. In sum, Uzbekistan more exactly equates to the Bolivian in its heartland description and not to the Mackinder thesis, the country being centrally

located but vulnerable toward consolidating its sovereignty against the aggrandizing appetites of the larger Great Power neighbors beyond its immediate bounds, similar to the continental landscape of South America.

2.2 Autarky

Uzbekistan now should be labelled a heartland of the Bolivian description, where internal weakness and vulnerability intertwines with the enslavement of autarky. For defining this term, an autarky reveals "a state's ambition for attaining enough resources, protection, and autonomy to enable a national self-sufficiency." To illustrate this at the strategic level, a pan-region structure will exhibit "three or four global longitudinal sectors, themselves enclosed within regions and continents - Pan-America, Pan-Europe, Pan-Eurasia, and the Asian Co-Prosperity Sphere, the purported reason aims to achieve self-sufficiency and autonomy for the sequestered sectors, each dominated by the northern Great Nations." (Kelly, 2016: 174, 184). Autarky translates to an isolated autonomy, the opposite being an open globalization.

To classify Uzbekistan as a self-sustaining autarky as its leaders would demand, it would need sufficient resources and protection to

enable it to function on its own. These domestic assets the country does not readily possess. Regional and international trade rates as 100th globally in exports and the same in imports, so that description of isolation and non-involvement holds some merit. But, if one assumes the nation should continue closure, Uzbekistan surely would plummet to failure, for in the modern economics of globalization, autarky anywhere cannot succeed, for trade and investment create growth and prosperity (although with certain problems also inherited), whereas isolation augurs depression and collapse. These latter qualities of being sealed off from others make Uzbekistan susceptible to defeat as a modern state and to penetration by outsiders, once more, the authors' repeated description of the country's geopolitical plight.

2.3 Landlocked country

A landlocked state lacks contact with adjacent oceans, thus suffering potential encirclement and possible domination by neighboring countries. Uzbekistan sees even more enclosure, and hence, more dependency, by being "doubly-landlocked," surrounded by immediate neighbors also lacking access to sea or lake outlets. Nor does the nation possess a river that would assure such a maritime path to a more profitable economic and security horizon. Consequently, it cannot easily perform a balancing leverage for security, either as a balancer state or as a bandwagoner, those roles respectively holding a pivot between two external powers, not favoring either, or siding with one against the other -- in either case, protecting itself reflective of its placement between of leverage. We are left with an inherent weakness attached to outside neighbors, caught in isolation without the protection of an immediate Western benefactor, it too distant from the country's location to lend a security. In contrast, confinement within an authoritarian and corrupt Russian influence sphere seems the most plausible outcome within the current but unfortunate configuration.

2.4 Hydropolitics

Uzbekistan's infrastructure, peoples, and ecosystems all are becoming deprived of water. The Aral Sea and the rivers feeding into it once represented one of the largest freshwater tributaries in the world. Since the 1960s, unsustainable irrigation practices have caused these water resources to wither into arid basins, and for the past decade, the adjacent states have witnessed the Sea shrivel into what is now known as the soon-to-be-dry Aral Basin. Rather than investing resources in developing sustainable irrigation practices, the Uzbek government instead has sought rather blindly to expand irrigated farmland as well as hydroelectric power generators within what is left of the Sea, this causing further water depletion. As a result, cotton and other agricultural products have seriously diminished over the past decade, these items no longer available to resist an increasing trade imbalance.

In the Khorezm Valley on Uzbekistan's southern central border with Turkmenistan, Uzbek farmers likewise are experiencing horrific drought at an irreversible rate. Communities' faucets are running dry, giving a paucity of fresh water. There have been multiple instances of death due to dehydration, the Uzbek government attempting to send water by vehicle to the Valley but with little sense of great urgency. Many *yuqoridagilar*, or "upper people" who deal with the dispersion of water and other agricultural decisions, have made accommodations to desert their government-mandated agricultural sectors (Oberkirkcher, 2011). The same goes for *mirabs*, "water people," a class of people who admit to a lower-class status but who still are intertwined with the bureaucratic operations of the region. This leaves the *farmers* (large farm owners) and *debqons* (small farm owners) alone in a drought-ridden region with little public assistance to lend them aid (Oberkirkcher, 2011).

This last debate comes with the draining of the Aral Sea, as the waters themselves border between Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. The Aral's size has decreased to ten percent of what it was formally (Shenker 2010). However, the declining water levels reveal a steady deterioration of relations between the two

states. Salt left in the topsoil of the newly exposed desert is swept away by the desert winds, destroying agricultural lands miles away in both Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. In an attempt to salvage what little they can of the Sea, Kazakhstan has begun the construction of dams upstream, north of the Uzbekistan border (Shenker, 2010). While this is good news for the Kazakh farmers north of the border, communities and enclaves to the south will see an even further loss of the precious resource, adding to the already serious strife over water among the neighboring populations.

As early as the year 2000, the Uzbekistani leadership exposed its inability to lead a regional collaboration to resolve this water crisis (Bohrs, 2004), and this failure, in addition to similar reluctances of neighbors, has seen strife raised on all sides. Swift and proficient action will need to be exercised to revert this slide into further division. But as tensions for water among the countries increase, conflict is readily predictable, again augmenting regional disunity that may force the Islamic states into outside control.

2.5 Borders/ frontiers -- national/regional unity

Uzbekistan exhibits a recent history of friction toward its immediate Islamic neighbors, negating any safety awarded it from a regional integration. Among several instances of strife, the fertile Ferghana Valley draws particular attention of such frontier conflict seen in a cross-border terrorist attack from Kyrgyzstan against Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan, several decades ago. Reflective of tensions between the two states, a fence has been constructed separating the disputed territory, but the separation, affecting peoples on either side, has not abated the hostility because it did not exact a settlement over water rights, leaving the valley yet in dispute (Batken 2004). Kyrgyzstan has placed trading bans on goods imported from Uzbekistan, making smuggling a lucrative profession (Megoran 2000).

The relationship with its southern neighbor, Afghanistan, likewise does not set on good terms. Shortly after diplomatic relations had been established in 1992, President Karimov

claimed the Afghan government was supporting radical Islamic guerrillas over the entire expanse of central Asia, such suspicions dampening ties between the two countries, with the common border now sealed as a result.

Finally, border tensions between the Uzbeks and Tajikistan represent still a further example of regional disarray, this occurring from settlement enclaves littering the frontier where squatters on either side vie for ownership. Uzbeks make up twenty five percent of the Tajikistan population (Fumagalli, 2007), and these total weights heavily in the rural areas where Uzbeks dominate much of the Ferghana Valley's space. Were Tajikistan to lose that expanse, this would leave it "as an incomplete country" and force a heavy reliance on its western neighbor, Russia for national sustenance (Fumagalli, 2007).

Despite the absence of opinion polls and other social research, the authors assume some level of domestic unrest among the populace, probably more in the political and economic sectors than in the ethnic and religion sectors, the latter a calm reflective of a homogeneous society. Protests against government corruption and repression have risen several times in the recent decades, but none serious enough to spark reform and transparency. Recession probably will stimulate greater tensions, the economy not productive sufficient to employ a growing population. Such local disunity would further expose the country to an awareness by outsiders of Uzbekistan's apparent slow descent into instability, once more reflective of a failing autarky and a heartland containing a vacuum of power in its core that also could attract outside interference.

The existence of serious regional conflict among the six Islamic states diminishes both their common ability for attaining some level of regional security cooperation and opens the potential for Russian and/or Chinese entry into one side or the other for dominance. Were the countries integrated in collective security, their joint safety in addition to their prosperity would surely be enhanced, but such is not the case. With division as seen in the Ferghana Valley and in other frontier areas, an outside force such as Russia could easily divide-and-conquer,

and one suspects this reality already is moving Putin's ambitions in this direction where he would face little opposition from a Western counter-pose.

2.6 Country shape and size

The restricted expanse of the country does not award a security-in-depth, nor does the irregular shape enhance national unity and easy communications. Were there some sort of economic integration, and later even a limited confederation, among the five Islamic countries, where an expanded size and rectangular shape might provide a better unity and ease of contact, these weaknesses might be abated somewhat. But lacking these improvements, a vulnerability still persists, and such cooperation seems distant at the present moment.

2.7 Natural resources/trade

Regionally situated in central Asia where natural resources are abundant, the lands of Uzbekistan and neighbors possess large natural gas and oil reserves, with additional wealth in gold and uranium (AZoMining 2013). Uzbekistan is also known for its cotton, which has been the main agricultural export. Recent increases in cotton and gold prices, the state's two leading incomes, have sparked some limited prosperity in those areas of late. Unfortunately, manufacturing and technology lie almost non-existent, and an underdeveloped infrastructure and lack of equipment have limited actual oil and gas production.

In the next ten years the government has laid plans promising increased oil, gas, and mineral output by remedying faults in capital and support infrastructure and by continuing to expand oil pipelines. But, to date, these promises lie fallow due to lack of domestic and foreign investments, the country suffering by its inability to attract capital imports that would assist development. Reflective of these infrastructure problems, the country's 2015 trade imbalances totaled a negative \$4.18 billion, with Russia taking the bulk of imports and exports. Western investors, in contrast, have shied away, not impressed with the nation's future improvements, once more

revealing Uzbekistan's isolation and vulnerability to the Russian bear.

2.8 Contagion

With the five countries so tightly closeted together within a confined and remote area, with dictatorship the political norm, their nearness has joined to reinforce a current stagnation toward any progress to better governance and to more open globalization. Any sort of enlightenment among the five would be hard to imagine at the present moment. Even were the states aligned for a common safety, a nearby Great Power, most probably Russia, could gain control by absorbing a first republic, then following a contagion path onto the others -- spreading its authority from outside in a falling-dominoes format. Isolation and vulnerability, reflective of Tambs' heartland and of the trait of autarky, would make this scenario all the more assured.

The Arab Spring first started in Tunisia in December of 2010, then spread onto Libya, Egypt, Yemen, and Syria, threatening dictatorships throughout the region including Uzbekistan. To resist a possible contagion, Karimov took action, censoring the internet, arresting demonstrators, and being alert to any opposition, although the country stayed calm, the Mediterranean disruptions not extending into central Eurasia (Jain 2013). Remoteness, isolation, and repression once more probably sealed the region from a democracy infection. But had Uzbekistan erupted into rebellion, still an unlikely scenario, might progressive reforms have spread outwardly to its immediate neighbors? The authors are sceptical of this reformist path because the locale does not emit a standard of unity or of progressiveness. And were such a unity and democracy ever present, Russia might well have intervened to resist such feats, the risks of intervention and of effective Western rivalry minimal.

2.9 Balance-of-power

The Eurasian balance-of-power configuration, that rests on the strategic or inter-continental level, conforms to the involvement and interactions of the five Great Powers of China, Russia, Japan, and Germany,

all northern hemisphere nations, and of the United States, also a northern Great Power, but of course, not Eurasian (Kelly 2017). Nonetheless, the American presence on the continent is strongly felt in the role of stabilizer and of consensus builder, although Russia under Putin has threatened this stability due to its aggressiveness toward the margins of western and central Eurasia. Within this strategic platform, the pattern is “unipolar,” meaning that the United States, as global hegemon, represents the single international leader-state or superpower, now alone with the Soviet Union falling from this status at the ending of the Cold War in the early 1990s.

Eurasia represents the sole “Grand Continent,” the single platform or theater for determining world stability as performed by the actions of the northern Great Powers. North America, a heartland on its own merit, and perhaps a more suitable fit for this configuration than Mackinder’s Eurasian example, is not a place for strategic balancing among the Great Powers, this region kept isolated from Eurasia interference by Monroe’s Doctrine. The United States instead plays as Eurasian stabilizer from afar, enlisting its powerful marine to offshore balancer on the margins of Eurasia. Stated once more, Eurasia offers the strategic platform for strategic balancing; North America plays the dominant balancer on that platform but from afar. Both regions control global politics.

Within these structures, the United States billets its predominant naval authority on the Eurasian rimlands, primarily onto west Europe, the Persian Gulf, and east Asia. It does not extend a major impact or interest within the Eurasian interior. Accordingly, the centrally-placed Islamic states do not represent vital American goals; the US will not and cannot champion the autonomy of these lands, despite it being the dominant global hegemon and the balancer of Eurasia. And unfortunate for Uzbekistan and its neighbors, Russia does hold vital interests in the region, and its nearness provides it sufficient leverage to gain an eventual control over the Eurasian core.

Putin’s desire for taking control over Ukraine was apparently frozen by Western

economic sanctions applied against Russian financial sources, this collective-security feat halting for a time his aggressions toward absorbing that state (Jalilov and Kelly 2014). Such an event should not equate to the case of Uzbekistan, its geopolitical reality being much more isolated, distant, and thus vulnerable, from any assistance offered by the United States and its Western allies.

2.10 Central pivotal position

Despite its central location, Uzbekistan exerts minimal regional leverage astride the immediate neighbors, all of these countries weak and liable to outside pressures, Kazakhstan across its northern border, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to its eastern bounds, and Turkmenistan along its southwest frontier. Nor does further advantage accrue from its core location among the outer surrounding neighbors, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, China, and Russia, that encircle. Some limited authority may spring from the country performing as a balancer among both inner and outer circles, gaining some favor in security, integration, trade, and regional leadership. The location could spawn a lintel feature – a core placement exacting a stalemate among larger neighbors, none of which can assert hegemony over Uzbekistan over their opponents’ objections. A key nation – a Great Power surrogate or a part of an influence sphere -- could also lend some leverage, although yet within a confinement of surveny.

Substantially more liabilities attach to our state’s focal placement than any benefits, and these threats eventually may well jeopardize Uzbekistan’s security and prosperity. For instance, one could envision a hostile encirclement of neighbor or neighbors bent on absorbing territory and wealth, a more-borders-more-conflict configuration where warfare against rivals or invaders could be predicted. Or the country could represent a prime candidate for a shatterbelt involvement, opposing Great Powers aligned with contestants within the locale, potentially damaging to independence due to a regional escalation of conflict. In sum, centrality does not pose an advantage for Uzbekistan.

2.11 The “new” great game

The “Great Game” label derives from the 19th century expansionist clashes between Russia and Britain, the former protective of its central Eurasian interests, the latter of its colonial possession of India. Several minor battles ensued during the period with an eventual agreement to erect a buffer in Afghanistan that would settle the interests of both by such a separation. Nonetheless, a majority of historians now describe the original “Great Game” as limited to “sporadic . . . skirmishes and intrigues [based upon] mere unsubstantiated rumors” (Morgan 1973, 64). Yet, these same historians agree to seeing the rise of a contemporary post-Cold War “new” grand game that rates as a serious and dangerous competition, primarily among states aspiring to oil, natural gas, plus natural-gas pipelines important to China, Russia, and the West. This “game” has returned, yet in different patterns, to disturb the foreign and domestic affairs of Uzbekistan, seen in the increasing notoriety given the country in the rivalry for wealth from its near and distant neighbors.

One additional caveat must be added to this gaming label - that of distance, with Russia the closest Great Power and China a remote second, both with ambitions to reaching into central Asia for resources and for protective buffers. Any likely champion for guaranteeing Uzbekistan’s security must then come from a distance and possess a significant power and interest toward extending its presence in the region, a Western state, perhaps of the European Union led by Germany and/or of the United States. Yet, both sources locate very peripherally and each hold much less value than Russia toward a strong involvement in central Asia. Hence, Uzbekistan lies in the direct path of Putin’s assertive plans, having made clear his intention toward restoration of the former Russian/Soviet empires, itself as leader-state of such a rising Eurasian realm.

2.12 Great power ties

Uzbekistan’s ties with major world powers has been limited in recent years, particularly since its expulsion of US troops in 2005 and its recent withdrawal from the Russian-led

Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), both examples among other feats of an attempt toward a trust in autarky for its security. Upon the death of former president Karimov, however, this could presume closer ties with Russia, given new president Mirziyoyev’s personal relationship with Putin and the latter’s ambitions for aggrandizement.

The question remains: would such a relationship of central pivot still be beneficial to Uzbekistan’s geopolitical situation? To repeat, Uzbekistan has pursued a policy of isolation as an extension of its pursuit of autarky, and as a consequence, the nation has not gained much relief from these isolationist policies. It seems clear, unfortunately, that whichever turn the country might take, closer ties to Russia, or some level of integration within the region, the conclusion should be the same - a good chance of a resultant dependency, vulnerability, and economic and political stagnation for this isolated nation. Perhaps its most profitable scenario for relief lies in a regional unification with ties to Western protectors, but this course remains doubtful.

3. Conclusions

Uzbekistan can best be described as a central but weak Eurasian heartland amid an entrenched and threatened autarky, both conditions intertwining and re-enforcing. The resultant exposure, the authors suggest, breeds a likely subserviency to the nearby Russian state that clearly desires absorbing the country’s sovereignty. Any chance of rescue from the West stands remote for reason of distance, the democracies own worries and challenges, and the absence of interest seen in this central Eurasian region. Accordingly, we suggest several concluding scenarios as possible avenues the country may finding itself traveling.

- **The present status quo of political repression and economic recession continues** - The present autarky maintains its dictatorship with little improvement to the national economy. Such could endure for some years, assuming Russia holds more important interests elsewhere and that it believes, probably correctly, that adding the weaker Islamic states to its control in the

near future would not be a difficult task to take on.

- **The country falls into the Russian orbit** -- Putin's call for alliance amid failure of the West to accommodate Uzbekistan's independence. The authors will argue this scenario makes the best case, a matter of time and of interest for the Islamic lands to resume their previous link to a greater Russia.
- **Uzbekistan leads an active regional effort to resolving the pressing problems facing the five Islamic countries** -- Reflective of the country's central placement among its peers and assuming a more enlightened and progressive leadership, we find this scenario's satisfaction quite remote.
- **Instead, Uzbekistan is able to align with Europe and the United States, accepting commitments of development assistance and of security assurance** -- The Western powers checkmating Russian designs with promises of trade and investments -- also a highly unlikely conclusion.
- **The economic and governing system fails, with state collapse and civil war probable, this power vacuum would attract immediate Russian entry**-- This scenario awaits the elite's failure to unify and satisfy an increasingly restive populace. But once more, the outcome would have Russia attaching Uzbekistan to its control.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the Emporia State Honors Program for funding this Honors Seminar on Classical Geopolitics, the course instructed by Professor Phil Kelly.

Works Cited

AZoMining (2013) "Uzbekistan: Mining, Minerals and Fuel Resources." *AZoNetwork Mining.com*.

Bohrs, A. (2011) "Regionalism in Central Asia: New Geopolitics, Old Regional Order", *International Affairs* 80/3, 485-502.

Danby, Nick (2016) "The Evaporation of the Status Quo in Uzbekistan," *Harvard Political Review*, 1-4.

"Focus on Conflict Prevention in Ferghana Valley," (2004) IRIN.

Fumagalli, M. (2007). "Framing ethnic minority mobilisation in Central Asia: The cases of Uzbeks in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan," *Europe-Asia Studies*, 59/4, 567-590.

Jain, Tanya. (2013) "Why Uzbekistan may never witness Arab Spring-like revolution," Word Press.com.

Jalilov, Murad and Phil Kelly (2014) "The Ukraine Shatterbelt: A New Cold War?" Report #30, Istituto di Alti Studi in Geopolitica e Scienze Ausiliarie.

Kelly, Phil (2017) "Recognizing the North American Heartland: A More Suitable Fit for Mackinder's Thesis," *Geopolitics, History, and International Relations* 9/1, 215-240.

Kelly, Phil (2016) *Classical Geopolitics: A New Analytical Model*. Stanford, CA.: Stanford University Press.

Kelly, Phil (2016) "A Critique of Critical Geopolitics," *Geopolitics* 11/1, 24-53.

Mackinder, Halford (1904) "The Geographical Pivot of History," *The Geographical Journal* 23, 421-444.

Megoran, Nick (2004) "Revisiting the 'Pivot': The Influence of Halford Mackinder on Analysis of Uzbekistan's International Relations," *Geographical Journal* 170/4, 347-358.

Megoran, Nick (2000) "Bad Neighbors, Bad Fences," *Newsline* 4/51, Part 1.

Morgan, Gerald (1973) "Myth and Reality in the Great Game," *Asian Affairs* 60, 55-66.

Oberkircher, L. and A. Hornidge (2011) "Water is Life"-- Farmer Rationales and Water Saving in Khorezm, Uzbekistan: A Lifeworld Analysis," *Rural Sociology* 76/3, 394-421.

Shenker, J. (2010) "The Shrunken Sea," *E: The Environmental Magazine* 21/3, 12-14.

Simoes, Alexander (2016) "Uzbekistan." *OECD-Uzbekistan (UZB) Exports, Imports, and Trade Partners*. n.p.

Spoor, Max and Anatoly Krutov (2003) "XI. The 'Power of Water' in a Divided Central Asia," *Perspectives on Global Development & Technology* 2, 3&4, 593-614.

Tambs, Lewis (1965) "Geopolitical Factors in Latin America," in *Latin America: Economics and Hemispheric Security* (Norman Bailey, ed.). New York: Prager, pp. 31-49.