



# **The Eurasian Moment in Global Politics: A Comparative Analysis of the Big Powers' Strategies for Regional Integration**

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**Moscow , 2014.07.04**



# Introduction

- The disintegration of the bipolar system around 1990 changed the term “Eurasia” from an anthropological concept to a significant category of international relations.
- Eurasian countries no longer play insignificant international and regional roles under the shelter of Moscow. A swarm of outside forces and a new status quo of “co-opetition” determined the newly independent countries' unprecedented position in the global contest.
- In tandem with the transformation of the regional pattern in Eurasia and the transition that took place inside Eurasian countries, the terms “Silk Road” and “Eurasian integration” became popular among policymakers, scholars and the media. Both great powers and middling ones, from the US, Russia, China, and the EU to Turkey and South Korea, have created regional integration strategies.



- A Eurasian moment in global politics is being formed. The contest between the rising countries and the conservative countries within the process of international power transition will not only center around sea power, but also contend the changes of the Eurasian power structure.
- This paper aims to conduct a comparative analysis of the Eurasian integration strategies of global and regional powers. After this, we can predict possible scenarios of the Eurasian geopolitical and geo-economic picture in the medium (to 2030) and long term (to 2050).
- We will evaluate the strengths and weaknesses of the implementation of the strategies mentioned. Finally, we look ahead at the developing trend of Eurasian region and the role of China in the medium and long term.



## I. Imagining Eurasia

- Eurasia is not just a geographical location; the term carries metaphorical and rhetorical freight.
- The ideological connotations behind this concept are clear to some countries in this region. But the concept of Eurasia is constructed by both those inside and outside this region, used to denote both self and other.
- This term itself has a high degree of flexibility; the idea of Eurasia has always been mobile. Within this region, the rise and decline of trade networks provided the important impetus for the progress of civilization.



Table 1 The Four Waves of Eurasian Trade

<i>Eurasian exchanges</i>	<i>Routes</i>	<i>Which way</i>
First period 1st-3rd centuries.	Sea and land	Roman Empire -- West Asia -- India -- China
Second period, 11th-13th centuries	Sea and land trade (Silk Road)	More-frequent trade between the Arab world, South Asia and East Asia; Europe was on the verge of Eurasian trade
Third period, 16th-19th centuries.	Mainly sea	Intensive interregional trade; Europe, West Asia --India -- Southeast Asia -- East Asia. European competitiveness was still relatively weak, making up the deficit by passing silver bullion
Fourth, present-day	Mainly through sea, much less over land; air, long-distance telecommunications	Initially more from Europe to Asia; increasingly also in the opposite direction and within Eurasian landmass; significant boost as the Soviet Union broke up; huge boost with China rising as an economic superpower



- Eurasia was once treated as a prosperous region along the Silk Road and was deeply connected to the world system.
- Later, with the rise of the “maritime trade routes,” Eurasia, once an important hub on the Silk Road, was no longer significant and gradually became isolated from the outside world.
- During the rule of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, Eurasia’s regional nature was further weakened, and the term “Eurasia” became a reference to the Russian sphere of influence.
- The sudden disintegration of the Soviet Union was regarded as a historic opportunity for Eurasia, including Central Asian countries, to regain regional unity and break up social and economic isolation through developing relations with the outside world. area

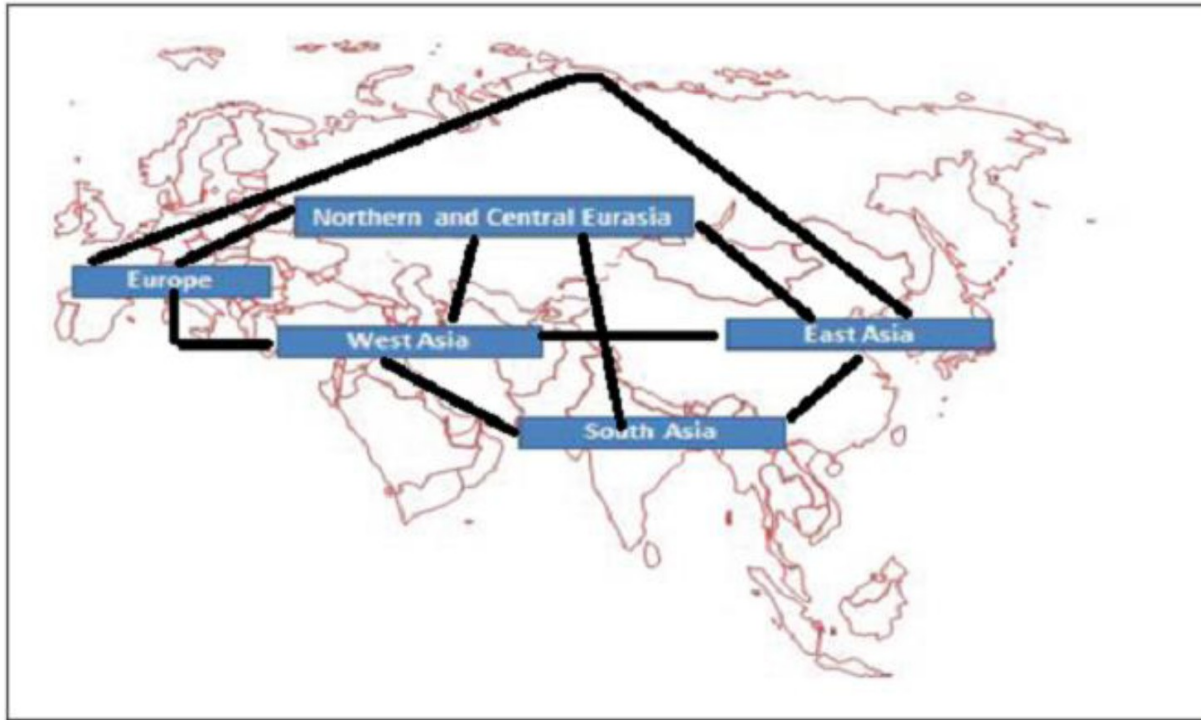


- Therefore, the current circumstances of Eurasia has been strongly influenced by the international and regional power transition since the 1990s. “Eurasia” is not a natural region, but a social construction given form by the chain reaction of international and domestic politics.
- It is a collective actor which has its own motivations and logic, and can respond independently facing external shocks. Its member states are much more free to set their cooperative agenda as needed in accordance with own national interests. Eurasia is definitely not a fixed geographical and political context, and does not only have the traditional nation-state as its basic unit.



- Eurasia, both as an analytical category and a practical political/economic unit, is closely related to the development of globalization. The new wave of globalization, which started in the 1980s and accelerated in the 1990s, is an important external factor in Eurasian nation-state building.
- Globalization's openness, internationalization and convergence are also permeating into the national character of Eurasian countries, and forming a source of strength for Eurasian regional integration.
- Today's globalization is a network with Europe, North America, and the Asia-Pacific as its three main nodes. There are also gaps in globalization because of less developed economies and the slow diffusion of former hegemonies.







- In the twenty years since the breakup of the USSR, the mutual dependence among the three nodes has deepened, each of them absorbing and radiating the effects of globalization to their surrounding regions. One key factor is China's continuous growth. As China became more involved in neighborhood politics, the gaps mentioned above are becoming closed by new networks of cooperation, starting the Eurasian moment in global politics.
- That is, the original gaps in central and northern Eurasia have been covered by a new comprehensive network which connected Europe, the former Soviet Union and China and other East Asian countries. The once clear geographical boundaries of Europe and the Asia-Pacific in Eurasia have becoming blurred because of the construction of these new networks.



- The transnational cooperation network of newly emerging economies, such as China, Russia and India, is closely joined and also connected to the western part, the EU. The eastward expansion of the EU and the Eastern Partnership has contributed to this process. For the very first time, cross-Eurasian integration is a practical possibility.
- In short, as a geopolitical and geo-economic unit with an important location and abundant natural resources. Eurasia has been strongly shaped by external powers and the regional environment. Its huge potential to integrate into the international community has been more and more noticed. Recent political and economic process in Eurasia has demonstrated the plasticity of an emerging region.



## II. Different understanding of Eurasian integration

- Russia is accustomed to narrowing Eurasia, that is, using the term to refer to the traditional sphere of influence of Russia, the post-Soviet space. Its legitimacy comes from the historical heritage of the imperium of Tsarist Russia and the Soviet Union, which has still not been cleared up.
- In this way, Russia's Eurasian concept is both geographically and ideologically exclusive.
- But this approach ignores the reality of an emerging post-post-Soviet space. This manifests in many ways: the function of CIS as a regional international organization has weakened day by day, the newly independent countries have changed their direction of political development, the influence of external forces in the post-Soviet space is growing and there are more and more new regional organizations that contain countries both inside the region and outside the post-Soviet space.



- For the US and EU, since the Central Asian countries gained independence, their strategic objectives for regional integration have been threefold. First, containing Russia, Iran and to some extent, China; second, integrating Eurasia, which include the Central Asian countries, into the Western system of politics, economy and value;, and finally, shaping development direction and geopolitical environment of Eurasian countries.
- Obviously, this definition has been illuminated and regulated by the guiding ideology of Eurasian policy in Western countries, including the residual effects of “containment strategy”, “the clash of civilizations” and “democratic peace theory”.
- Since it puts a lot of emphasis on political criteria, the Eurasian concepts of the US and EU are similar to Russia’s in their exclusivity.



- Turkish Foreign Minister Ahmet Davutoglu proposed the establishment of a “Eurasian Union” once again in the spring of 2010. Turkey is closely linked to the EU, which it also deeply desires to join. But at the same time, it has also maintained close ties with the post-Soviet Turkic-speaking countries, namely the Central Asian states and Azerbaijan.
- For Turkey, Eurasia, especially, Central Asia, possesses a special historical, cultural, linguistic and anthropological significance. Turkey has always retained a mindset about “Avrasya” (“Eurasia”) that shares an interesting consistency with Russia.



- As for South Korea, its “Eurasian Initiative” expresses the regional demands of an emerging medium power. The core idea of Park Geun-hye’s administration is to unite a disconnected Eurasia, driven by the legacy of the Iron Curtain and the Cold War mentality, together to become a continent of creativeness and peace. The matching policy is the “Silk Road Strategy” of South Korea, that is, the plan to build a “Silk Road Express” for Eurasian rail road network which starts from Pusan and runs through North Korea, Russia, China, Central Asia until Europe.
- In this way, a composite logistics network between Asia and Europe can be formed. South Korea also has great expectations of energy cooperation in the Eurasian region, where they believe that energy infrastructure, like oil and gas pipelines, should be connected into a wider network. They also consider that through promoting common development of China’s shale gas, the Far East and Siberia oil and gas, win-win cooperation can be achieved over Eurasian energy.



Table 2 Convergence and Divergence of Different Eurasian Integration Strategies

	<i>Russia</i>	<i>U.S.A.</i>	<i>EU</i>	<i>ROK</i>	<i>Turkey</i>
Time of the latest version	2011	2011	2007	2013	2010
Time of the predicted implementation	2015	2014	2013	NA	NA
Starting point	1995, the Customs Union Protocol by Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan; 2010, the restart of the Customs Union and the Common Economic Space	1999, 10 <sup>th</sup> Congress passes the "Silk Road Strategy Act"; 2006, "Silk Road Strategy Act"	NA	NA	1992, the summit of heads of 18 Turkic-speaking countries
Strategic objectives	To reshape Russia's great power status through sub regional integration	To contain, Russia, Iran, China; to reshape the South Asia geopolitical and geo-economic landscape; to maintain hegemony as much as possible	Play the role of normative power, enlighten Eurasian countries in transition	To overcome the structural remnants of the Cold War; to form a new regional order and seek to maximize the benefit	To help the Turkic-speaking countries in the former USSR build a liberal-oriented "Islam-Turkic identity"; further strengthen the relationship between Turkey and other Turkic countries
Policy instrument	Military bases; the Customs Union; a full range of cultural cooperation; the Common Economic Space; The common foreign policy	Foreign aid; NATO's partnership program; South and Central Asia transportation and pipeline network system	Foreign aid; cooperation in education and energy; to promote the good governance and rule of law in Eurasian countries	"Quick Silk Road" the rail and road network in Eurasia; the Eurasian energy cooperation network	Foreign aid; cooperation in education and culture
Exclusive?	Yes	Yes	Partially	No	Yes
The roots of attractiveness/fear for Eurasian	the imperium of Soviet Union	Global hegemony	Global hegemony partner	Emerging economies	Civilized





- At the moment, Russia's Eurasian Policy is designed on the basis of its power as a neighbor and former sovereign of the states involved to a large extent. Russia has not given up on the strategy of "spheres of influence". Compared to other great powers, Russia still retains considerable influence upon Eurasia.
- It is undeniable that, though most countries in Eurasia have enjoyed two decades of independence, they are still deeply embedded in the system of Russian empire. This degree of association today is revealed in the complex power structure and the contradictory coexistence of alienation. There are still some unrealistic demands in the goals of Russia's policy towards Central Asia, for instance, Russia naturally considers itself to play a leading role and functioning as an organizer in the integration process in Central Asia.



- **Rather than an economic integration strategy, the Russia-led Eurasian Union is an exclusive geopolitical project. It has several weaknesses. First, given the increasingly complex power structure in Eurasia, there is inherent fragility in an integration strategy where Russia attempted to dominate alone. In particular, those newly independent countries in Central Asia value their sovereignty and core interests highly and there are potential concerns over the revival of Russia's imperial ambitions, which are shaping the degree of political integration in the Eurasian Union.**
- **Since the Soviet collapse, the US has evolved from an inexperienced outside actor in Eurasian affairs to an influential actor of this region's development.**



- As seen in the *Silk Road Strategy Act* in 1999 and 2006, safety, democracy and energy have prompted the US to participate in Eurasian affairs and interact with neighboring countries of Central Asia, especially Russia, China, Iran and Turkey. In comparison, the *New Silk Road Strategy* proposed by then US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton is a hastier measure.
- The logic of shock-response is also obvious, namely providing Eurasia with geo-politics, geo-economics and an arranged discourse in the post-2014 era when the US withdraws from Afghanistan. A fundamental aim of the US Eurasia integration strategy is to prevent a dominant giant which will inevitably threaten the balance of Europe, Middle East and Far East.



- The greatest difficulty for the US is that its national strength is lessening. The US places its hope on companies, hoping they can fulfill related investment projects, while companies step back in the face of the high investment risk in this region. At the same time, due to the intense US exclusiveness during the promotion of New Silk Road Project, regional countries are merely talking and take no action. Core projects like the TAPI natural gas pipeline project can hardly start any time soon, which also impairs the attraction of the US plan.
- The EU's Eurasia integration strategy is subject to its current economic plight. Traditionally, the EU pays more attention to peripheral countries next to Mediterranean while paying less attention to Central Asian countries like Iran, which is the core area of Eurasia. In 2007, backed strongly by Germany, a Central Asia-related strategy was approved, but whether it can continue after 2013 when it is due to be implemented is still uncertain. In addition, the stubbornness of EU concerning value exports makes Eurasian countries more vigilant.



- For Eurasia, especially Central Asia, the positive effect of Turkey's proposed pattern is that it is both a secular Islamic country and a Turkic country that has made remarkable achievements in democracy and economy. It shares similarities of civilization, ethnicity, and language with newly independent countries in Central Asia.
- Geographically close to these countries, Turkey is likely to be a model for countries in Central Asia, thus preventing these countries from separating from Islam to a certain extent and removing the impact of the Soviet successor Russia. Therefore, Turkey sees cooperation with Eurasian countries as a strong strategic tool for existing and potential elites in Turkic countries of ex-Soviet to shape a liberal Islamic-Turkic identity, attempting to consolidate the relationship between Turkey and Turkic countries in Eurasia.



- Eurasia is of great strategic value to Korea. Firstly, Eurasia can provide the energy required for the sustainable development of the Korean economy. Secondly, Eurasia has great potential as a new export market for Korea. It is also the channel for economic cooperation with the Middle East and Europe. Eurasia is also important for Korea when the latter is promoting worldwide peace and prosperity and broadening its diplomacy range. Eurasia can provide experience of multilateral cooperation for Korea at a time when the Park Geun-hye government is trying to achieve peaceful cooperation with Northeast Asia.
- Korea is trying to further enlarge its core influence through both the hard power of electronic products and the soft power of film and television. The essence is to avoid a strategic pattern dominated by America and Japan, thus bringing China, Russia and the EU into the priority of its great power foreign policy. But Korea is still a new player in Eurasia. The Eurasia Initiative proposed by Park Geun-hye in September, 2013 is not a pure economic plan. It also takes diplomacy, politics and safety strategy into consideration. It is no easy job to realize Korea's global strategy by multilateralism.



### III. The Rising Integration of China and Eurasia

- In 7th September, 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping put forward the cooperative initiative of establishing the “Silk Road economic zone” in a speech in Nazarbayev University.
- Firstly, the “Silk Road economic zone” is not a linked cooperative region, as people usually read it.. In fact, it is a network for Eurasian countries to cooperate with and benefit each other. To a certain extent, Eurasia has always been in a flowing state, during which the trade network that have risen and declined many times provided key motivation for the progress of human civilization. Xi describes “Silk Road economic zone” as a crossed Eurasian cooperation space, forming passages of cooperation from the Baltic Sea to the Pacific Ocean, from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf.



- Secondly, the “Silk Road economic zone” won’t be a formal system arrangement like EU and Eurasian Union at least for the foreseeable future. This is a synthetic cross-regional cooperation initiative.
- Thirdly, the “Silk Road economic zone” is not a geo-economic plan dominated solely by China, but a multivariate and opening process, requiring Eurasian countries to jointly participate. The essential feature of geopolitics and geo-economy in Eurasia lies in the overlapping nature of cooperative mechanisms. The Russia-led Eurasia Union, the US-proposed New Silk Road Plan, EU’s Central Asia strategy and Korea’s Eurasia initiatives are all reasonable in certain aspects and have made progress. Xi’s initiative is not a substitute of the above cooperation plans, but is seeking to find something in common with those plans and thus connecting diverse goals.





- The advantages of China's "Silk Road economic zone" are that firstly the emphasis of integration is laid on overall economic cooperation, integrating Eurasia with the grand strategic horizon based on Central Asia and beyond. In particular, using the synthetic power with China and EU at the two poles, it coordinates among Central Asian countries and Russia, tackling aspects such as economy and society, traffic and regional public goods like energy while excluding politics and value guidance. China's economic strength and the detailed finance investment promised by China make the plan more feasible. The fruit of cooperation between China and Eurasian countries since the Soviet collapse, especially the new systematic arrangements, has laid a good foundation for such cooperation. Finally, the loophole of globalization in Eurasia has been filled by China's outward economy. So the new cooperation plan does not start from nowhere. Rather, it has been systemized, so it is relatively easy to implement.



- The main disadvantage of China is that there is still massive misunderstanding outside about Xi's proposal. The outside mostly thinks the "Silk Road economic zone" is still an exclusive geopolitical plan thus lessening its appeal to Eurasian countries and making major giants further guard against China. And compared with the plans of other major powers, especially Russia, America and Europe, China's "Silk Road economic zone" remains in the initial stage, the contents of itself being unclear, thus strengthening the wait-and-see attitude of others. And Xi's five suggestions are seen as self-contradictory by others; they believe China's aim is not to provide public goods, but is essentially selfish, seeking to seize resources from Eurasia to realize its own rise.



- The current dilemma is that the integration programs of Russia, the US, the EU, Turkey are all highly exclusive, that is all the countries are going for their own national interests and the collective interests of the group they belong to.
- This means that the competition among all major powers will continue for a long term or even be further intensified. It's still uncertain whether a complete political concept of Eurasia will form. If it develops along the existing tracks, the geopolitical picture of Eurasian region is likely to undergo profound, fundamental changes, or even to be a fragmented region rather than a unified one. Eurasia may disappear from international political issues as a geopolitical concept, or as a political one.



- In my opinion, any monopoly Eurasian integration program will bring trouble and not benefit the development of this region. There are also great uncertainties because of the strong competition among external countries. In this sense, the inclusive Eurasian integration initiatives proposed by China and South Korea may have value of their own, especially contrasted with these exclusive policies.



**Thanks!**