



Energy, Economics, and Security in Central Asia: Russia and Its Rivals: Strategic Studies Institute

Professor Stephen Blank

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Five Central Asian states emerged out of the Soviet Union's Central Asian republics in 1991. Although U.S. policymakers presumed that Iran would inevitably sweep them into its sphere of influence, this has not happened. Nor is it likely to occur. Instead there has developed a multi-state competition for influence and even control of these new states. This competition involves Russia as the leading force in the area and Moscow's main rivals are Turkey, Iran, Pakistan (and India), China, and the United States. This rivalry is particularly strong in the struggle among these states to gain positions of leverage over the energy economy, i.e. production, pipelines, and refining in Central Asia because this region is blessed with enormous energy deposits. These deposits are crucial to Central Asia's integration with the world economy and economic progress. Indeed, energy exports may be the only way these governments can hope for any economic stability and progress in the future. Therefore, whoever controls the energy economy will determine the destiny of the region. This monograph offers a detailed look at how and why Russia is trying to control that economy and thus the destiny of these states, as well as the strategies of its rivals. Moscow is aiming to reintegrate Central Asia into an economic, political, and ultimately military union with Russia. It is trying to dominate their economies and subject them to Muscovite direction. Russia, therefore, resorts to blocking energy production, hindering foreign firms' activities in Central Asia, obstructing exports, and conducting currency policies that export inflation. Russia also has devised policies that coerce Central Asian states into giving Russians residing there dual citizenship. All of these policies signify Russia's efforts to fashion a new model of economic and, hence, military-political hegemony over the region and a new form of Central Asia's colonial dependency upon Moscow. The monograph argues that though Moscow is conducting a strong policy, it is not ultimately able to achieve such control because Central Asian states have alternatives in other states and because of Russia's own economic weakness.

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