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The review of a Doctoral Thesis  
*Transformations of the Central Asian Regional Energy Security Complex after 1991:  
The Case of the Turkmenistan-China Gas Pipeline*  
submitted by Václav Lídí

### **Content and objective of the work**

The work focuses on energy security in Central Asia after the fall of the Soviet Union, with particular attention paid to the natural gas sector. The work's aim is to investigate approaches to energy policy that prevail among actors that form the regional energy security complex of Central Asia.

The work identifies China's cooperation with Turkmenistan as the key factor that has changed the web of energy interdependencies in a broader region of Central Asia. Using the Central Asia-China gas pipeline as a case study, the thesis analyses energy security in Central Asia. The work explores China's rising presence in the Central Asian energy sector and scrutinizes the evolution of energy policy of Turkmenistan. The analysed case of China-Turkmenistan cooperation offers contribution to several debates in the IR discipline and post-Soviet/Eurasian studies, related to energy security, energy policies of state actors, regional energy security complexes as well as the energy realm of Central Asia.

### **Methodological and theoretical approach**

The work conceptualizes two major approaches to energy security: strategic-oriented and market-oriented. This conceptualization provides a starting point for answering the main research question as to which approach has been chosen by actors within the Central Asian regional energy security complex – Russia, China, Central Asian states. It also allows for constructing an analytical model of a strategic approach to energy security. The model is embedded in the realist paradigm of IR theorising and it draws on the theory of regional security complexes. It identifies four major aspects of a strategic approach to energy security and a set of indicators.

Whereas the theoretical background and the analytical model are presented in a clear and accessible manner, the section on methodology is rather repetitive. The limitations of the proposed research design are not discussed. The section on primary sources and data of energy flows and energy sector transactions could have been discussed more at length, especially given some unavoidable contradictions between different sources. The role of semi-structured interviews and data collected with their use could also have been elaborated on – it is not known what were the criteria of selection and what was the contribution of the interviews to the research process as a whole.

## **Logical structure**

The thesis has a coherent structure, the narrative is easy to follow. The proposed model provided a set of criteria against which empirical evidence can be analysed. The introductory part provides an overview of the state of research, which properly sets the stage for the main argument. Concluding paragraphs towards an end of each section make it easier to follow the train of the Author's thoughts.

The policy of each of the main actors – Russia, China, and Turkmenistan – is discussed in a separate chapter. All three chapters have the same structure, based on the analytical model: energy resources, energy actors, energy policy, and energy policy in the energy security complex of Central Asia. The concluding sections in each of these chapters juxtapose the empirical evidence with the indicators outlined in the model.

There is some imbalance between the chapters devoted to Russia and China, and the chapter focused on Turkmenistan. The latter provides an in-depth analysis and scrutinizes all key developments. The chapters on Russia and China are in some parts a bit too general and lack focus. Some sections, e.g. on Russia's policy towards the energy security complex in Central Asia, are a tad difficult to follow as it is not clear what the timeframe is and what is the logic underpinning the section. These chapters tend to discuss a number of issues that are not directly related to the research question. Good concluding sections allow, however, to retain the focus on the key research question.

The concluding chapter neatly summarises the thesis's findings.

**Formal and language structure** (linguistic expression, the correctness of citations and references to literature, graphic design, formal requirements of the work, etc.):

The work fulfils all the formal criteria. The bibliography and referencing do not raise any doubts. The work is based on a broad range of primary and secondary sources. The use of tables and maps helps to illustrate key aspects of energy policies of main actors. The language is accessible and the narrative easy to follow, although more clarity in the section discussing the model would have been helpful.

**Short evaluator's comment** (overall impression of the thesis, strengths and weaknesses, originality of ideas, fulfilment of the goal, etc.):

The thesis fills an important gap in the literature. The work's central topic analyses one of the most dynamic shifts in regional politics in the post-Cold War international politics, with China largely pushing Russia out of the energy sector in the region. The work also illustrates the agency of smaller Central Asian actors, Turkmenistan in particular. It thus sheds light on the dynamics between great powers and smaller states, both in the realm of energy and in broader regional politics. The thesis makes a strong

argument for the domination of a strategic approach in energy policies of Russia, China and Turkmenistan. The analysis of Sino-Turkmenistani relations is the strongest point of the thesis.

Having said that, there are some minor weaknesses. The notion of Central Asian energy security complex remains slightly convoluted (p. 20); it is not clear whether the complex is regarded merely as an analytical tool or as the web of dependencies existing in reality.

There is some confusion of theory and political practice when discussing the strategic approach in the introduction. It is not clear if the 'strategic approach' identified by the Author is merely a conceptual tool employed by scholars (and other observers of international politics – as an ideal type of behaviour), or whether it is one of two approaches employed in practice by state actors.

There is also some confusion related to realist paradigm; neorealism and neoclassical realism are mixed (e.g. p. 14). Waltz and Gilpin, leading representatives of neorealist current, are ascribed to neoclassical realism, whereas the majority of authors who identify themselves as neoclassical realists are not mentioned. Overall, the discussion of how realist theory can help us make sense of energy policy could have been grounded in the topical literature more.

The analysis of Russia's policy tends to skip over certain details, e.g. it does not discuss the evolution of Russia's attitude towards the Energy Charter Treaty; it was the Russian parliament, not the government, that blocked the sale of Slavneft to China in 2002).

A more critical approach towards the metaphor of the 'Great Game' would be useful, especially taking into consideration that the thesis demonstrates the role and agency of smaller states.

### **Questions and comments recommended for a more detailed explanation (one to three)**

1) I would like to ask about the possibility (as well as limitations) of adapting and employing the concept of energy security complex to the analysis of energy interdependencies in other regions.

2) May I ask you to comment on the extent of competition and cooperation between Russia and China in Central Asia, especially with regard to Russia-Turkmenistan 2009 gas war. To what extent has the Sino-Russian relationship in the region been influenced by the dynamics in the energy realm?

### **Recommendations / non-recommendations for defense**

I am absolutely recommending the thesis for defence.