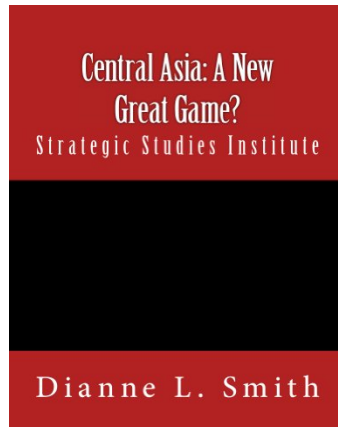


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Ausgabe **KINDLE**

Is there a new "Great Game" being played out in Central Asia? Boris Rumer argues that the successor states to the Russian and British empires have renewed the struggle for hegemony in the center of the Asian continent. As the world shifts from a bipolar to a multipolar focus, the nations of Asia search for new trans-regional security arrangements. More specifically, the breakup of the Soviet Union and the creation of five Central Asian republics (Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan), have complicated the security relations of the Asian states. (See Figure 1.) But, this new struggle is not a repeat of the 19th century "Great Game," by which the Central Asian states are but pawns of great powers as they jockey for power and position. Instead, the Central Asian states themselves are active players in this struggle for power, in a unique geo-strategic position to influence immediate neighbors Russia, China, and Iran, and even beyond into the Indian subcontinent. Once considered a backwater of little importance during the Soviet era, Central Asia could play a pivotal role in Asian politics in the next decade.

Enlargement and Engagement set domestic political stability, regional peace, and the maturation of market economies in the five Central Asian states as policy goals of the United States. The key to Asian, especially Central Asian, regional security is economic. A strong, vibrant

market economy is a prerequisite for political stability and the growth of democracy. Political stability, however, is itself a key element to economic development; peace in the region, especially in Tajikistan, Afghanistan, and Kashmir, must be gained before that economic takeoff can occur.

Serious political, economic, ethnic, religious, and social challenges confront the five new Central Asian states in this quest for regional security. How each state is able to confront and resolve these problems will determine its ability to emerge as a viable force in this struggle for influence, in this new "Great Game." Instability might seem to provide opportunities for states such as Iran or China to expand their influence, but the risks that such instability would ricochet back on them are too great. Thus, Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia and China each seek, in their own way, to promote stability within Central Asia while expanding their own regional influence.

Implications for American security from this struggle derive from the U.S. desire to prevent existing problems within Central Asia from escalating into crises that might engage Iran, Pakistan, India, Russia or China. Therefore, we must first identify those centrifugal forces threatening Central Asia, then review each of these states in turn, to analyze their behavior, identify their regional objectives and state policies in relation to Central Asia, and evaluate the impact of Central Asia upon their own security. Doing so offers a better perspective on our own strategic interests in post-Cold War Asia.