CHAPTER – 2

INDIA’S STRATEGIC INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

The Central Asian region lies at the crossroads of Russia, the Middle East, South Asia and the Far East. Any geopolitical changes in the region inevitably extend their impact on several states in the neighbourhood. Thus from Mackinder’s theory of heartland, “He who rules the heartland commands the world –Island; who rules the world Island commands the world.”\(^1\) The heart of the island is a vast region cut off from the ocean.\(^2\) Central Asia lies in the heart of the Eurasian continent.\(^3\) Sir Halford Mackinder considered Central Asia as the centre of the world as it holds an important part of the Heartland.\(^4\) It is the only largest landmass in the whole world. He also observed that whosoever have its possession; will have the advantage for world conquest.\(^5\) According to Mackinder’s pivot of history, Central Asia has acquired not only a role of geo-strategic importance; it has also acquired a magnetic importance for attracting countries like United States, Russia, China, India, Pakistan etc. into an area of great game competition. His theory got support during Great Game\(^6\) played by Russia and Great Britain in Central Asian region.

However, there are three most important geographic and political factors that make Central Asian republics (Republic of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Pakistan, etc.) attractive for the above nations.

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\(^2\) Ibid.


\(^5\) Ibid.

\(^6\) The term Great Game was used for the strategic rivalry between Russia and Britain for supremacy in Central Asia. But the term lost its importance during World War II as the two became allies. Morgenthau, Hans J., *Politics among Nations*, Scientific Book Agency, Calcutta, 1976, p. 61.
Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) important to the world powers.\(^7\) -

- the Central Asian region is land-locked. It is the most central one on the Eurasian landmass. It also controls the East-West land movement. It is gateway to the European market for the West Asian and South Asian countries. The geo-strategic location accords it the status of “transit region for the flow of European goods to and from the South Asia.”\(^8\)

- there is an excess of natural resources which are not fully exploited, mainly the hydrocarbon energy resources.

- the incomplete process of the state and nation formation in the newly independent Central Asian republics make them vulnerable to other countries in the world.

The Central Asian region does not have an access to the sea.\(^9\) Hence, in order to link itself to the world market, it is important for it to get an access to the southern sea. Likewise, the growing influence of its neighbours on the region is directly related to the ability of Central Asian republics to provide the whole region with an access to the sea. But the neighbouring countries, touching CARs borders, are different and troublesome. For example, Afghanistan resting on southern borders are war-torn countries. Though, Russia on the North is, somehow, a stable country. China’s Xinjiang province on the East is a troublesome area, which is suffering from the ethnic Uighur problem.\(^10\) The Caucasus region is also a flash point to the west. The factors like Arab-Israeli rivalry, intra-Arab hostility and the war against terrorism keep the energy rich

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region of Central Asia in a state of continuous turmoil and instability. With the changing geopolitical environment, it is most likely that the CARs may now be dragged into these conflicts. The danger, of course, arises from political Islam, introduced by the Arabs in 7th century.

Today, Islam is the predominant religion in these republics and most Central Asians are Sunni Muslims. The factor of Islamic fundamentalism has appeared in the CARs due to its geo-political closeness to the countries like Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan which are with Islamic identity and ethnic similarity. These countries are purely Muslim population dominated countries which believe in uniting all the Muslim countries in the world against western domination. Thus, the region attributes strategic importance in terms of the strategic depth to the concept of uniting the Muslim world.

There are many factors like drug trafficking, Islamic movements, arms smuggling, weapons of mass destruction of Soviet times, radio active material (especially in Kazakhstan which is the only splinter nuclear power of the former Soviet Union in Central Asia) corruption etc., which have changed the Central Asian countries in to an unstable region. In the years to come Tajikistan, which is having a similar topography to the FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) and NWFP (North West Frontier of Pakistan),

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15 Kapoor, V. K., India’s Strategic Neighbourhood-Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia, in Kumar, Satish, India’s National Security Annual Review 2005, Knowledge World, New Delhi, 2005, p. 82.
18 Federally Administered Tribal Area is a semi-autonomous tribal region of Pakistan. It is situated between the Afghanistan in the north and west, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces in the east and Baluchistan in the south. It is the poorest part of Pakistan. See Markey, Daniel Seth, Securing Pakistan’s Tribal Belt, Council on Foreign Relations, Centre for Preventive Action, New York, 2008, p. 5.
will need great attention from terrorists outfits. The dense mountainous areas and the political & social tensions prevailing in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan will become easy hide out places for non state actors especially for Taliban. Islamic organizations and radical groups like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahrir in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan operating mainly from Farghana Valley are cause of concern for Central Asian countries security.

The New Great Game in the region revolves around to have control over the energy resources, economic gains, fight against international terrorism, regime change and military posturing amongst a multitude of nation states. The main players of this game are U. S., Russia, and China and the peripheral players include Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and India, which have their own interests clashing with each others. The proximity of these countries make Central Asian region vulnerable for volatile clashes between neighbouring powers. The security related problems of the Central Asian region are bound to have effect in the both continents of Europe and Asia.

The Central Asian region is also strategically important because of it’s over abundance of resources like oil and natural gas. The disintegration of Soviet Union left behind a wealth of huge hydrocarbon and minerals in Central Asia. Beneath the steppes, these resources lie waiting for investment and

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21 Farghana Valley is divided among three Central Asian republics: Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan. About 60 percent of the valley’s territory lies in Uzbekistan, 25 percent in Tajikistan and the remaining 15 percent in Kyrgyzstan. The two largest underground opposition Islamic movements known to be currently operating in the valley are the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and the Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HuT). See Slim, Randa M., "The Farghana Valley: In the Midst of a Host of Cries, in Makenkamp, Monique, Tongeren, Paul Von and Veen Hans Van de, Searching for Peace in Central And South Asia, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., Colorado. 2003, p. 142 and p. 148.
26 Sharma, S. K., Now a Petro-Cold War, The Tribune, August 8, 2005, p. 10.
Natural gas reserves are mainly in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Turkmenistan’s gas reserves are the fourth largest in the world, accounting for 11.7 percent of the world total with 24.3 trillion cubic meters (TCM). It is also the fourth largest producer of oil in CARs. The real hydrocarbon resources in Central Asia are incredibly large, and if both the onshore and offshore Caspian Sea resources are combined together then these would be equal to those of Saudi Arabia and Kuwait.

Such huge amounts of natural gas and oil, if exploited properly, could become the driving force for developing the economies of Central Asian republics. And this will also affect the economies of developed as well as developing countries like Russia, United States, China, India, Pakistan etc. In other sense it is a beneficiary point for the oil and gas rich countries. If these countries create the shortage of oil or increase the prices, the economy of a developed or developing country can collapsed. The reason being is that the progress and development of these countries always depends on the industries which necessitate oil. In that case all the countries are trying to have an access to the oil and natural gas rich region. For example USA, Russia and China are the countries which have already secured their interests and have an access to these countries.

India’s strategic interests and strategic presence in Central Asia date back to antiquity. It does not share geographic borders with Central Asia, but being India’s immediate neighbours Central Asian countries have had an age-old relations and multidimensional contacts with India from the time of Rig Veda.

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28 Ibid.
29 Khalmovatova, Umida, Perspectives on New Silk Road Connect between Central Asia and South Asia, in Malhotra, Rashpal, Dash, P.L., Gill, Sucha Singh, Bakhadirov, Murat M., South and Central Asia: Quest for Peace and Cooperation, Central for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh, 2013, p. 33.
30 Ibid.
and Buddhism to the influx of medieval invaders. The Dravids, who founded Mohenjodaro and Harappa, the magnificent cities and the glorious culture of the Indus Valley, had a link with Central Asia. The region’s southernmost frontier is in very close proximity to Jammu and Kashmir. The dynasties, in the history, that ruled over India for a long period of time like the Khaljis, the Tughlaqs, the Lodhis, the Surs and the Mughals etc. were all related to this region in one way or another. Hence based on Kautilya’s Mandla theory, India has given importance to the concept of neighbourhood in terms of widening centric circles.

The extract of Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh’s address at the Combined Commanders Conference at New Delhi on 18 October 2006 explains the importance of Central Asian region for India-

“When we look at our extended neighbourhood we can not but be struck by the fact that India is the only open pluralistic democratic society and rapidly modernizing market economy between the Mediterranean and the Pacific. This places a special responsibility upon us not only in the defence of our values but also in the search for a peaceful periphery. We have traditionally conceived our security in extending circles of engagement. Today, whether it is West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia or the Indian Ocean region, there is increasing demand for our political, economic and defence engagement.

38 An extract from the Prime Minister’s address at the Combined Commanders Conference at New Delhi.
Shri Pranab Mukherjee, President of India and earlier External Affairs Minister, has also mentioned in a speech on his visit to the Defence Service Staff College, Wellington on January 22, 2008, that, “the Gulf and Central Asia are part of India’s extended neighbourhood and India is adding an important elements to its traditional ties with the countries of the Gulf and the Central Asian Regions by leveraging economic opportunities and long standing cultural and people to people links.” More so India considers Central Asian region as an area of strategic and economic importance.40

However, India’s favoured position into the region that was identified by the strategic thinkers as India’s near abroad has been reduced.41 The emergence of a number of regional players and the potential for local conflicts also significantly changed the strategic environment for India.42 Today, in order to gain her strategic interests, India has been trying hard to have firm foothold in the Central Asian Republics. Apart from this, the Central Asian heads of governments need to realize India’s potentialities including liberal, economy, secularism and representative democracy and welfare oriented system. According to Martha Brill Olcott – all of the Central Asian leaders are “aware of the economic and geopolitical power that New Delhi would come to exercise as its economy continues to grow.”43

According to Professor Nirmala Joshi in her book Reconnecting India and Central Asia – Emerging Security and Economic Dimensions. India was a “Latecomer to the region.”44 It accounts for their exaggerated attention to geopolitical issues. The Central Asian republics, after 1991, have seen many

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41 Sengupta, Anita, India and Central Asia, World Focus, Volume 21, Number 8, August 2000, p. 23.
42 Patnaik, Ajay, Central Asia Since Soviet Disintegration, World Focus, Volume 21, Number 8, August 2000, p. 5.
powers’ playing into the region but in spite of this India still has cordial relations with the CARs. India is having the privileged access to CARs which it enjoyed during the Soviet regime. India’s strategic environment and her wish to rise as a regional power in Central Asia can be impacted by the present developments and the interplay of various countries in Central Asia to establish their influence.\(^\text{15}\) The changing scenario and the power blocs operating in Central Asia along with the geo-strategic concerns of India will decide the role and approach for India in Central Asian region.

However, it is a well known fact that there is an absence of direct transport corridor from India to Central Asia.\(^\text{46}\) This hurdle is better judged by many statesmen and diplomats. India’s former External Affairs Minister Pranab Mukherjee discussed the hindrance in trade and commerce and other bilateral relations caused by lack of direct route from India to CARs in Conference on ‘Cooperative Development and Peace in Central Asia: An Indian Perspective’ organized by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, that “the absence of direct surface transportation route has been a major handicap in further developing the economic ties between India and Central Asia. The recent steps taken by Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Russia to increase road and rail connectivity may help in the development of the international north south transport corridor.” \(^\text{47}\) He, further, added, “At the same time, air connectivity could be used to overcome this impediment as several Central Asian capitals were closer to Delhi than Delhi to many Indian cities.” \(^\text{48}\) India would face many constraints if it uses the direct and short transport corridor i.e. via Pakistan and Afghanistan to Central Asian region.\(^\text{49}\) While the available route passes through the troublesome areas of Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, it

\(^{17}\) India Mulls Regional Centre in Central Asia, The Sunday Tribune, Chandigarh, March 16, 2008, p. 3.
\(^{48}\) Ibid
is difficult for India to use such route because it offers the possibility of disruption in the lines of communications by the non state actors operating in these countries.\textsuperscript{50}

Another available route is ancient Silk route through China. During the British rule, the route via Xinjiang was preferred for conducting trade and commerce with Central Asia.\textsuperscript{51} But the problem lies here too because the available route involves the ethnically disturbed areas of China. The Xinjiang province of China is suffering from the ethnic Uighur problem.\textsuperscript{52}

India has not played much role in Central Asian republics as compared to other countries. But in spite of this India consider Central Asia both strategically and economically important. Even the Ministry of Defence, Annual Report has defined Central Asia as an area of vital importance to India, not only on account of its geographical proximity and India’s historical and cultural links with the region, but also because of the common challenge they all face from extremism and terrorism.\textsuperscript{53}

It would be in India’s interest to engage and involve with the Central Asian Republics and take initiatives to ensure that hostile and harmful forces are not allowed to win. Otherwise, it will create a conflicting arena in Central Asia which can cause and probably be dangerous for India’s security.\textsuperscript{54}

The changing environment in the Central Asian republics, both strategically and geopolitically, demands the need for India to keep her regional role at a much higher place. India is involved in a struggle to get an access to region’s energy resources. The security of India’s lines of communications to the resource wealth of Central and West Asia was one of the great tragedies of

\textsuperscript{50} The Week in Review-July 09-15, 7(3), Strategic Digest., Volume 42, Number 8. August 2012, p. 807.
\textsuperscript{52} Ibid. 
partition. Thus for strategic reasons and to gain an access to the region’s energy resources through direct supply lines with Central Asia, India should work towards stabilization in Afghanistan and Pakistan. India can depend on the United States as partner in this geo-political project; at practical level America can also help to stabilize Pakistan. In 1992, India claimed that Pakistan had obtained uranium from Tajikistan for its nuclear programme. The strategic partnership between New Delhi and Washington could be extended to Central Asia as well.

There are factors like energy resources in Central Asian republics due to which India can not ignore it. These countries have abundance of significant natural resources especially hydrocarbons. India’s growing economy requires a large amount of energy resources like oil and natural gas. With an average GDP growth rate of 6.5 percent, India is currently one of the fastest growing economies of the world. On August 15, 2005 Independence Day address, Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh has said, “It is not only we have but the entire world is viewing India as an emerging power. The whole world is eagerly watching the manner in which India is making rapid economic progress.......It is the result of our combined hard work that India today has made its mark on the world stage and we feel proud of our standing in the comity of nations.” India’s energy consumption is accounting for about 3.5 percent of the world’s commercial energy demands. That is why the demand for energy is growing day by day. Due to this, it is now confronted by a serious
challenge to its energy security. The reason being is that accesses to the energy resources at reasonable prices always remain one of the important factors in dealing with increasing demands. However, lack of direct route is the hindrance in the way. Such kind of hurdles prevents India from accessing the CARs and makes it harder for India to pursue its interests in the region.

India’s strategic approach lies in the development of strong ties with the countries of Central Asia along the energy and security vectors. Today, stability and security of the Central Asian republics is of prime importance for India. India poses neither a security threat as is the case with Russia, nor an economic or demographic threat, as it is perceived to be the case with China. India has also been pursuing the policies to restore its traditional linkages with the region and to reintegrate itself with the strategic neighbourhood. This has been reflected in India’s ‘Look East Policy’ of the mid-1990s, followed by its ‘Look West Policy’. India’s look west policy involves West Asia and Central Asia. Presently India is adopting the Connect Central Asia or Look North policy which, particularly, relates to Central Asian republics. India announced the same in June 2012 during a conference at Bishkek.

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67 Ibid. p. xi
69 Earlier India was relied on the countries on the western side. But then India has adopted a policy to look at her eastern neighbours. The policy was based on to improve politico-economic relations with these countries.
72 Khalmovatova, Umida, Perspectives on New Silk Road Connect between Central Asia and South Asia, in Malhotta, Rashpal, Dash, P.L., Gill, Sucha Singh, Bakhadirov, Murat M., South and Central Asia: Quest for Peace and Cooperation, Central for Research in Rural and Industrial Development (CRRID), Chandigarh, 2013, p. 37.
73 Ibid.
Shri Pranab Mukherjee, the then Minister of Defence had given the reflection in his statement at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington D. C. 74.

"India is not inclined to export ideologies, even ideologies it believe in and follows. India would rather promote democracy in the region by precept and example. Freer traffic between India and Central Asia would be a factor in favour of modernization and democracy there." 75

The reason why India wants democratic, stable and secular regime in Central Asian republics is that the weak governments can easily be overpowered by the terrorists or fundamentalist forces. Further, it could easily give momentum to the moving tendencies. Such kind of mutations could link up with the fundamentalist forces in neighbouring Afghanistan and Pakistan. 76 In that kind of situation India’s interests would suffer. It would have to face an added pressure from the terrorists especially in Kashmir where the terrorists get money and support from the foreign terrorist organizations.77

Presently, India’s relations with the Central Asian states are growing rapidly. Eminent writers like Stephen Dale 78 and Scott Levi 79 have written an extensive literature on the cultural contacts and relations between Central Asia and South Asia. For example people-to-people contact was there between Central and South Asia. There was a cross-national influence in philosophy, literature, music and art. All the Central Asian Presidents e.g. former President Askar

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74 Carnegie Endowment for International Peace was held on June 27, 2005 at Washington DC.
76 Mishra, Ranjana, India and Central Asia: From Hiatus to Hopes, World Focus, Volume xxx, Number 8, August 2009, p. 326.
Akaev of Kyrgyzstan in November 2003, President of Kazakhstan Nursultan Nazarbayev in January 2009, Turkmen President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov in May 2010, Islam Abduganievich Karimov, President of Uzbekistan in May 2011 and Tajik President Emomali Rahmon in September 2012, have visited India. The delegations of governments and non-governmental agencies have also visited India. Both sides are interested in exploring possibilities for economic cooperation.

With economic cooperation, there is also growing interest and cooperation between the Central Asian republics and India in various fields for example - defence, intelligence sharing, technical cooperation, space technology and energy cooperation. A memorandum of understanding has been signed in 2009 and 2011 with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan respectively on military cooperation.

Under the MoU, India will provide technical assistance in the field of space, nuclear, hydro in running defence industry of the Soviet times in CARs.

India has also been providing assistance in training CARs paramilitary forces to deal with the internal sources of conflicts and tensions. India’s presence has also grown in the region by the construction of Ayni Airbase at Farkhor (North West of Dushanbe) in Tajikistan. It has also established a military hospital at Tajikistan in 2001 to treat anti-Taliban Northern alliance forces. In 2002, with Kyrgyzstan it started a Joint Working Group on international terrorism. It has also been involved in Joint Working Group (JWG) on combating terrorism.

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Selvarajan, V., Central Asia – India’s Relations Since 1985: A Case Study of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan, Centre for Soviet and East European Studies School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, 1997.


Patnaik, Ajay, Customs Union and Eurasian Union: Implications for India, in Malhotra, Rashpal, Gill, Sucha Singh, Gaur, Neetu, Perspectives on Bilateral and Regional Cooperation, South and Central Asia, Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development, Chandigarh, 2013, p. 83.


Both the nations i.e., India and Tajikistan condemned terrorism in all forms and assured that international terrorism is a threat to global peace and security. With Tajikistan, India has Joint Working Group on countering terrorism in 2003. In June 2003, India and Kazakhstan also set up a Joint Working Group (JWG) against terrorism. In the meetings of the Joint Working Groups several issues of security and counter-terrorism like – financing of terrorism, exchange of information, data, and related matters are being discussed by the members.

In 2001, India purchased six Uzbek manufactured IL-78 air-to-air refueling aircraft and entered into a further agreement for Indian transport aircraft to be repaired at Tashkent. Many counter terrorism related exercises are conducted by Counter-Insurgency Warfare School at India and personnel from Uzbekistan get training in these exercises. India also avails naval equipment and spare parts for thermal and electrical torpedoes from Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan.

India and Kazakhstan has signed a uranium deal (Declaration of Strategic Partnership) in January 2009. Under this nuclear deal Kazakhstan will supply over 2,100 tons of uranium to India to make fuels for its nuclear plants. As Kazakhstan is the world's second largest uranium producer and in 2012, became the world's top uranium producer holding 20 percent of the global uranium reserves.

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70 Ibid.


India’s oil company ONGC Videsh Limited has acquired 25 percent stakes in Satpayev block in Kazakhstan in April 2011. It is also holding 15 percent stake in Kazakhstan’s Alibekmola oil fields, and has 10 percent holding in the Kurmangazi field in the Caspian Sea. A road to connect Afghanistan to Iranian port Chabahar has already been completed by India. India helped to develop it into a commercial port so that it can have access to both Afghanistan and Central Asia, bypassing Pakistan as a transit point. This port is much closer to India.

India is trying to participate in the projects like the Iran – Afghanistan – Pakistan – India pipeline and another linking Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan – India (TAPI). Dr. Manmohan Singh considered TAPI pipeline as Pipeline of Peace. But the factors like rivalry between India and Pakistan, turmoil condition of Afghanistan and the security concerns have made these projects more difficult to complete. However, according to former Petroleum and Natural Gas Minister Shri Jaipal Reddy, TAPI project is going to be the Silk Route of the twenty first century. In 2006, during India’s Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh’s visit to Central Asia in Uzbekistan, a Memorandum of Understanding was signed on the Cooperation in the field of Oil and Natural Gas between the Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas of the India and Uzbekistan’s national company “Uzbekneftegaz.”

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95 Ibid.
97 Ibid.
99 Inaugural Speech to mark the twentieth Anniversary of Diplomatic Relations between India and Turkmenistan on April 26, 2012, at New Delhi., in *Strategic Digest*. Volume 42, Number 5, May 2012, p. 442.
“India’s presence in the region remains thin in comparison with not only major powers like Russia or China but even Turkey, Iran, South Korea etc.” opined M. K. Bhadrakumar, former Indian Foreign Services (IFS) officer and ambassador to Uzbekistan. As, the war on terrorism and the presence of USA in Central Asia have changed the strategic environment in the region, many countries have joined the race and trying to establish their foothold in the region like the US, Russia, China etc. These countries are strictly involved in various activities in the region. There is possibility of clash among these countries as each country’s interests are clashing with another one. No doubt, there are many big and major powers which are involved in the region and India is lagging behind amongst these countries. So it becomes necessary for India to maintain its interests and space in order to keep herself placed in present scenario.

In fact, a “New Great Game”* is being played by big powers like United States, Russia, and China. These powers are competing to establish their foothold firmly and to increase their influence in the region. Lord Curzon, in 1898, defines great game as, “Turkistan, Afghanistan, TransCaspia and Russia, as he said, to many these words breathe only a sense of utter remoteness to me, I confess, they are pieces on the chessboard upon which a game for domination of the world is being played out.” In this great game CARs are struggling for power for their own survival. The scene in Central Asia tended to remind the seventeenth century when trading companies like East India Company and its European competitors were trying to control the trade routes and natural

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103 Ibid.
*The term New Great Game is different from the Great Game. It is used in the context of current strategic presence of the countries like U. S., Russia, China, U. K. and other countries in Central Asian region. These countries are competing with each other to increase their influence in the region and to gain their interests. Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, Op. Cit., 2002, p. 446.
resources in different parts of the world. But the twentieth century’s struggle is not a recurrence of the Great Game of the nineteenth century in which the Central Asian republics were pawns of great powers and position. These republics are themselves active players in the struggle for power. Though there are ethnic, political, economic and social tensions going on in this region e.g., the Tajik Civil war (1992), ethnic conflicts in Uzbekistan (2005) (Andijon province), Tulip revolution in Kyrgyzstan (2005) and Kyrgyz revolution (April-June 2010). These conflicts and tensions can be the sources to threaten CARs neighbourhood and immediate neighbourhood as well.

Moreover, its geopolitical proximity to Russia, China, West Asia, South Asia and the Central Asian region emerged as a distinct geo-political entity stimulating global attention and interests. Central Asian region holds international transportation and communication network, like, it has an access to the Persian Gulf, through Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan to the Indian Ocean, through China to Asia Pacific region. Countries like Iran, Russia, Turkey, Pakistan, India and China are competing for strategic, economic and cultural interests in Central Asia. With billions of dollars and crucial strategic influence at stake, the struggle for control over the vast oil resources in the Caucasus and Central Asia is being carried on. It is a tale of political intrigue, fierce competition for energy resources, geo-strategic rivalries, disagreements and indescribable independence.

114 Ibid.
Likewise, it compels everyone to think in a zero-sum game of who will control the region next\(^1\), following Mackinder’s theory of “who controls the heartland controls the world.”\(^2\) The internal weakness of the Central Asian states and its internal conflicts make these states extremely vulnerable to the outside pressure.\(^3\) They have also suffered the hardships of economic, social and political crisis after disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991.\(^4\) And with the involvement and intervention of powerful countries like Russia, US, China, other states of Caucasus as well as Iran, Turkey and India the new economic, geo-political and security orientations has begun to take shape. Following are the actors and forces seeking influence in the Central Asian arena:

United States is the current pre-eminent big power whose influence spreads everywhere in CARs. Its chosen instruments are NATO, the European Union (EU), and the West based MNCs. After the end of the cold war, the US got many opportunities to cooperate with the countries that had once belonged to the Soviet bloc, as well as with the new states that emerged in the post Soviet expense.\(^5\) The U.S. and other oil firms were looking for the ways to pipe out the vast natural gas reserves of Turkmenistan to energy starved markets in Pakistan.\(^6\)

The American response to 9/11 terrorists attack on World Trade Centre took the form of Operation Enduring Freedom\(^7\) thereby opening US entry into the region of Central Asia. And these republics turned out to be the frontline states

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\(^{1}\) Stobdan, P., Central Asia and India’s Security, Strategic Analysis, Volume 28, Number 1, January-March 2004, p. 54


\(^{3}\) After the disintegration of U. S. S. R. in 1991, the Central Asian countries were struggling for their existence and survival. Apart from this these countries faced challenges like building their economies, lack of democracy, corruption, ethnic conflicts, Islamic fundamentalism, internal turmoil, revolutions etc. Presently the current presence of outside powers in the region is a source of concern for the CARs. Encyclopedia of Modern Asia, Op. Cit., 2002, p. x.


\(^{5}\) Ibid.


\(^{7}\) Operation Enduring Freedom was initiated by United States in response to terrorists’ strikes in New York on September 11, 2001. It was launched against Al-Qaeda and Taliban. It brought U. S. and NATO forces to Central Asia to fight a war on terror.
through which U. S. fought the war in Afghanistan. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have participated in the NATO’s Partnership for Peace (PfP) programme.  

The Central Asian republics of Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan granted permission to U. S. and the NATO forces to operate from their territories. Kyrgyzstan airbase lease agreement signed between U. S. and Kyrgyzstan, according to which the U. S. force would have to evict the Manas airbase in Kyrgyzstan as the lease will expire in the year 2014. In 2002, the U. S. gave Karimov regime $500 million in aid and rent payments for the U. S. air base. In 2009, United States paid approximately US $ 60 million as a lease amount to Kyrgyzstan. Earlier it was US $ 17 million and the Kyrgyz government increased the same in 2009. The increased amount was also a part of the agreement signed between the both countries in 2009. The signed agreement was different from the U. S. -Uzbek and U. S.-Tajik agreements. U.S.-Kyrgyz agreement comprised two important aspects:

- It was not classified like U.S-Uzbek and U.S.-Tajik agreements and
- It established a one-year time frame for the operation of the base; later, it was extended for another three years.

The agreement between U. S. and Kyrgyzstan contains no clauses which would empower the U. S. and NATO forces to defend Kyrgyzstan’s security. However, Kyrgyzstan’s government has decided to shut the Manas air base.

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126 Ibid
127 Ibid.
128 Ibid.
The base is a vital hub for troops and supplies for the U.S. and NATO campaign against terrorism in neighbouring Afghanistan.130

In 2008, Kazakhstan has signed an agreement with U.S. and NATO forces. According to the agreement Kazakhstan will allow U.S. and NATO forces to use country’s capital Almaty’s airport as an emergency airfield for the fighter planes flying on missions to Afghanistan.131 Kazakhstan is the only republic of Central Asia which has created a peacekeeping force (the Kazbat battalion, upgraded to Kazbreg) and which collaborates with the NATO under a United Nation mandate.132 The U.S. relations with the republic of Tajikistan focused on border control, security and law enforcement.133 However, Tajikistan had already offered three airfields of Kulyab, Khojent and Tyube to the United States.134 The Uzbek and US military personnel held joint military exercises on June 6-7, 1997 in the Ferghana Valley.135

In this Great Game, the United States has also been trying to gain its own edge over other participant countries. On the one hand, it wants to establish its overall influence in the CARs to gain control over the other powers and on the other, it want to take control of its geo-strategic position in order to expand its domination as it did in the Gulf region.136 Likewise, it is also trying to contain the Russian influence in the region137, and use China as a force and ensure its presence in Central Asia against Russia.138 The United States strictly opposes Islamic fundamentalism and wants to decrease the spread of Islamic influence

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132 Ibid, 431.
The Central Asian region became an economic and competing battlefield for the big and major powers due to its visible potential. Russia considers the region as its security territory and the US is seeking new energy resource, in terms of replacing it with Middle East oil. In the recommendations of the former U. S. Vice-President Dick Cheney, in May 2001, the President makes energy security a main concern for the trade and foreign policy of the country. He also indicated towards the Caspian basin being a major hub of hydrocarbon reserves.

The American influence in the region, after 9 September 2001 homeland terrorist incidents, has increased a lot, but it started declining when the U. S. started promoting the western style democracies in Central Asian republics. The other governments of remaining four Central Asian republics overtly denounced western influence in their domestic affairs. The high point of these policies, with negative repercussions for the U. S. was reached when it responded to the Andijon violence in Uzbekistan in May 2005 by criticizing the Uzbek government. In retaliation, the U. S. was asked to vacate its base in Uzbekistan. But in April 2008, after attending the NATO summit at Bucharest, former President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov said that the NATO force could use Uzbek air space and land routes through Termez-Kharyaton only to provide logistic support to the troops in Afghanistan. There was another incident which questioned the future of U. S. military presence in

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142 Ibid, p. 5 & p. 95.
144 Ibid.
Kyrgyzstan in which an American army man killed a Kyrgyz citizen in December 2006.\textsuperscript{148}

However, United States does not have cultural links with the Central Asian republics. That is the reason for U.S. policy makers to find out main security interests which is common with the CARs.\textsuperscript{149} After the war in Afghanistan, U.S. troops have firmly established themselves in Central Asian states.\textsuperscript{150} The U.S. strategy in CARs region is to keep on maintaining its influence.\textsuperscript{151} However, the NATO forces have announced their withdrawal from Afghanistan by the end of 2014.\textsuperscript{152} But the outgoing Ambassador to Afghanistan Ryan Crocker has said the US troops will stay in Afghanistan till 2024 as US will not allow Taliban to take over.\textsuperscript{153} The troops will include Special Forces soldiers and an effective air power to counter the rebels.\textsuperscript{154} The U.S. has come to understand that it is impossible to achieve peace with military means alone.\textsuperscript{155} Therefore, it encouraged its project e.g. the New Silk Road for Afghanistan and its neighbours.\textsuperscript{156}

The present U.S. administration is keeping a close strategic eye on the Central Asian region following April – June 2010 incident in Kyrgyzstan when President Bakiev was overthrown. This is posing both new threats and opportunities for the Central Asian countries in the context of reinforcing the

\textsuperscript{153} The Week in Review- July 16-22, 7(4), Strategic Digest, Volume 42, Number 8, August 2012, p. 818.
\textsuperscript{154} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{156} Ibid.
geopolitical balance in the region. However, the United States has always been trying to tilt the balance of power in Central Asian region in its favour.

Russia plays an important role in the economic life of Central Asia. It is interested in preserving its own presence in the region. It is interesting to quote that during great game period, many British spectators claimed that there was a fear of Russia’s use of Central Asia as a launch pad for an invasion of India. But after the 1991 collapse, Russia lost Central Asia in all possible respects politically, economically or ideologically.

Russia is having declining hegemony of yesteryears. It started return to Central Asia when the presence of other major powers in CARs increased. Having withdrawn in the 1990s, it seeks to make a comeback in the region. Now, it has been constantly trying to revive her lost glory in the CARs. However, its chosen vehicles for involvement in the region are the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), and the Eurasian Economic Cooperation Organisation (EEC). Today Russia’s main interests in Central Asian region are strategic and related to security factors. It also wants to stop its access of the region to the outside powers. It believes that the outside powers especially USA, China, Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia are curbing her efforts to reunite its all states as these were during the time of USSR. But according to Russia, these powers are hindrance in gaining her control over the region. It sees external powers as

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threat to her own interests and security. Russian federation is also concerned about the Islamic fundamentalism in the region which could spread and affect its boundaries directly. Any instability in the Central Asian republics will pose threat to Russia also.

The Central Asian countries also want to maintain useful ties with Russia due to various reasons which have become the cause of concern, for example intrusion and intervention of outside powers, illegal migration, drug trafficking and religious extremism. But at the same time, Central Asian republics do not want to be influenced by Russian federation. Kazakhstan, which shares a border of 4, 660 kilometers with Russia, has large ethnic Russian population which is highly vulnerable to Russian influence. It is important for Russia because of being a buffer state which shares borders with Russia and China. Any instability in the region means impact on Russia. Apart from this all the main surface routes from Russian federation to Central Asia pass through Kazakhstan. It has permitted Russia to make unplanned launches from her Baikonur space station. However, Russia is building its own launch pad in the Russian Far East. Since 2002, Tajikistan President Rakhmanov has relied to some extent on the Russian security assistance to stay in power. Russia, also, does not want to lose control over region’s natural resources.

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168 Ibid, p. 79.
169 Firdous, Tabasum, Peace Strategies in Central Asia, Readsworthly Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p. 86.
171 The Week in Review- July 09-15, Strategic Digest, Volume 42, Number 8, August 2012, p. 807.
173 The Week in Review- June 11-17, Strategic Digest, Volume 42, Number 7, July 2012, p. 719.
After September 9, 2001, Central Asian region has become more attractive to Moscow, mainly for the reason of geopolitics. United States presence in Russia’s backyard (in Central Asian region) was becoming more assertive and became a source of concern for the Russian Federation. Early in 2004, Russia’s first deputy foreign minister Vyacheslav Trubnikov said, “presence of non-regional states, be it the U. S., China or some other states (in the Caucasus and Central Asia) is unacceptable.” But if we see in case of the war on terror then in early 2000, Russia, which stood by United States in its fight against Taliban, raised its status from a declared to a real partner in Washington’s counter terrorist struggle.

Russia has mutely regained the control over Central Asian key sectors including oil, space, minerals and the defence industry. Many security analysts have observed that Russia is returning to the region with a vengeance and with an ambitious strategic agenda. Russian President Putin himself said in November 2002, to Ekho Moscwy Radio:

“The era of Russian political concessions – which began with 1991 and continued through post-September 11 appearance of U. S. military bases in Central Asia – was coming to an end.”

Moscow’s push for closer military ties and holding military exercises in this context with the Central Asian countries has also been seen as an effort to safeguard and promote Russian economic interests and its domination of the Central Asian energy sector. It also focuses on drug trafficking and illegal migrations and offers military equipments. It has rented numerous military equipments...
facilities in Kazakhstan and two bases in Kant (Kyrgyzstan) and Ayni (Tajikistan). However, Tajikistan was pressing Russia to provide more than $250 million annually for the use of military bases on its territory. Under the current lease, which expires in 2014, Russia has the right to use these bases. On the other hand, Kyrgyzstan will also increase the fees for its military bases which have been taken by Russia on lease. Russia pays 15 million roubles to Kyrgyzstan according to the agreement signed in 2007.

Uzbekistan was the first Central Asian country which had joined the NATO sponsored Partnership for Peace Program in mid-1994. In 1999, it had withdrawn from the Russian sponsored Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in order to distance itself from the bear hug of the Russians. In August 2006, Uzbekistan was formally reinstated into the organization (CSTO). In September 2006, a joint military exercise to counter terrorism was conducted by Russia and Uzbekistan. These proved very beneficial for Uzbekistan.

In spite of its own vast energy resources especially oil and gas, Russia may face domestic shortages as its economy is heavily dependent on oil and natural gas exports. In order to strengthen its influence while competing with the West and China (who are making several attempts to involve into the Central

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185 The Week in Review- July 09-15, 7(3), Strategic Digest, Volume 42, Number 8, August 2012, p. 807.
186 Russia uses these bases in Tajikistan and in return, Russia provides military and technical assistance to Tajikistan’s military. Ibid.
188 Ibid.
190 CSTO refers to Collective Security Treaty Organisation a military alliance signed in 1992. Its present members are Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Armenia and Belarus. According to the treaty any aggression against one signatory will be considered as an aggression against all. Bakshi, Jyotsna, Op. Cit., 2004, p. 245.
192 The joint military exercise with Russia trained the Uzbek defence personnel for countering terrorism situations. Ibid, p. 168.
Asian energy), Russia is pursuing a healthy energy strategy in the Central Asia. On September 21, 2006, Russia’s Gazprom, Uzbekistan’s Uzbekneftegaz, and Kazakhstan’s KazMunayGaz also signed an agreement on gas supply and its transit. On May 12, 2007, it signed a deal with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. In accordance with the deal, the signatories agreed to build a natural gas pipeline along the Caspian Sea Coast to carry gas from Turkmenistan to Europe via Kazakhstan and Russia.

Though Russia has lost its influence in Central Asian republics as it was having at the time of USSR, but still, the present strategic scenario states that Russia should again gain its influence over the region. And apart from, this Russia’s increased influence in the region will be beneficial for India. CARs can also provide a near abroad market for India’s emerging export industries and overland routes to rich energy resources of Russia and the Middle East. Both Russia and India share warm and friendly relations.

According to Andrey Volodin:*

“India and Russia will stay in Central Asia for long. Moreover, their involvement will probably deepen as their capabilities grow. For Russia, India’s capability to

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197 Moore, Scott, Peril and Promise: A Survey of India’s Strategic Relationship with Central Asia, Central Asian Survey, Volume 26, Number 2, June 2007, p. 280.


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stabilize Central Asia is an important asset, both domestically and internationally.\textsuperscript{199}

China is the new rising power with an ambition of becoming a superpower by 2020.\textsuperscript{200} It is focusing on large scale investments and economic aid into Central Asia.\textsuperscript{201} It was after 9/11 incident, when China emerged as a key player in the Central Asian Republics. However, it was considered supreme in Central Asia a thousand years ago.\textsuperscript{202} China has borders with Russia to the north and Central Asia to the west.\textsuperscript{203} It shares a border of 5000 kilometers with three of the republics namely – Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.\textsuperscript{204} It has cultural relations with CARs since ancient times. The Silk Road created close ties between these countries. It is also a rapidly growing economy which is in acute need of accessing the CARs resources especially oil and gas.\textsuperscript{205} China has increased its influence in Central Asia mainly through trade, energy deals, building up of infrastructure in Western China and linking it up with Central Asia.\textsuperscript{206} It has also enlarged the scope and purpose of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, especially in the security arena.\textsuperscript{207} It gives priority to cross-border relations with the Central Asian republics which include establishment of stability in the Xinjiang province.\textsuperscript{208}

China’s main interests in the region are – to exploit the resource potential of the CARs; to decrease the influence of Russia and United States in Central Asia

\textsuperscript{199}Volodin, Andrey. Centrality of Central Asia: Case of India and Russia, an unpublished document and a paper presented at the International Conference on “Cooperative Development and Peace in Central Asia”, organized by Centre for Research in Rural and Industrial Development with the support of Ministry of External Affairs in Chandigarh on March 15-17, 2008.
\textsuperscript{200}Gubaidullina, M., Kazakhstan-China Relations, Shanthanam, K., Baizokova, Kuralay, Dwivedi, Ramakant, India-Kazakhstan Perspectives: Regional and International Interaction, Anamaya Publishers, New Delhi, 2007, p. 169.
\textsuperscript{201}Ibid.
and to prevent the spread of Uighur/Muslim nationalism in Xinjiang\textsuperscript{209} an autonomous region of China besides stability in the region. China is also the second largest trading partner of Central Asian republics.\textsuperscript{210} For example its trade volumes with Central Asia topped $46 billion last year, up 100-fold in 2013.\textsuperscript{211} It sees CARs as a vast market for Chinese goods and services.\textsuperscript{212} If stability stays there, it will help in Chinese trade which spreads across the world.

The extensive competition for energy resources in Central Asian republics is mainly limited to the countries of West and Russia. That is why China is too hinged for its share. It is pursuing a healthy and forceful energy policy in the Central Asian region.\textsuperscript{213}

China has strengthened her interests in Central Asian and Caspian oil as well. It has built a 988 kilometers long pipeline from Kazakhstan (Atasu) to Xinjiang designed to carry 10 million tons of oil annually.\textsuperscript{214} An agreement has been signed between Kazakhstan and China to build a pipeline from Western Kazakhstan to Western China.\textsuperscript{215} The pipeline will be 3008 kilometers long.\textsuperscript{216} Another plan of constructing a pipeline from Alashankou to Druzba which will pass through Dzungar Gate is in process.\textsuperscript{217} It has been involved in an energy deal with Turkmenistan which would supply it with natural gas. An agreement was signed in this regard in 2012 on the purchase of gas between China and Turkmenistan.\textsuperscript{218} As per the agreement, China’s CNPC (China National

\textsuperscript{209} Xinjiang is an important region for Russia ever since the mid-nineteenth century, when its troops clashed with Chinese pickets in the Sino-Russian border area in Central Asia. See in Rahul, Ram, \textit{Struggle for Central Asia}, Vikas Publishing House Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, 1982, p. 7.


\textsuperscript{211} China imports raw materials and Central Asian countries import consumer goods and finished products from China on a large scale.


\textsuperscript{216} Out of 3008 kilometers, 270 kilometers will be within China’s border. The pipeline will carry 20 million tons of oil. Ibid.

\textsuperscript{217} Ibid, p. 169.

\textsuperscript{218} The Week in Review- July 04-10, 6(2), \textit{Strategic Digest}, Volume 42, Number 7, July 2012, p. 705.
Petroleum Corporation) is slated to buy 65 billion cubic meters of Turkmen gas annually. On August 2005, China won over PetroKazakhstan (PK), which is a Canadian oil company in Kazakhstan with all its assets and out bided India’s ONGC Videsh Ltd. (OVL). China is the founder member of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). To counter the U. S. influence in the Central Asian republics, China has strengthened the SCO and encouraged bilateral contacts. It has conducted various joint military exercises with Tajikistan. Investors in China have to build a US $ 50 million refinery in Chui, Northern Province of Kyrgyzstan. The country has already solved various border issues with the Central Asian states by signing boundary agreements. It has pursued the policy of peaceful co-existence and economic prosperity with the Central Asian region. The main aim of Chinese policy is to maintain relations with Russia and republics of Central Asia. China has accepted the same and is trying to improve relation with the Russian federation. China, Russia and three of the Central Asian republics i. e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have signed an agreement named Shanghai Agreement. It was meant for confidence building and maintaining peace and security in Asia-Pacific region. Another agreement was 1997 Agreement on Mutual Reductions of Military Forces in the border region.

China also opposed the U. S. presence in the countries of Central Asia. United States is, presently, encouraging NATO force expansion to compete

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219 Ibid.
220 Singh, Priyabala, India and China’s Scramble for Energy Resources: Point of Cooperation or Conflict?, World Focus, Volume XXXII, Number 9, September 2012, p. 95.
221 Ibid. The Week in Review- April 30- May 6, 5(1), Strategic Digest, Volume 42, Number 6, June 2012, p. 572.
222 Ibid.
225 Ibid. See Annexure III.
226 Ibid.
227 Ibid.
with Russia in Central Asia. However, China thinks that by doing so U.S. is trying to encircle the Chinese territories which it would never allow to the U.S. But it will not encourage any kind of activities which could harm its sovereignty.

For China, the main problem is Uighur problem in Xinjiang. The region is the focal area where China, India, Afghanistan, Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) and West Central Asia adjoin one another. Apart from this, China’s increasing impact and its military and financial assistance to Pakistan can be dangerous for CARs and India as well. India is also aware of the Chinese aims in Central Asia and development on the Xinjiang region. The impact of developments in Xinjiang on India has been profound. According to Hirender Nath Mukherjee*, “China is an incorrigible enemy and, therefore, India has to get together with Pakistan and whosoever else it may be and try to see that China is more or less liquidated – if we can do so.”

Currently, everyone is aware of the China-Indian competition for new energy sources in Central Asia. However, China is well ahead of India in search of energy resources. It has already placed itself in Central Asia in order to acquire energy resources which are vital for China’s economy.

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232 Ibid


236 Hirender Mukherjee was a member from first to fifth Lok Sabha in the Parliament in 2004.


240 Ibid.

Pakistan is also a country with interests in the Central Asian republics. A German correspondent, who interviewed Gen. Zia-ul-Haq, the day before he died, said that Zia was beset with delusions of grandeur and spoke of Pakistani influence extending from the ramparts of Delhi’s Red Fort, across Afghanistan to Central Asia. Likewise, Pakistani author Ahmed Rashid also asserts that, “Zia’s vision of a Pakistani influenced region extending into Central Asia depended on an unidentified border with Afghanistan, so that the army could interfere in that country and beyond. Pakistan wants to strengthen its position in Central Asia and create a ring of Muslim states around India. Being an Islamic power, Pakistan thinks of Central Asia as a region for the spread and expansion of Islam. It will help in preparing the way for Islamic countries like Iran, Turkey and other west Asian Muslim countries. It does not provide India a direct land route to Afghanistan. It is the biggest problem of India’s trade and linkages with Central Asian republics.

Pakistan’s strategic geographical location is a boon for her. Being a neighbouring country, Pakistan provides a good transportation route to Central Asian states for trade through the Indian Ocean. Pakistan’s primary objective is to see that the transportation routes linking Central Asia with South Asia and the open sea pass through its own territory. In fact when the independence came to Central Asian countries, Pakistan seemed interested in opening trade relations and route with these free republics. In order to gain her interests.

242 Ibid
244 Ibid, p. 132.
Pakistan has signed many trade related agreements with the region. In March 2005, Pakistan signed a MoU with Turkmenistan for a trans-Afghan gas pipeline. Here, Pakistan saw a chance of getting benefit as the energy rich Central Asian republics were seeking outlets to sell their energy resources, especially gas and oil, in the international market. Strengthening its position in this region could provide Pakistan an additional trump card in its confrontation with India. It will also be an easy way for Pakistan to cause problems to India by creating disturbances in Afghanistan.

The former U.S.S.R. was the main source of threat to Turkey. That threat vanished away after Soviet disintegration. But the great game and other conflicts in and around the region created an unstable situation. Like many other powers Turkey has its own interests in the region of Central Asia. After the elimination of threat and with the help of Western powers Turkey is trying to get a hold on the region. Turkey’s main interests in the Central Asian region are:

- to prevent the spread of Islamic fundamentalist in her own territory
- to prevent the influx of refugees from Central Asia
- to access over the region’s natural resources, which could decrease her dependence on Russia and Iran

The Central Asian republics except Tajikistan have major population of Turkic origin. But CARs are facing the fear of spreading Islamic resurgence in the region by Turkey. Increased influence and role of Turkey in the region will be fruitful for United States as it wants to decrease Russian and Iranian

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251 Ibid. Pakistan is looking for ways to acquire the Central Asian energy resources, but, the problem laying is within Afghan boundary from where the pipeline has to pass through.
influence in the CARs. That is the reason U. S. always encouraged Turkey to increase its influence and role in the region.  

Afghanistan served as a buffer in the great game between British and the Russian empire in the late nineteenth century. It is strategically located on the crossroads between Iran, the Arabian Sea and India and between Central Asia and South Asia. Afghanistan shares common ethnic population with Central Asian Republics which comprises 36.4 percent to 42 percent Pashtun, 27 percent to 38 percent Tajiks, 8 percent to 10 percent Hazara, 6 percent to 9.2 percent Uzbek, 1.7 percent to 3 percent Turkmen, 0.5 percent to 4 percent Baloch, 0.1 percent to 4 percent Aimak, 1.9 percent to 9.2 percent and others (Pashai, Hindki, Nuristani, Barhui, Hindkowans). It has a great impact on the Muslim population in the region.

Afghanistan shares borders with three Central Asian republics namely Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. It also shares common cultural and historical relations with Central Asian states. The Gorno-Badakshan region of Tajikistan and the Badakshan region of Afghanistan have virtually no difference in terms of language, life style etc. The disturbed areas including Taliban* are the matter of concerns for Central Asian Republics as they are dangerous for the security of the region. The Taliban is actively engaged in spreading Islamic extremism and terrorism in South and Central Asia. Noticeable is that, in the past, by the mid 1980s, the strength of the Mujahideen cadre/fighters increased to more than 2, 500 in the field. Afghanistan and Pakistan have played a major role in the unrest in Tajikistan. No doubt,

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255 Ibid.
*Taliban militants are also known as the students of theology.
262 Ibid, p. 110.
Pakistan will find direct access to republics if Taliban, again, becomes active in Afghanistan. And it could use Islamic fundamentalist forces by using Taliban in Central Asia to increase its influence in the region. This will disturb the whole Asian continent.  

However according to Shri Pranab Mukhrjee the Central Asian region is of enormous significance to India. Recently, India has taken many steps for strengthening and maintaining its relationship with the significant region of Central Asia through diplomacy and via educational and cultural relations.

The big power politics revolves around the oil and gas producing areas of the region. India seeks to have a firm foothold and exercise influence in Central Asia along with other great powers so that this strategically located region does not become an area dominated by forces inimical or hostile to India's interests. Hence, it is in India's interests to tackle with the security related problems in the region and the military presence by other powers in the region that could potentially threaten it whether directly or indirectly. Central Asian region can become a part of dangerous neighbourhood dominated by Islamic militants. Any kind of attempts by Islamic fundamentalist forces to regroup in the Central Asian region will have a fallout for India and the Central Asian republics.

India should keep an eye on countries like Iran, Turkey, Saudi Arabian Muslim blocs and especially on Pakistan so that these could not create a nexus between themselves. Hence, the need for India is to formulate and implement a clear and comprehensive policy in Central Asian countries.

India can not ignore the implications of the great game and the presence of major powers in the region. This could result in the lack of stability in the region.

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266 Ibid.
271 Singh, Bhavana, Xinjiang Again: A Legatee of China’s Start Crossed Policies, World Focus, volume xxxii, Number 9, September 2011, p. 566.
republics. The cause of instability in the region is the presence of an alien power carrying a war on terrorism on the soil of CARs. In this case, India and Central Asia should cooperate with each other so that the effect of great game in the region could be minimized and the status-quo of the republics of Central Asian region could bring back. India should take initiatives for her diplomatic policy. It becomes necessary for India to be a prominent partner in the development of the Central Asia region. The leaders of both the regions should keep on interacting with each others on security and development related issues in the republics of Central Asia and India as well.

The presence of other countries like United States, Russia, China, and Pakistan may affect India’s interests in the CARs. Therefore, it will be in India’s favour if it grows her influence in the region. She needs to take steps, like energy cooperation, which could help her in increasing her influence in CARs. India should develop the trade and transit route through Iran and Turkmenistan as this is the short and most viable route as well option for her. It should use this option which could make Indian efforts to prevent Pakistan’s future conflicts as India would continue to draw her requirements from Central Asia. India can also help and support in promoting democracy in the Central Asian republics. She can give the region her own example as a democratic society with many religions. India has defence relations with the Central Asian region since Soviet times. She must develop it further in the region. Presently, India has adopted an independent foreign policy and has also signed agreements to increase mutual cooperation with the independent republics. But still India is in need to play more active role in the region as compared to other powers.

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273 Ibid.
275 Joshi, Nirmala, Regional Economic Cooperation and Transport Links with Central Asia: An Indian Perspective, Shanthnam, K., Dwivedi, Ramakant, India and Central Asia: Advancing the Common Interest, Anamaya Publishers, New Delhi, 2004, p. 209.