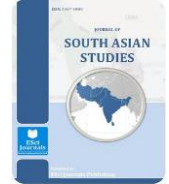




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INDIA'S RESPONSE TO NEW GREAT GAME IN CENTRAL ASIA

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ABSTRACT

The power vacuum created with the fall of USSR had made Central Asia the focal point for contestation among both the regional like Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India and External players for influence, power, hegemony racing to establish links via through roads, pipelines, air routes, alliances and what not. These great powers made central Asian region as a chessboard for outsmarting one another through cleverness and wit and at times adapting policies of appeasement. In other words, Central Asia has become a "zone of intense, complex interaction between local conditions and the larger world system. India being one of the contestants though small and later comer have found a significant place as for as its connections, policies and strategies vis-à-vis Central Asia is concerned. The paper is an attempt to analyze the place of India vis-à-vis other players of the region.

Keywords: Central Asia, great game, geo-politics, geo-economics, foreign policies, regional players, external players.

INTRODUCTION

The New Great Game (Ahrari and Beal, 1996) in the present context can be taken as a conceptualization of modern geopolitics going on in Central Asia and Caucuses region between the United States, and other NATO countries against Russia and the People's Republic of China with small powers like Turkey, India, Pakistan and Iran for "influence, power, hegemony over the region extending up to the Transcaucasia region (Armenia, Azerbaijan and Georgia). The origin of new great game can be traced to the old great game which can be attributed to the Lieutenant Arthur Connolly who was the sixth Bengal Native light Calvary of east India Company. It was introduced into mainstream thinking by the British novelist Rudyard Kipling in his novel Kim (Canfield and Rasuly-Palcze, 2010). Later on, in 1919, Mackinder summarized significance of the region in his theory as:

"Who rules East Europe commands the Heartland; (Pivot Area)

Who rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; (Europe and Asia)

Who rules the World-Island controls the world"

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The Heartland was than ruled by Russia lay at the centre of the world island, spreading over the area from Volga to Yangtze to the Himalayas up to the Arctic (Mackinder, 1996). The theory developed a different kind of thinking among the power holders of the time particularly the Russia and imperialist Britain. Both the imperialist made every effort to control the region for political and economic influence.

It was struggle for hegemony in Central Asia as Russians were pressing eastward into the region and the British India who were trying to secure their northwestern frontier which they thought significant from a strategic point of view (Canfield and Rasuly-Palcze, 2010). It was a struggle for political dominance, control and security, conducted by two Imperial powers over land and populations whose value lay in their location between the Russian and British empires (Edwards, 2003). Britain was willing to go to great lengths to retain control and it was with this aim that the British tried, unsuccessfully, to move in westwards and to gain control to the region that is modern day Afghanistan. Russian Too needed Afghanistan using it as platform for invading India and it access would give Russia access to warm waters ports on the shores of the Arabian Sea, enhancing Russia's trading skill. It would also enhance the war ability of Russia over the perceived threat of

China on western border. So, in order to stop the expansionist approach of Russian empire what British did launched Anglo-Afghan war of 1838 allowed the British to set up a puppet which proved short lived. In 'Myth and Reality in the Great Game' by Gerald Morgan reasoned that the perceived threat of a Russian invasion into the Indian subcontinent may have been present but the idea had always been farfetched. While the fall of the Russian Tsarist regime at the hands of

the Bolshevik revolution ended the Old Great Game, the New Game took shape with the fall of the Soviet Regime.

Under Soviet rule, "from Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent" and with its fall gave rise to the emergence of independent Central Asian Republics that collectively provided the playing field for the New Great Game.



Source: Mackinder, H. J. "The Geographical Pivot of History." *The Geographical Journal* 23, no. 4 (April 1904): 4435.

The power vacuum owing to the disintegration in early 1990s led all the players from both within the region as well as outside to fill this void (Akbar, 2012). These new republics constitute the modern core of the pivot area of Mackinder's thesis and are therefore pivotal in any geo-strategic analysis concerning the Heartland. Russia is, and historically has been, the regional hegemon of the Heartland (Scott and Alcenat, 2008). However, that influence is being contested by the United States (U.S), European Union, China and other small regional players like India, Pakistan Turkey. Ahmed Rashid, a Pakistani renowned journalist, an active writer and a strong authority on Central Asia has best summed up the contrast between the Old and New Great Game, and made apparent the very real existence of this new game he writes: "The Great Game is no fun anymore. The term "Great Game" was used by nineteenth-century British imperialists to describe the British-Russian struggle for

position on the chessboard of Afghanistan and Central Asia – a contest with a few players, mostly limited to intelligence forays and short wars fought on horseback with rifles, and with those living on the chessboard largely bystanders or victims. More than a century later, the game continues. But now, the number of players has exploded, those living on the chessboard have become involved, and the intensity of the violence and the threats it produces affect the entire globe (Rubin, 2013).

Geo-Strategic and Geo-Economic Significance of the Region: The New Great Game concept can be used to illustrate the contemporary use of geopolitics in this region. It is a geo-political rivalry that is going on for the influence of Central Asia. It is struggle for political dominance, ascendancy, security and energy. The payoffs of the new Great Game are more obvious and plentiful; monetary profit, security of energy supplies, national economic growth reinforcing state

independence, an Islamic cultural revival, enhanced politico-military position as well as other lesser benefits. Central Asia has been the battle ground is once more a key to the security of all Eurasia as Russia, geostrategically engaged in complex geopolitical maneuvers and enmeshed in geo-economic competition into its contiguous "Great Space" As oil become important for sustaining economy and have stable economic growth. As the struggle for Eurasian oil and Caspian petroleum is a multidimensional security, geopolitical and economic game. The general theme underlying this concept is one of competition, competition for influence, whether at political, economic or cultural levels (Edwards, 2003). U.S. oil firms dominate, controlling 75 percent of new oil fields with an investment of \$30 billion, representing 30–40 percent of foreign investments in Kazakhstan and Azerbaijan. Energy companies from the UK, France, Turkey, Iran, and Japan are also present. The Central Asian countries are benefiting from competition between the powers. They have maintained close relations with Moscow, since much of their oil and gas exports continue to transit via Russia (Godement, 2011).

The proven as well as unexplored energy reserves of Central Asia and the post-September scenario have again increased its significance in the world power struggle (Jaffe, 1998).ⁱ Kazakhstan ranked 6th in the world in terms of natural resource reserves endowed with oil, gas, uranium, zinc, tungsten and gold. Moreover, it has proven oil reserves of 30 billion barrels, highest in the region followed by Azerbaijan which has 7 billion barrels. Turkmenistan has the world's 4th largest gas reserves at 7.5 trillion cubic meters while Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan follow close with 2.41 trillion and 1.84 trillion cubic meters respectively. Thus, collectively the Caspian region contains about 46 per cent of the world gas resources. Kyrgyzstan has an abundance of water resources and the energy potential of its mountain rivers is estimated at 163 billion kilowatt-hours (bkwh) per year. Tajikistan is also rich in water resources about 65% of the total estimate of central Asia (Jonson, 2006). The implications of sharing a land border with two of the most powerful nations in the world are manifold. Not only does it provide avenues of trade and diplomatic depth for the Central Asian Republics, it provides an avenue for the current world hegemony. At the end of 2009 the proven oil reserves of Kazakhstan are 39.8 which makes 3.0% of the total and Turkmenistan having

74.2 thousand billion barrels which constitutes 5.6% of the total world share (BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2010). Kazakhstan having 1.82 trillion meters of gas which forms 1.0% of the total gas reserves and Turkmenistan 8.10 which is about 4.3% of the total world (BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2010).ⁱⁱ These untapped energy resources have dragged the world powers to seek their own interests. In 2009, Turkmenistan's proven gas reserves were estimated at a staggering 8.1 trillion cubic meters, fourth largest in the world after Russia, Iran, and Qatar. Not surprisingly, from the view point of Ashgabat, the country's capital, it invariably seems to be raining gas. Nonetheless, experts doubt that the landlocked, idiosyncratic Central Asian republic actually has enough blue gold to supply Russia (which absorbed 70% of Turkmenistan's supply before the pipeline to China opened), China, Western Europe and Iran, all at the same time.

This struggle for influence in the pipeline and oil consortia— famously the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) and Azerbaijan International Operating Company (AIOC)—is an integral part of the New Great Game hypothesis, with both companies and states involved (Edwards M., 2003). Chevron restructured the previously ill-conceived attempt to build the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) project into an oil company-controlled pipeline dedicated primarily to moving crude oil from Western oil company production in Kazakhstan to its own separate terminal on the Russian Black Sea coast. The 1,500-kilometer CPC Pipeline was completed in 2003 at a cost of \$2.6 billion. It has a current capacity of 450,000 barrels per day and an ultimate capacity of 1.35 million barrels per day, although Russia blocked the pipeline's expansion until recently (Chow and Hendrix, 2010). Energy sources are not the only reason for power struggle among different players but region has remained the hub of Islamic activities with famous cities of Bukhara and Samarkand.

The region has a strategic location lies at the crossroads of Asia, Europe, the Persian Gulf, the Middle East, and the Far East. It is also surrounded by some of the fastest growing economies in the world including China, Russia and India who are not only investing in the region but are competing for the leading role. The regions northern and eastern neighbors could be perceived as the emerging powers and may pose a threat to the supremacy of America (Roy and Kumar, 2007). These great powers made central Asian region as a chessboard

for outsmarting one another through cleverness and wit and at times adapting policies of appeasement (Jonson, 2006). In other words, Central Asia has become a “zone of intense, complex interaction between local conditions and the larger world system” (Kavalski, 2010). The reasons for contestation in central Asia are due to the absence of any single power capable of holding Central Asia and keeping other powers at distance and revival of interest in geopolitics as a viable framework for describing, explaining, and understanding the international affairs of Central Asia (Kavalski, 2010). Now, more than hundred years later, great empires once again position themselves to control the heart of the Eurasian landmass during the early 1990s. Today there are different actors and the rules of the new neocolonial game are far more complex and subtle than those of a century ago. The United States has taken over the leading role from the British with echoing slogans of new world order, end of history and end of ideology. Along with the ever-present Russians, new regional powers such as China, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan and India have entered the new Eurasian landmass and this geographical possession is important because of connecting traditional East/West and North/South trade routes.

What distinguishes such involvement of international actors in regional affairs is that they do not appear to be interested in imperial expansion for the control of territory, but in gaining access to the strategic resources of Central Asia (Kavalski, 2010). What is new in this new great game is the involvement of both international and regional players who are not fighting for the control of territory but access for resources to gain strategic position. In other words, the ‘new great game’ is about the creation of ‘niches of influence by neighboring countries (Kavalski, 2010). Actually the difference lies in the nature of interest and approach adapted by these players to gain their foothold in central Asia and caucuses. The nature of the game means that these players following the policies of coexist, cooperate, and compete at the different levels of their interactions in the region.

Since 9/11, the strategic influence of central Asia especially that of Tajikistan has increased following the attack on Afghanistan in 2001 by the America led NATO forces. The geopolitical importance of Tajikistan invited the attention both international and regional powers who are in competition with one another in the guise of

a ‘New Great Game’ and these players sometimes cooperate-to the benefit of Tajikistan and at times putting the interests of rival players at distance (Jonson, 2006). The fall of USSR had weakened the state grip over the different elements of state and could possibly be used as fertile ground for extremism and fundamentalism. The influence of Turkey, Saudi Arabia and Iran could create pan-Islamic groups in Central Asia (Khalid, 2007). IMU under the international pressure changed its name to the Islamic Party of Turkestan, leading to speculation that it had broadened its goals to include all of Central Asia on a pan-Islamic basis.

According to the International Energy Agency, China's overall oil needs will rise to 11.3 million barrels per day by 2015. As Beijing's 20% of oil is flowing from the Strait of Hormuz and Malacca which is, after all, the only entryway to the Persian Gulf and through it now flow roughly China's oil imports with Iran to the north and Oman to the south (Escobar, 2010). China fears that constant presence of U.S. aircraft-carrier battle groups on station may cause some obstruction in the supply of oil. Another potential bottleneck is the presence of U.S. navy around the Strait of Malacca through which 80% of China's oil imports as both straits could quickly be closed or controlled by the U.S. Navy. Hence, China's increasing emphasis on developing a land-based Central Asian energy strategy could be summed up as: Bye-bye, Hormuz! Bye-bye, Malacca! And a hearty welcome to a pipeline-driven new Silk Road from the Caspian Sea to China's far west in Xinjiang. instead of spending more than a trillion dollars on an illegal war in Iraq or setting up military bases all over the greater Middle East and Central Asia, China used its state oil companies to get some of the energy it needed simply by bidding for it in a perfectly legal Iraqi oil auction.

The Caspian region is perceived as a vital interest and a strategic sector for the U.S. because of two major elements; energy and security. The former is driven from the U.S. policy to diversify its energy sources in order to decrease its dependence from Middle East oil and the former one related to its policy of “war on terrorism” in Afghanistan. “Democratization” is a political tool that helps U.S. intervention to political and economic affairs of the weak region states easily in order to preserve its above-mentioned primary interests. According to the estimation of European Commission by 2030, because of growing energy demand and declining domestic production, Europe will rely on imports for

two-thirds of its energy needs. Dependence on imported oil will remain extremely high, reaching 94 percent in 2030. Dependence on imported gas will rise to 84 percent in 2030, and imports of solid fuels are projected to reach 59 percent in 2030. Energy Secretary of the US, Bill Richardson notes, "The Caspian region will hopefully save us from total dependence on Middle East oil" It possesses a high amount of proven and possible energy resources. Estimation is that proven oil is between 10 and 32 billion barrels with 233 billion barrel possible oil reserves coming to the gas, it is estimated in 243-248 trillion cubic feet proven and 293 trillion cubic feet possible gas (Abilov, 2012), The Caspian states view multiple pipelines as key to their efforts to ensure that no regional power can exercise strategic control over energy routes and their broader economic and political ties to western, Mediterranean, and Asian partners.

The Americans have also favored the establishment of a Transcaspian link of Kazakhstan's giant offshore Kashagan field into the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline. Russia struggles to get Tajikistan involved the custom union (Canfield, 2011). Dick Cheney emphasized during his speech to oil industrialists in Washington, D.C. in 1998, "I cannot think of a time when we have had region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian (Kleveman, 2003). At times it is being projected as new Middle East and geographically, the Caspian region consists of the five littoral states: Azerbaijan, Iran, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan. With the intensification of energy, security, and economic interests of the big powers the Caspian region has transformed to be the core of the 'New Great Game'. American and other western companies have the greater resource to invest in Central Asia as they are backed by military and other financial leverage of the U.S. and at the same time China cannot compete with Russia who is rich from infrastructure point of view but financially weak which provides china an upper edge in central and Caucasus region.

India's approach to the New Great Game: For quite a long period of time India's Central Asian policy caught in the dilemmas of conceptual tensions, strategic uncertainty, and geopolitical constraints (Kavalski, 2010). The collapse of the bipolar world and the radical transformations in the former Soviet Union has therefore 'shaken the basic foundations and framework of India's foreign policy. Consequently, for the better part of the 1990s, the Indian foreign policy elites seemed

uncertain how to position their country's external relations. This setting reveals New Delhi's problems of coming to terms with the turbulence of post-Cold War order. It also displays the deepening sense of 'incoherence and indistinctiveness of India's foreign policy due to the absence of a well-defined and well-articulated policy framework. New Delhi's had to confront several predicaments: a) on policy level, India had to formulate a new international strategy in the absence of its erstwhile ally—the USSR. This was not only the outcome of India's failure to engage Central Asia more convincingly during the "post-Cold War Blues" but also of the formulation of New Delhi's external relations in reaction to Pakistan's foreign policy strategies. In "Indian perceptions", therefore, Pakistan has "vested interests" in pursuing a "quest for strategic depth vis-à-vis India in Central Asia." For India Afghanistan is always tied with Pakistan's political and economic aims in Central Asia. New Delhi had interpreted Afghan jihad as a strategic weapon by Pakistan to establish political ties with central Asia. Indian foreign policy makers also opposed the power vacuum theory and stated that Central Asian states are capable to safeguard their independence and national interest. Despite the "historical belonging" to India's "strategic neighborhood", New Delhi was "not giving sufficient attention to Central Asia" (Kavalski, 2010). It simply indicates the New Delhi's unwillingness to venture out of the cage of Cold War politics. The assertion is that the 'philosophy (of Pakistan's interactions with the region) appears to have always focused on a prescriptive approach as to what should happen in or to the Central Asian states within the overall backdrop of deep antagonism against India'. India foreign policy dilemma during the early phase of post-cold war period is also gets depicted by the metaphor used by one of the economist to depict the picture of India's foreign during this period, "that India is like tiger in the cage and ones the tiger will come out it will show us its strength. However, the growing international competition for establishing spheres of influence in Central Asia has caused a serious concern for India. New Delhi realized that it can no longer remain an indifferent onlooker and watch the blatant attempts by outside powers to change the geopolitical balance in Central Asia, which is fraught with grave consequences for the strategic balance in South and West Asia (Kavalski,2010). The veteran political commentator and scholar DavendraKaushikhas

remarked that 'the public mind in India has been in general clear about (the) high Indian stakes in Central Asia on account of our age-old vital cultural and economic interests in the region and concern for security also motivated our policies vis-à-vis Central Asia (Kavalski, 2010). Initially India's engagements in Central Asia are clearly guided by 'the ancient tradition of the Great Silk Route' which was known for 'its spirit of religious tolerance and cultural pluralism rather than the competitive spirit of the "great game" (Kavalski, 2010). Most commentators maintain that India's relations with Central Asia are a function of the long historical experience that they share. Nevertheless, it should be remembered that such a discursive construction was made possible by the dissolution of the Soviet Union, which forced upon New Delhi the realization that Central Asia is simultaneously (i) a distinct region in global life; (ii) a region, which is in India's immediate vicinity; and (iii) a region, whose patterns of relations have an impact on and are impacted by developments in South Asia. In particular, it points out the idiosyncrasies of New Delhi's bilateral relationship with Tajikistan, which forms a crucial aspect in the assertiveness of the 'Look North' policy. Subsequently, the twin objectives were framed to serve the purpose of her foreign policy (i) maintaining 'the democratic and secular ethos' of the region, because it 'binds India and Central Asia together'. Consequently, India's strategic objective in the region is to 'work for the rise and consolidation of democratic and secular polities in Central Asia, because the spill-over of the rise of religious extremism may threaten India's own internal stability and security'. (ii) Indeed, the key Indian objectives are to deny Pakistan and China, its key rivals and threats, opportunities to increase their strategic capability by gaining predominant influence in Central Asia or by threatening India's assets there. Indian analysts have long worried that Pakistan, if successful in Central Asia, could organize those forces for a campaign to foment unrest and separatism in India. India's Look North policy with Central Asia in focus therefore extended a non-Pakistani alternative to the region (Scott, 2011). New Delhi first analyzed its relation to the new states through the prism of its conflict with Pakistan: it has sought to halt Islamabad and to prevent Central Asia from offering Pakistan the famous "strategic depth "India's Look-North to Central Asia have come to stress the need for a 'proactive and meaningful policy

that accords top priority to the region. India's primary concerns in Central Asia are energy security, to curb the influence of Pakistan, emerge as a significant player to bargain other powers with equal footing.

Unlike the Look East policy, the Look North approach to Central Asia has remained mostly a discursive platform for Indian pundits and commentators rather than an actual government strategy (Scott, 2011). The understanding of Central Asia simultaneously as a geographic region and an embodiment of the challenges facing New Delhi's external agency is central to the interpretation of its 'Look North' policy. The motive of Look North policy is a balancing factor reflects New Delhi's post-Cold War encounter of Russia, China, and the West in the region.

- the end of its post-Cold War ambiguity;
- the adoption of a more assertive foreign policy stance; and
- a discursive break with the imperatives of post-Independence

The India's nuclear tests of 1998 have also entrusted an assertive role in her foreign policy stance. It also ended the long ambiguity as an actor in international relations and India's foreign approaches of conciliatory and non-committal attitude have marked with departures. This has forced India to reconfigure the geographical, economic, cultural, and geopolitical moves on which we base our policies. Witnessing strategies of competition and cooperation adopting by China and other regional powers, Indian policy makers gave new directions to her Central Asian policy. Increasing trend of terrorism in the form of Taliban and other Central Asian militant organizations invoked India's interest in the region. As Indian strategists are of the view that the spillover effect of these militant organizations over Indian occupied Kashmir could create trouble for India. The increasing bouts of terrorism compelled India to take stand against the same for this reasons India went very close to Tajikistan from time to time and opening her Ayne Air base is witness to this fact. In this respect, it is Tajikistan that—to all intents and purposes—has become the centerpiece of New Delhi's strategic bilateralism in Central Asia. Strategically speaking, however, it is the shared perception of external threats that appears to motivate India's bilateral relations with Tajikistan.

India's gaining of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) observer status in 2005 has been interpreted by some commentators as an indication of India's ability to

'dilute Chinese and Russian influence' in Central Asia. On the one hand, Russian support for India's inclusion as an observer in the SCO (and seemingly currently for India's full membership confirms the perception that the two countries have a shared interest in the stability of Central Asia. This then underpins the awareness that 'Russia would like India to become a big player in the region as a balancing factor for both the American and Chinese presence. It lets Moscow shift some of its burdens in Central Asia to friendly India and balance China's well-known aspirations. Obviously, this vision would collapse if Central Asia down to Kashmir were engulfed in violence and hostility to India. Then sustaining India's economic development and internal security becomes much more problematic. Even some foreign policy observers noted that the geographical parameters of South Asia have expanded to include Central Asia and obviously this raised the importance of India's interests in Central Asia. New Delhi's is making efforts to reduce the influence of Turkey and Iran not from the economic point of view but not to turn the region into *Persianization* or *Turification*. The purpose is not to let them out from the region but to minimize the influence of *Wahabism* in the region (Roy and Kumar, 2007).

The engagements adopted by India in Central Asia emphasize the need for the development of a "proactive and meaningful policy that accords top priority to the region" In particular "Look North" policy would enable India "to formulate proactive strategies, to minimize potential threats, exploit opportunities and influence the final outcome of the transition" (Kavalski, 2010). The Look North Policy like south east Asian policy is intended to demonstrate India's ability to 'break out of the claustrophobic confines of South Asia'. Thus, the narrative exploitation of the legacies of the past by Indian foreign policy elites discloses a strategy that aims 'to remind the new generation in Central Asia that India is not new to them but rather a very old friend'. Indian academia suggested that we should adopt or forge a collective security arrangement and a collective project for the development of all the countries of the region regardless of their policy slants in favor of this or that great power" (Kavalski, 2010).

With regard to China the ongoing border dispute as well as the bitter memory of the 1962 war, the issue of Tibet, as well as China's partnership with Pakistan and its economic and military support for Myanmar are just

a few of the dilemmas that frame New Delhi's relations with Beijing. It is therefore not surprising that the encounter of China in Central Asia has produced a diverse set of perspectives within the narratives of the 'Look North' policy. These perceptions identify China simultaneously as a *partner*, a *threat*, and a *model* in Central Asia. Although not necessarily complimentary, all three representations are elicited by the discourses of the 'Look North' policy.

As I.K. Gujral, the former Prime Minister, has indicated, India's external relations are increasingly constrained by 'an *encircling arch of anxiety* (which) stretches all the way from the Middle East to South Asia *via Central Asia*' The then Prime Minister of India P.V. Narasimha Rao made it clear in his visit to Turkmenistan in 2005 that "for India", Central Asia is an area "of high priority, where we aim to stay engaged far into the future. We are an independent partner with no selfish motives. We only desire honest and open friendship and to promote stability and cooperation without causing harm to any third country" (Kavalski, 2010). In this respect, it is Tajikistan that — to all intents and purposes — has become the poster child of New Delhi's bilateralism in Central Asia. The construction of Tajikistan as India's "gateway to Central Asia concomitantly made possible connect central policy. Central Asia is an increasingly important factor in India's overall foreign policy because it increasingly looks to play a major role across Asia.

The regions geostrategic significance is clear from India's principal military engagements with Tajikistan, which is India's closest neighbor in Central Asia. Like India, Tajikistan has had important ties to the Northern Alliance in Afghanistan, the group whose imminent arrival in Kabul in 2001 led to the fall of the Taliban government. India rebuilt and refurbished an air base at Ayni, outside the Tajik capital of Dushanbe. India was and is able to carefully watch the region's religious fundamentalist groups, primarily the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan ("India's 'Look West' Policy: Why Central Asia Matters", 2007). India's security to a large extent is closely linked and connected with the peaceful Central Asia as Afghanistan is often being used a ground for drug trafficking and extremism, proliferation of small arms., Central Asia's instability could be used by these extremists as a safe ground for their activities. India's look-west policy even though facing some geographical obstacles is gaining strength through the expansion of SAARC and other trade related dialogues with the

region. At this juncture, the concept of a Greater Central Asia offers opportunities to connect India with Central Asia, particularly in the transport and trade sectors. On his part, Mr. Ansari emphasized India's commitment to the strategic partnership with Tajikistan. Cooperation on security issues as well as in countering cross-border terrorism is of prime importance. "Both the President and I agree that nations in the region, as well as the international community, should strengthen Afghanistan's capacity to maintain peace, stability and prosperity of the Afghan people. We also discussed the international political situation and agreed to strengthen our cooperation in multilateral organizations," ("India, Tajikistan discuss cooperation in countering cross-border terrorism", 2013) he said in a statement. He termed his meeting with the Tajik President "very productive." It was followed by "very constructive" delegation-level talks. Mr. Ansari apprised the Tajik President of India's discussing Cooperation in drive to expand its relationship with the countries of Central Asia through a "Connect Central Asia Policy." As part of this policy, India had begun the process of setting up a Central Asia e-Network, with its hub in New Delhi and spokes in the five Central Asian capitals. Plans were also under way to establish a Central Asian University. Tajikistan President Emomali Rahmon, in his statement after his talks here with Vice-President Hamid Ansari on the second day of his visit, stressed the need for a joint consultative effort before the withdrawal of NATO forces from Afghanistan next year (Kumar, 2013) Regional stability was of prime concern for his country, he said. He urged India to work for the economic rehabilitation of Afghanistan's people (Kumar, 2013).

The major theme of the Nirmala Joshi's edited book "Reconnecting India and Central Asia: Emerging Security and Economic Dimensions" is the stress on the role and presence of India in this pivot area i.e. Central Asia. The author also believes that India is destined to become a major player than Russia, China or U.S. (Joshi, 2010). India's soft power is gaining its presence in the region as we are witnessing exchange of high level visits of both the sides. President Nursultan Nazerbayev of Kazakhstan was the guest of honor at the republic day of 2009. similarly India's President Pratibha Pratil visit as guest of honor at Tajikistan's national day, she also attended an Indian-Tajik Business Forum. Recently India has airlifted a medical hospital to Tajikistan notch up economic and security cooperation with Tajik leaders.

Tajikistan's strategic significance increased on account of NATO withdrawal in 2014 as the country shares borders with Pakistan, China, and Kyrgyzstan. New Delhi invested \$70 million between 2002 and 2010 to renovate the Ayni airbase in the Central Asian state, but Zarifi ruled out in 2011 the possibility of Indian forces at the airbase ("India airlifts military hospital to tajkistan", 2013).

Russia's negative perception of increasing Chinese role could possibly prove helpful for India in the region. American also shares the same views about the role of Iran and china in the region. This negative attitude could plead India's case in the region and India is at better leverage taking the relations of major players into account. Trilateral co-operation of these players possibly stop the region from drug trafficking and may engage in the areas of energy exploration. To forward our economic and security relations India and Kazakhstan had signed a Declaration of Strategic Partnership in 2009. India's security parameters had broadened considerably, transcending its traditional South Asia-centric concerns. Its stakes in the extended neighborhood have risen considerably. This gave India's —Look Central Asia policy a fresh impetus.

The Central Asian states therefore welcome India's heightened involvement in the region. In their perception, given India's rising stature particularly in its evolving strategic ties with the U.S., - it (India) could play the role of a balancer in Central Asia. India though as a late comer enjoys a good position vis-à-vis Central Asia is concerned. She can make good use of her relations with both Russia and U.S. Economic cooperation between the EU and Central Asia was given a boost in 2010 when Kazakhstan was awarded the rotating presidency of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). India is looking forward to increase its involvement in the region under its strategy of "going north", which in 2010 saw it begin development on the TAPI pipeline along with Turkmenistan, Pakistan, and Afghanistan (Godeman, 2011). To prevent the region from turning into Islamic belt not in the sense that Islam as religion is antithetical to India's interests in Central Asia. Actually the threat lies when the same is interpreted in political terms. India could also prevent narco-terrorism otherwise the whole northern borders of it could catch the plague of it. This security dimension has driven Indian investment in

Afghanistan and military cooperation with Tajikistan (Scott, M, 2007).

Another strategic move India had adopted to get enter into Central Asia is the development of Chabahar port. There is a clear strategic convergence between India and Iran on promoting stability in Central Asia and managing great power relationships in the region. Moreover, Iran remains India's only corridor to the Central Asian republics, given India's adversarial relations with Pakistan. In return for Iran's provision to India of the transit facilities to Central Asia, India will be a great help in improving Iran's transportation facilities, like ports and railways. In this regard, the North-South International Transportation Corridor Agreement signed in September 2000 by India, Iran, and Russia and the Agreement on International Transit of Goods between India, Iran, and Turkmenistan signed in 1997 hold special promise. These agreements go a long way in cutting time and costs in the transit of goods, thereby giving a boost to India's trade with Iran and other Central Asian nations (Pant, 2008). India's engagements are also being stimulating for feeding up her huge emerging economy. Now India openly started to contest for regions resources particularly for energy and other oil resources of Caspian Sea. India is very much interested in importing gas from Turkmenistan via a potential Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline. India is also looking to build and made substantial contributions to the trans-Afghan roadway and railroad. India's proposed North-South trade corridorⁱⁱⁱ which if it is completed would build road linkages from the Iranian port of Chabahar through Afghanistan into Tajikistan ("India's 'Look West' Policy: Why Central Asia matters", 2007). A second subset of this cultural aspect of the New Great Game was fought by Pakistan and India with both vying for influence in Central Asia as part of an extension of their own strategic rivalries.

Central Asia also provides tremendous advantages with her huge energy resources. In response to this India has shown interest for the construction of its two pipelines TAPI and IPI. TAPI stands for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline, stopped due to Afghan problem. IPI however, is the Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline, also known as the "peace pipeline." The US supports Turkmenistan- Afghanistan-Pakistan (TAP) gas pipeline as a tool to decrease Chinese and Russian monopoly on transportation route of the Caspian region

(Abivov, 2012).The U.S. is especially supportive of the Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline, which is an attempt to take Turkmen gas into India via Afghanistan and Pakistan. This is a very high-level priority in Washington. Turkmen leaders are also very supportive of the project, since it will allow them to hedge their gas market, which at the moment is dependent on China. Afghans will of course collect transit fees from this pipeline (Colley, 2012).Whether it's IP, IPI or IPC, Gwadar will be a key node. If, under pressure from Washington, which treats Tehran like the plague, India is forced to pull out of the project, China already has made it clear that it wants in. The Chinese would then build a Pipelineistan link from Gwadar along the Karakorum highway in Pakistan to China via the Khunjerab Pass - another overland corridor that would prove immune to US interference. It would have the added benefit of radically cutting down the 20,000-kilometer tanker route around the southern rim of Asia (Escobar, 2010)Arguably, for the Indians it would be a strategically sound move to align with IPI, trumping a deep suspicion that the Chinese will move to outflank them in the search for foreign energy with a "string of pearls" strategy. The setting up of a series of "home ports" along its key oil supply routes from Pakistan to Myanmar will put India under serious trouble.

Alexander Cooley also believes new great game favors contemporary Central Asian governments in various ways. The institution of sovereignty in an age of globalization and growing external rivalry provides them great bargain power. They can get access to international aid flows and investments and use membership within organizations and new regional organizations to bolster their political authority (Colley, 2012). Each maintains relations with Russia (some more strained than others), with China, with the West (through the European Union and United States) and with "strong second tiered members" like Turkey, India, or South Korea. As for Washington, it still believes that if TAPI is built, it will help keep India from fully breaking the U.S.-enforced embargo on Iran. Energy-starved Pakistan obviously prefers its "all-weather" ally China, which might commit it to building all sorts of energy infrastructure within that flood-devastated country. In a nutshell, if the unprecedented energy cooperation between Iran, Pakistan, and China goes forward, it will signal a major defeat for Washington in the new Great Game in Eurasia, with enormous geopolitical and geo-

economic repercussions.

CONCLUSION

The engagements adopted by India in Central Asia emphasize the need for the development of a "proactive and meaningful policy that accords top priority to the region. In particular "Look North" policy would enable India "to formulate proactive strategies, to minimize potential threats, exploit opportunities and influence the final outcome of the transition" "India's vision of Central Asia or the "Heart of Asia Process" as it is being called is of trade, transit, energy and communication routes criss-crossing and knitting the entire region from Turkey to India and between Eurasia and the Arabian Sea, with Afghanistan at its heart" (Dikshit, 2013). India's extended neighborhood policy first engaged the Southeast Asian nations under the "Look-East Policy" framework and now the Central Asian Republics under the policy framework of "Connect Central Asia Policy" (CCAP). The payoffs of the new Great Game are more obvious and plentiful; monetary profit, security of energy supplies, national economic growth reinforcing state independence, enhanced politico-military position as well as other lesser benefits. Central Asia has been the battle ground is once more a key to the security of all Eurasia as Russia, geostrategically engaged in complex geopolitical maneuvers and enmeshed in geo-economic competition into its contiguous.

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ⁱ The hydrocarbon reserves of the region are significant. Proven oil reserves are pegged at between 15 billion to 31 billion barrels, about 2.7% of total world proven oil reserves. Proven natural gas reserves of 230 to 360 trillion cubic feet represent about 7% of total world proven gas reserves. Future exploration may confirm that the region potentially holds between 60 billion to 140 billion barrels of oil. However, this figure remains speculative and should not be compared to the 269 billion barrels of proven oil reserves already discovered in Saudi Arabia (Jaffe, 1998: 2)

ⁱⁱ Kazakhstan has substantial oil; Turkmenistan has gas; Uzbekistan has more modest hydrocarbon resources; and Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have surplus hydropower (“India’s ‘Look West’ Policy: Why Central Asia Matters,” 2007: 1).

ⁱⁱⁱ A key program that connects Russia, Iran, India, and Central Asian states like Kazakhstan is the North–South trade corridor that originates in Russia, provides a corridor for trade, including energy, through Central Asia and then proceeds through Iran to India.