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### Pakistan and Central Asian Relations in the Context of Global Politics

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#### ABSTRACT

Central Asia and South-West Asia have become more important in world politics in recent years, especially when the Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan and after it left at the start of the US-Afghan war. In other words, the closing of the twentieth century and the beginning of the twenty-first century have developed multifaceted political environments in the region, which have involved Pakistan as well. Central Asia is the second largest energy reservoir of oil, gas, and hydrocarbons after the Persian Gulf and is the core region of the Asian continent, whereas Pakistan is located at the convergence of South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia and provides the shortest access to warm water seas for all landlocked Central Asian states. Pakistan also acts as a junction of multiple corridors of economic cooperation between these three regions in the fields of energy, trade, transportation, and tourism. Pakistan will become an economic centre and spur interregional economic activity as a result of the communication and commercial links that connect South Asia, Central Asia, and West Asia. Most of the research available on Central Asia and Pakistan is focused either on the Great Game and internal instability of Central Asian states or on the historical linkage and cultural association of Pakistan with Central Asia, with a superficial discussion on regional trade between them. No research has been done on the geopolitical and economic position of Pakistan in Central Asia, and the instability in Afghanistan is also affecting the associations between Pakistan and Central Asian States. In this research paper, the emphasis has been laid on why geostrategic and economic relations between Pakistan and Central Asian states are significant. Certain other questions have also been answered, like: what is the geopolitical significance of Pakistan and the CARs in world politics? What are the divergent interests of local and international powers in Central Asia? And how has the conflict of interests among these actors hampered the economic development of Pakistan and the CARs? Descriptive and analytical research methodologies are used to probe into the phenomenon of global politics.

**Keywords:** Central Asian States, Geo-political Importance, Regional Actors, Global Actors.

#### INTRODUCTION

Pakistan and Central Asia have the heritage of the world's earliest civilization. The cultural, political, and economic relations between Pakistan and Central Asia can be traced back to prehistoric times at the end of the 3rd and beginning of the 2nd millennium B.C. Central Asian governments also acknowledge the importance of Pakistan, as it provides an outlet for their landlocked economies and a southern transit route. It has preference over other transit routes because Pakistan has three major seaports along the Arabian Sea: Karachi port, Qasim port, and Gwadar port. The Gwadar port provides industrial facilities for more than twenty countries and

can receive oil tankers with a capacity of 200,000 tons (Grare, 2006: 4).

After independence in 1991, Central Asian republics realized the importance of re-establishing economic, cultural, and political links with Pakistan, and they signed the charter of the ECO on November 28, 1992. To integrate Central Asia with South Asia (Pakistan) in the twenty-first century, the development of roads, railway tracks, and pipelines is essential. Pakistan is at a crossroads and could play a big part in the economic growth and well-being of Central Asia and South Asia.

The construction of connecting routes with Afghanistan, like Gwadar, would reduce the distance of Pakistan-

Central Asia traffic by about 500 km. The road and railway developments will also convert Pakistan into an economic hub for inter-regional economic activity. Four new road links are under construction between Pakistan and China through the Khunjerab Pass, which would bring the total number of Pak-China Road links to eight, and Pakistan and China are also upgrading the Karakorum Highway (KKH). Pakistan has membership in ECO and SAARC, and its association with SCO has given it a unique position in regional cooperation. Transportation and trade links between Central Asia and Pakistan will bring prosperity and economic stability to both regions, as will having multiple points of contact with the rest of the world.

Pakistan and the Central Asian Republic stopped talking to each other after the Soviet Union was made. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of five Muslim Central Asian states—Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Tajikistan—have reopened a chapter of the century-old relations between the two regions of South Asia. Pakistan is excited about its foreign policy in the Central Asian Republics because of how important the new central Asian states are.

The geopolitical location of Pakistan makes it an ideal site for Central Asia (CA), as it links the region with the rest of the world. Because Islam is the dominant religion in both countries, Pakistan and California have a long history of brotherly interaction. Since the arrival of Muslim invaders on the Indian subcontinent, a recipient of the Muslim civilization emerging from Central Asia, Pakistan has been heavily influenced by CAR society. Pakistan has remained keen to revise its historical ties with California on the basis of these religious and cultural values. There had been trade links between South and Central Asia, as well as with their Muslim neighbours, so it was also a revival of historic economic relations between them. Moreover, the military rulers of Pakistan have also realized the "strategic depth" of Central Asia. It also links the CARs with the world market by providing the shortest sea route. In return, Pakistan can be equally benefited by the CARs' natural energy resources.

However, the problem is that these opportunities for both regions are hindered by continued violent political instability and chaos in Afghanistan. This condition has created hindrances in direct access and communication links between Pakistan and CARs. More than anything, the presence of local and international competitors in Central Asia has aggravated the affairs of the region. Due to the US

war on terrorism, Central Asia has become important not only for Pakistan but also for other regional and international actors. The CARs have been unable to utilize their large reserves of untapped natural resources (oil and gas) and hydrocarbons (diamonds) due to a lack of technology and a weak economy. This shortcoming has caused the regional and world powers—Russia, China, the USA, and India—to interfere in Central Asia. Pakistan provides the shortest route for the export of oil and gas resources from Central Asia to Europe, Far East Asia, and Pacific Asia. Thus, a race has started between regional and global powers to control the route from the CARs to Pakistan and onward to the Arabian Sea. The main cause of instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan (Baluchistan and Karachi) is because these areas provide the main transit route for natural reserves in CA, and the regional and international forces are trying to acquire their own benefits (through the transportation of oil and gas by their own companies), which in turn has affected the relations between Pakistan and the Central Asian Republics. The regional instability is because of the presence of US forces and NATO in Central Asia, and a competition among the international actors (the USA) and regional actors (Russia, China, and India) has been initiated.

### **Geopolitical Position of Pakistan**

The geography, demography, economics, and strategic possibilities of a state have a vital role in establishing its relations with the world. Since ancient times, the geography of Pakistan and Central Asia has been a big part of how these two places get along with each other. Geography has made it possible for Central Asia and Pakistan to trade, find their way, and share cultural and political ideas.

Geographically, Pakistan is situated in South Asia and is surrounded by Iran in the west, Afghanistan in the north-west, China in the north-east, India on the east, and the Arabian Sea on the south. The Persian Gulf is an important part of the world's geography because it has a lot of oil. Pakistan has good relationships with countries in the Middle East and is an important link in the chain of Muslim countries. Pakistan is the only Muslim nuclear state. It also links China to the Middle East and reduces Indian dominance in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean. Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics are landlocked countries that are very far from coastal areas. To have access to the sea, these countries must pass through Pakistan. Khyber Pass connects Pakistan and

Afghanistan, and Khunjrab Pass links Pakistan and China. Iran and Pakistan share a border at Koh-i-Taftan. The border between Pakistan and China is 523 kilometers long, and the Chinese territories of Sinkiang and Tibet share a border with Kashmir. Pakistan has a 2,912-kilometer border with India, as well as a 2,430-kilometer border with Afghanistan and a 909-kilometer border with Iran. The coastline of Pakistan is 1,466 km long. Pakistan has the shortest route to Central Asia at 2600 kilometers, as opposed to Iran at 4500 kilometers and Turkey at 5000 kilometers.

Geographically, through the seaports of Karachi, Port Qasim, and Gwadar, Pakistan offers a trading route to the Central Asian area (Chohan & Chandio, 2021). The geopolitics of Central Asia have shifted because of the formation of independent Central Asian countries, which has boosted Pakistan's significance for US policymakers. Pakistan serves as a link between the key parts of the Asian continent. It houses a wealth of Indus Valley Civilization history and served as a crucial Silk Road connection during the Middle Ages. From ancient times to the present, Pakistan has continued to be a major commerce route where people and products were transported, as well as a route used by great conquerors.

### **Geostrategic Importance of Central Asia**

Central Asia, also called Transoxiana or Shredine Asia in Russian, was a place with nomads and settled people, barbarism and civilization, imperialism, and communism, and for a long time, it was not important. But its geostrategic, political, and economic importance has never been ignored. The only time this happened was when Russia ruled the area for 74 years and kept it hidden behind the iron curtain. Its importance is evident from the fact that it shares more borders than any other region in the world, as it is surrounded by Russia, China, Afghanistan, Turkey, Iran, East Europe, the Middle East, and Pakistan.

From ancient times until the fall of the Soviet Union, it was the center of global civilization and trade. Historically, central Asia has provided a corridor for invaders to travel towards South Asia. The region has been raided by Alexander the Great, the Greeks, Turks, Mongols, Persians, and Arabs who came from China to Europe with threats and cultural messages, creating a political crisis thousands of miles away. Furthermore, the region also influenced world history by facilitating the passage of numerous foreigners and large armies like the

Arians, Alexander the Great, Scythians, Tatars, Turks, Mongols, and Mughal tamer lame (Yunus & Parmer, 2003: 7). After the Russian conquest of Central Asia, the region remained for 74 years under the rule of the Soviet Union. However, with the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, the Central Asia region regained its importance, and a new dimension has been created for the tactical situation in south and west Asia and in the rest of the world as well. "He who rules the heartland, rules Asia," said Sir Helford Mackinder of Central Asia's geostrategic importance. "He who rules Asia, rules the world." He has described this region as critical to global power, with control of it being a key to global influence and dominance. He has said that it is protected by the polar ice caps, deserts, mountain ranges, and dry regions, making it the largest natural fortress on the planet. It is the world's biggest geographical region on the planet, and whoever controls it has incredible power since they are not reliant on maritime power (Cohen, 1973: 46).

For Central Asia, the fall of the USSR not only brought a wave of economic, political, and social disaster but also new prospects, including new friends and alliances. Relations with the new nations are desired by the US, Turkey, Iran, India, Pakistan, China, and even Russia. Since 1991, Central Asia has taken on a new geopolitical structure and attracted ongoing interest (Banuazizi & Weiner, 1994: 19–20). Eurasia's center, Central Asia, has great powers as its neighbors, like China to the east, Russia to the north and west, Iran and Afghanistan to the south, the Hindu Kush and Pamir Mountain ranges in the south, and the Tien Shan Mountains in the east.

### **RELATIONS BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA**

#### **Historical Perspective**

The history of ties between Pakistan and Central Asia dates to the second and third centuries BC and continues into the eighteenth century. It begins with the Indus Civilization, which now includes Pakistan. The inhabitants of Pakistan and Central Asia have undergone a continuous process of political, cultural, economic, and religious relations. The Central Asian and West Asian nomads, including the Aryans, invaded South Asia to share or steal its resources. The mountainous barrier to the north restricted entry into the subcontinent to the relatively flat west. Centuries later, the more adventurous and despairing rulers from Central Asia

crossed the geographical barriers and established their rule in South Asia. Geographical features played a decisive role in the evolution of the subcontinent's economic and political history. The Aryans had entered South Asia from the north-west (Central Asia) (Yunus & Parmer, 2003: 8).

In the second and third centuries BC, the Scythians, who were nomads in Central Asia, crossed the Pamir from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan into Gilgit and Taxila. This started the political relationship between the two countries. These nomads reached up to modern Sindh, and the tribe's king Maues established his court in Taxila. The next empire was the "Kushan Empire," spreading from the Caspian Sea to the Bay of Bengal and from the Aral Sea to the Arabian Sea (Hutton, 2005: 34–37). During the winter, their capital was Purushpura, now known as Peshawar. The "Achaemenian Empire," which ruled over Central Asia and the Indus Valley, came to an end. The Greek forces of Alexander the Great defeated them. Alexander was moved back from Central Asia through Baluchistan after conquering Central Asia and the Indus Valley. The Greek soldiers who left Central Asia established a new state, "Bactria," which now includes Afghanistan, between the Pamir and Hisar mountain ranges.

In the fifth century AD, the Hindu-Turks formed the Hunnish Empire in the present-day land of Pakistan. The new land tenure system was established, and confederate tribes were granted feudal rights, which later evolved into the Rajput and Pushtoon tribes of Pakistan and Afghanistan, which also followed it. In the northern areas of Pakistan, Turkish rule was established in Gilgit, Hunza, and Nagir. In the frontier province and Punjab, the "Turki Shahi" dynasty ruled from Kabul and modern Hunds on the Indus. They related Samarkand, Tashkent, and Penchkant directly with Gilgit and Chatral. The Samanids, Seljuks, and Karakhittais Turkish people ruled Central Asia for two centuries, and Mahmud of Ghazni and Mahmud Ghori, who were their offshoots, ruled the Indus people. The Delhi Sultans united the inhabitants of Central Asia and South Asia and created a bond of friendship with the southern people (Hunter, 2005: 272-273). Their last Mongol ruler was Timor Lang, whose empire also included present-day Pakistani areas. These political links began to diminish due to the weak successor of Timor and the conquest of Central Asian Muslim states by Russia in the eighteenth century. It depends on two states, while Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, because of the steep terrain on the Chinese border, must

1918, after the communist revolution, Central Asia went behind the iron curtain, and the Indian subcontinent was to be ruled by the British Empire (Dani, 1996: 12), so the link between Pakistan and Central Asia was broken. Thus, politically, Central Asia and Pakistan were ruled by the same rulers, and both have had past political relations. The relations between Pakistan and the CARs are established based on terrestrial proximity, a shared past, religion, values, and customs. After the independence of Pakistan and the CARs, the primary concern for Pakistan and these states is security and economic development. The economies of Pakistan and the CARs are complementary to each other.

### **Current Scenario of Central Asian Geography**

The geography of Central Asia is composed of an area of more than 4,000,000 sq. km. and is populated by 76,891,732 million people, which is 0.95% of the world population according to the UNO (Worldometer, 2022). The population is in two areas, the Fergana Valley and the North of Kazakhstan; both areas are very distant from each other at about 1,000 km, and the remaining area is made up of large deserts and mountain ranges with vast unpopulated areas. The Central Asian states are also very far from great oceans and seas. Tashkent is 5,421 kilometers from the Pacific (Shanghai), 2,770 kilometers from the Indian Ocean-Persian Gulf (Bender Abbas), 5,500 kilometers from the Baltic (Riga), and 3,950 kilometers from the Black Sea (Novorossiysk) by rail. The eastern-southern part of the region is adjoined by the Altai, Pamir, and Hindu-Kush Mountain ranges, which impede transportation with China, Iran, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.

Geographical characteristics have made Central Asian countries comparatively remote from main trans-oceanic routes, and they are dependent on their neighbors to access world trade transportation through the sea. Kazakhstan depends on China and Russia, and Turkmenistan depends on Iran to access the oceans. These two states share a border with the Caspian Sea, which connects them to the Caucasus, and they are dependent on relatively fewer neighbors to connect to the global economy. whereas the other three Central Asian states, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan, are more isolated and depend on more neighboring countries to access the trans-oceanic routes. Uzbekistan depend on another two or more countries to reach the oceans, as shown in the following tables 1 and 2.

Table 1. Distance by Rail from Tashkent to Sea port,

Distance from great Oceans and Sea	Distance by Rail
Pacific Ocean (Shanghai)	5,421 km
Indian Ocean (Persian Gulf, Bender Abbas)	2,770 km
Baltic Ocean (Riga)	5,500 km
Black Sea (Novorossiysk)	3,950 km

Source: Table is drawn by the author after data analysis.

Table 2. Dependence upon countries to access oceans.

Central Asian States	Depends Upon to Reach Indian Ocean	Depends Upon to Reach Persian Gulf
Kazakhstan	Pakistan and China	Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, and Iran
Kyrgyzstan	Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan	Uzbekistan, Turkeministan and Iran OR Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Iran
Turkmenistan	Pakistan and Afghanistan	Iran
Tajikistan	Pakistan and Afghanistan	Afghanistan and Iran
Uzbekistan	Pakistan and Afghanistan	Turkmenistan and Iran

Source: Table is drawn by the author after data analysis.

The railway is the most commonly used method to carry goods over lengthy distances in Central Asia, and the current network of roads and rails that is used for the transportation of goods was built during the Soviet era and is about 10,000 km long. It was based on a north-south outline to join the Siberian Corridor between Moscow and European Russia. Approximately 90 percent of exports from Central Asia are carried by this rail network. Pakistan Highway has plans to build the Murghab-Kulma route from Tajikistan to China, linked to the National Road to Pakistan. Pakistan must utilize the 45-kilometer Wakhan Corridor via Afghanistan to reach Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Pakistan-Tajikistan Highway, which will be 1,306 kilometers long, will connect the Pakistani Karakoram Highway with the Tajik city of Dushanbe (Wasi, 2002). An energy line to bring power from Tajikistan to Pakistan will run parallel to the road. To benefit Eurasians, there is a plan to extend the Karakorum Highway to the Central Asian States. To link Peshawar with Termez in Uzbekistan, a road of 880 km is under construction, which will also provide easy access

to Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Kazakhstan. The land route to link Chaman with Kushka in Turkmenistan involves a distance of 1170 kilometers. The road links begin from Tajikistan, Dushanbe, and enter Afghanistan at Shir Khan Bandar; from Uzbekistan, Tashkent, and enter Afghanistan at Herat; and from Turkmenistan, Ashgabat, they enter Afghanistan at Aqina. This road corridor enters Pakistan from Afghanistan's Nangrahar province at Torkham, leading to Port Qasim in Karachi, or from Afghanistan's Kandahar province at Spin Boldak, leading to Karachi or Gwadar. This road development project provides fourteen routes to connect Tajikistan and Pakistan via Kabul to the exit point at Torkham. The total distance of the combined road corridor is about 13,586km. Pakistan's location allows for relatively short distance connections to Central Asian republics. The following tables 1 and 2 compare distances between Islamabad and Karachi, Central Asian capital cities, and Soviet-era Russian port facilities (Akhtar, July 1992).

Table 1. Distance of Soviet era Russian port facilities.

From	To	Distance
Karachi Port	Dushanbe (Tajilistan)	2700 Km
Abadan Port	Dushanbe	3200 Km
Bander Abbas Port	Dushanbe	3440 Km
Odeesa Port	Dushanbe	3400 Km
Vladivostok Port	Dushanbe	9500 Km

Source: Table is drawn by the author after data analysis.

Table 2. Distance of Central Asian States by Road.

FROM	TO	DISTANCE
Islamabad	Tashkent (Uzbekistan)	800 Km
Islamabad	Dushanbe (Tajikistan)	640 Km
Islamabad	Alma Ata (Kazakhstan)	1040 Km
Islamabad	Bishkek (Kyrgyzstan)	960 Km
Tashkent	Chaman (Baluchistan)	1292 Km

Source: Table is drawn by the author after data analysis.

After the independence of Central Asian states in the 1990s, Pakistan showed a keen interest in providing a transit corridor to them. In 1995, Pakistan estimated the distance needed to provide port facilities to the Central Asian States and to build more ports in addition to Karachi and Qasim ports. By building the deep-sea port of Gwadar on the coast of Baluchistan and the roads to Afghanistan, the distance between Pakistan and Central Asia has been cut by about 500 kilometers. The Gwadar port also reduces the travel time from five to ten hours, depending on which traveling direction has been adopted. The Karakorum Highways and Pakistan National Highways have constituted a north-south transit corridor to channel traffic to Central Asian Republics. It connects Karachi in the south to Torkham at the Afghan border in the north. A Torkhum-Jalalabad link with Afghanistan is also nearing completion. The Asian Development Bank is aiding for this rail and road network from Gwadar to Chaman to link the Afghan cities of Kandahar, Herat, and Kabul. This network is in turn linked to the borders with Iran, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan. Then these are extended to Europe via Turkmenistan and Turkey. Pakistan's close associations with the Central Asian Republics are necessary not only in strategic terms but also in military and logistical terms. The opening up of new land routes with CARs would certainly provide Pakistan with a safe line of communication and transportation to the outside world, without any fear of being cut off in case of emergency or war. Pakistan has a history of being cut off from military and civil supply routes by India during three wars in 1949–50, 1965–66, and 1971–72. The ties with CARs would enable Pakistan to supply oil for its military without any hurdles created by India.

#### **GEO-POLITICAL INTERESTS OF GLOBAL AND REGIONAL POWERS**

The CARs are significant from a geopolitical and strategic standpoint, thus each of the bordering states as well as

other nations worldwide are working to protect their own national interests. Since the beginning of the industrial age and the growing need for energy around the world in the early 1800s, there has been competition between states to find, use, and control hydrocarbon resources wherever they are. Prior to 1991, the Caspian and Central Asian regions had no idea about the vast oil and gas deposits that would later shape the region's geopolitics. Following the CARs' separation from the Soviet Union in 1991, several international powers, regional states, and non-state entities flocked to the area to get access to the region's substantial oil and gas reserves (Dar & Firdous, 2014). The event of 9/11 has brought a major change in the traditional geo-political background of the Central Asian region.

The "Great Anti-Terrorist Game" (Sulaiman, 2002: 248) describes the current geopolitical context in Central Asia as distinct from the prior geopolitical context of the region. Prior to the events of 9/11, Russia made attempts to forge close political, economic, linguistic, and cultural ties with the CARs in the Russian post-revolution. However, in the wake of 9/11, the USA is now emerging alongside Russia as the major force in the area in the fight against terrorism. The United States has substantial military capabilities and a presence in the area. The US 10th Mountain Division has between 1000 and 1500 soldiers stationed at the Khanabad airfield in Uzbekistan. At the Kyrgyz Manas air base, some 3000 members of US-led anti-terrorist coalitions are stationed, and there are additional forces in Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. In exchange for aiding the US in its fight against terrorism, the CARs get financial, political, and military support from the US. It has given the US power over Moscow in this crucial area, and the US is reinforcing its position and ensuring access to the landlocked region to maintain control over the vast oil and gas riches of the CARs. The US has used the 9/11 attacks to connect its long-term objective of establishing its presence in Central Asia with its short-term goal of hunting down Usama bin Laden and

the Al-Qaida network. The presence of the US in the region has placed the US in direct proximity to both Russia and China, where all three are exposed to each other. This presence will go in a direction that is yet to be seen.

### **United States' Interest in Central Asia**

The US had no history of political and economic relations with the CARs before 1991. But since the end of the former Soviet Union in 1991, the US has engaged in relations with the CARs. The region's geostrategic importance, as well as its geographic proximity to Russia and China, have made it important to the United States. Side by side, the CARs have also welcomed and absorbed the US-led western concepts of equality and a free market economy. The CARs also wanted to get away from the fact that Russia had been in charge for decades, and the US has given them an alternative.

The 1973–4 oil crisis, as well as two increases in oil prices—once in 1973 and again at the end of the 1970s, forced the West and the United States to seek an alternative source of energy. In 1973, the world consumed 57 million barrels of oil per day, which increased to 68 million barrels per day in 2008. The United States leads the world in oil consumption, with 50% of it imported, and this reliance on oil imports is expected to increase in the twenty-first century. The United States' reliance on oil imports has jeopardized its national security and interests. America has changed its oil policy regarding imports. To avoid dependence on a single supplier (OPEC), the USA hunts for diversification of oil supply to protect its national security and interests. The energy reservoirs of Central Asia have attracted US interests, and this framework explains US curiosity in the restructuring and development of oil industries and oil fields in the Central Asian region.

The September 11 tragedy increased ties between the US and Canada. The CARs are now frontline states in the US war against terrorism due to their shared border with Afghanistan. The US has been granted permission to utilize the airbases of four Central Asian nations—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—in the fight against terrorism. Despite officially designating itself as a neutral state, Turkmenistan has offered to the US Air Force the use of its facilities and air corridor for logistical assistance and rescue missions. These locations, like the Manas airfield in Kyrgyzstan, can be used to launch assaults against Afghanistan in emergency

scenarios. Additionally, the CARs are geographically close to Iran, Russia, China, and the Tibetan area. The US is now positioned near China's western border owing to American troops deployed in bases in Central Asia, along with US bases in South Korea and the Indian Ocean that are close to China's eastern and southern regions. As a result, China is now militarily surrounded by the US. US facilities in Central Asia have also placed US forces near Russia's southern border and given the US military access to Iran, which Bush singled out as being a member of the "axis of evil" in his State of the Union speech in January 2002. The US possesses sophisticated missile and monitoring systems that can strike significant places in Iran, Russia, and China under the ICBM regime, and the deployment of US forces in the Central Asian bases is an indication of the US strategy of world dominance (Nichol, March 2014: 8).

Regarding oil diplomacy in the Central Asian area, the US seeks to have control over the about 200 billion barrels of oil and 236–237 trillion cubic feet of gas that are found there. Some political watchers and experts in the United States believe that the events of September 11 were preplanned to get access to and control over the hydrocarbon riches of Central Asia. US imperialists need to seize the financial windfall that can result from stoking the east-Asian power boom projected over the course of the next ten or more years, led by Rockwell's Exxon Mobil (Fitzgerald & Vira, 2006: 1–9). Nothing less than US hegemony over the entire Eurasian landmass and the maritime channels that serve it constitutes the larger strategic plan. In the years after September 11, 2001, the US military involvement in Central Asia has reduced the CARs' reliance on Russia, and the US and the CARs have developed a strategic alliance. On October 12, 2001, Uzbekistan and the US signed a strategic security agreement. The Uzbek government described the agreement as a fundamentally new partnership built on a long commitment to advancing security and regional stability. In March 2002, the presidents of Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan signed a document with the US titled "The Declaration on the Strategic Partnership and Cooperation Framework." All of the CARs are particularly concerned about getting protection against terrorist threats in their own territory, and the US provides that assurance. Since gaining their independence, all of the CAR states have experienced internal unrest that borders on terrorism due to religious militant groups and historically present ethnic groups, such as the Islamic

Movement of Uzbekistan, Hasb-ul-Tahrir, and Tajikistan's Tajik opposition fronts. This has put these Central Asian states' security at risk. The CARs seek US assistance in driving out terrorists from their area. Due to the dismal economic situation in these states, the United States is also offering long-term financial assistance to them. Takeoff and landing fees are the major source of growth in the economies of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, which get financial assistance in the form of humanitarian support as well as payment for renting out their base capabilities to the US.

The most imperative source of economic activity for the CARs is the export of oil and gas from here to the global market. An agreement has been signed among Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, and Pakistan to build a gas pipeline, TAPI, from the Daultabad gas field in Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to the Gwadar Sea Port in Pakistan. It is a hopeful expansion, but the success of any such project needs stability and peace in Afghanistan. Because of CAR's strategic location and rich fuel resources, the United States has made Central Asia an inalienable part of its global strategy. The disintegration of the Soviet Union has opened political, military, and economic doors to the US. America is turning Central Asia into a base for its strategic resources and a center from which it can keep an eye on Russia, Iran, and China. The aim of the US geopolitical strategy in Eurasia is to maintain its presence and protect US economic interests. America's motive in Central Asia is threefold. Firstly, the United States is forcing them to adopt Western values and democratic ideology and to make them part of a western system. Secondly, the U.S. is maintaining its military presence in Central Asia to ensure the region's security. It wants to help the states liberate themselves from their security dependence on Russia. Thirdly, the U.S. is providing financial aid and direct investment in Central Asia to get control over their key industries, especially in the sphere of mining and transportation of natural resources. After 9/11, U.S. and NATO armies stationed in Central Asia made it the main front of the global war on terrorism. To penetrate the region, the U.S. has successfully raised the slogan of the anti-terrorist struggle, and today it is getting control over its hydrocarbon resources and Caspian oil. For the first time, NATO forces have moved eastward and are now deployed in Asia (States, February 5, 2020).

### **Russian Interest in Central Asia**

Russian interest in Central Asia has been impacted by US involvement in the CARs. Tensions existed between the CAR and Russia before the September 11 events because of the Chechens' independence effort (1994–1996). It saw the deaths of 4,000 Russian soldiers and tens of thousands of unarmed Chechen civilians. Because of the Chechen conflict, Central Asian nations began to worry that their weak and fragile governments would be unable to endure without Russian intervention in their domestic politics. The CARs are economically dependent on Russian channels for the export of products and energy sources. Russia and the CARs are economically dependent on one another. Kazakh energy resources provide for a significant portion of the Central Asian region's oil and gas sales, which account for around 50 percent of Russia's foreign currency receipts. (Ya, 1995: 30) Turkmenistan-produced gas is brought into Russian markets before being shipped via Russian exports to Europe. Turkmenistan relies only on the Russian gas firm Gazprom to export its natural gas, and just a short connection connects it to Iran. One pipeline from Kazakhstan, which is rich in oil, travels to a port on the Russian Black Sea and transports Kazakh oil to the global market. The non-Russian trans-Afghan pipeline has given Central Asia optimism that it will no longer be dependent on Russian routes to reach the global oil market.

Russia cannot end its association with Central Asian states and is quite conscious of regional stability and security. In fact, Russia itself fears that regional instability and insecurity due to religious extremism, illegal drug and weapon trade, and international terrorism might spill over into its own territory if left unchecked. So, Russia has established security relations with CARs to achieve its own security objectives in the region (Nichol, March 2014: 11–13). The US military's presence in the region has further increased the security need. In August 2002, Russia conducted military drills in the Caspian Sea to further and maintain their impact on the region's stability. Admiral Vladimir Kuroedov, head of the Russian navy, said that these drills demonstrate Russia's ability to safeguard its interests in Central Asia considering the long-term stationing of US forces there. Russia is expected to be important in the area. Russia wants to include regional governments in the resolution of all regional issues to lessen the influence of foreign



forces on the region's future political, economic, and security issues. Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) was founded in 2001 with that objective in mind.

### **China's Interests in Central Asia**

China has a history of close political, economic, and cultural context with the Central Asia region, which was carried through the great silk route. China was expected to fill the post-Soviet vacuum in Central Asia, but China was not actively involved in regional development until 2001. On June 15, 2001, the SCO was set up, which showed the interest of China in the Central Asian states, which means that China has realized the geopolitical importance and value of the energy resources of the CARs. Since then, SCO is used as a platform by China and is actively involved in all regional issues of the CARs, their stability and prosperity, and looks after its own strategic interests vested in the local resources (Ali, Muhammadi, Masood, & Ali, 2021). By 1993, China had become an oil importer, as its domestic production fulfilled only 70% of domestic consumption. China's developing economy needs more and more oil, and it will become even more dependent on oil. Thus, China has adopted a new energy strategy to maintain its economy (Nichol, March 2014: 15). 62% of the country's oil comes from the Middle East, which makes its energy sector dependent on oil from that area. The Iraq War of March 2003 has badly injured China's foreign trade and investment and slowed down its economic growth. After the Iraq War, China paid attention to Central Asia, Russia, and the Caspian region to avoid any such economic crises in the future. Since Central Asia has the third-largest oil reserves in the world, just after the Middle East and Siberia, and is destined to play a significant role in global politics, China's resource policy in the region aims to prevent the effects of the Middle East's oil crisis. The main objective of SCO is to develop China's cooperation with Central Asian states in political, economic, security, technology, science, and other spheres. The presence of the United States in CARs is encouraging China to become more involved in communication with them and to solve regional issues and crises (Chung, 2004: 989–1009).

Western China, especially the Xinjiang Uighur Autonomous Region, is an important part of trade between countries in the same region. Eighty percent of Chinese commerce with Central Asia is conducted through Xinjiang, which also serves as a bridge between China and Central Asia. China is renovating and

constructing the 616-kilometer Karakorum Highway to connect Pakistan and China in order to carry energy supplies from the Gwadar port. In Xinjiang, close to the Pakistani border, a highway is also intended to be built between Kashgar and Urumchi, the region's capital. China's Kashgar is a significant commercial hub. With high cargo rates and congestion at Chinese ports, the cost of commerce between the Asia-Pacific region and Europe currently surpasses \$300 million annually. China has been forced to explore additional overland trade routes as alternatives. Trade via the sea routes through Asia and Europe can cost up to \$167 per ton sent, and the transit time is 45 days. In contrast, the second Eurasian land bridge would cost just \$110 per ton and cut the shipping time in half. The second Eurasian land bridge cuts the travel distance to 6,379 km, saving time and money compared to the 26,000-km indirect sea route to Europe. China is currently concentrating on the development of its western region after developing its southern coastline. West Pakistan roads and Gwadar may be essential for the growth of western Xinjiang.

### **Indian interests in Central Asia**

India also has historical, social, and cultural links with Central Asian States, but its impacts are not as strong as in Pakistan because India sees Central Asia as a land of invaders in their homelands. India has no religious links with Central Asian states, and it lacks direct geographical links with Afghanistan and Central Asia. To get access to the region, it has to pass through Pakistani territory. After its independence in 1947, India established close ties with Soviet Republics, and after the fall of the Soviet Union, India kept its relations with Muslim Central Asian States as a security imperative against Pakistan and to contain Pakistan's hegemony in the Central Asian Region. Especially after 9/11, India backed the Karzai government in Afghanistan and expanded its role in the war-torn country, opening consulates in Kandahar, Mezar-i-Sharif, Herat, Jalalabad, and Avni in Tajikistan.

After 9/11, India and Central Asia became engaged in a shared perception of the threat from Islamic fundamentalists and developed a cooperative effort to contain cross-border terrorism, fundamentalism, and drug trafficking. India was worried that if Islamist militants were successful in the secular regime along the Central Asian region's borders with Afghanistan, it would lead to similar fundamentalism in the part of Kashmir that is controlled by India. Though India has planned an

energy pipeline from Russia across Central Asia and China, the TAPI pipeline is more significant for Indian interest because it connects it to Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan. India also wants to access the energy resources in Central Asia and is interested in the Afghan security situation. India has established a military base at Farkhor in Tajikistan, which reflects the strategic cooperation between India and Central Asia. This base has been operating since May 2002 and is close to the border with Afghanistan. Pakistan has charged India with creating unrest along Pakistan's western border, especially in Baluchistan, and exploiting the situation in Afghanistan to protect its strategic and economic interests in Central Asia (Khan, 2004: 126). India is now an observer in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and it wants to reduce Pakistan's influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia.

India has also planned an international north-south corridor from Iran to Russia via Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to ensure perfect connectivity with Central Asia. In the second decade of the twenty-first century, India's energy demand is expected to grow by 6% per year (Naazer, 2022). India's rapidly growing economy needs more markets for its goods and more energy resources for its industries, and both are provided by Central Asian Republics, which are rich in energy resources and provide markets for Indian products. So Indian entrepreneurs are forcing the need for greater involvement in Central Asia, but the shortcoming for India is that it has no direct link with the region. India is looking to China, Russia, and Iran to make up for what it lacks (Javeed and Naheeda, 2014).

### **Oil Corporations in CARs**

During the Soviet era, all trains, communications, rivers, and air transportation were connected to Russia, and Central Asian petroleum and natural gas were carried through Russian pipelines. Since Central Asia was totally cut off from its nearest neighbors outside of the former Soviet area, the Soviet Union was a union of petroleum and natural gas. Central Asian Republics welcomed western oil corporations to explore the area's oil and gas resources after achieving political and economic independence. In order to avoid the expensive building of a new export pipeline, Chevron was the first significant rival in Central Asia to propose to enhance the already existing Russian oil export pipeline to the Black Sea. Comparable to this, BP and its AIOC (Azerbaijan

International Oil Consortium) partners wanted to use Russian pipes to change the flow direction from the Caspian oilfield so that it would be exported out of the Black Sea and linked to Novorossiysk.

For the purpose of transporting crude oil from western oil firm production in Kazakhstan (Tengiz) to its own terminal on the Russian Black Sea coast, Chevron has reorganized the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC) project into an oil business. The 1,500-kilometer CPC pipeline, which cost \$2.6 billion to build and has a maximum daily capacity of 1.35 million barrels, was finished in 2003 (Dar & Firdous, 2014). The first oil corporation to propose building an oil pipeline across Afghanistan from Central Asia to Pakistan was Bidas. Then, Unocal Oil Company hijacked this concept, and the Asian Development Bank later adopted it to fund and build the pipeline that would deliver Turkmen gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan. The Asian Development Bank is especially interested in the completion of pipelines, rail lines, and roads in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan. This is another sign that the project's chances are getting better, especially when you look at how things are going in Afghanistan and how NATO forces are leaving.

China, however, has just entered the competition among oil companies in Central Asia. China has risen to global economic prominence as a result of its recent rapid economic expansion. Japan has been surpassed by China as the second-largest oil importer after the United States. China needs to import oil and gas to power its industries and economy, and Central Asia, which is close by, was an ideal location for China to find a new supply of oil and gas and change its own import lines. After concluding a contract to transport oil assets through Kazakhstan in 1997, the Chinese National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) signed the first oil concession in the Caspian Sea. In 2004, China and Kazakhstan announced plans to build a pipeline that would run from western Kazakhstan to Xinjiang, covering a distance of 2,800 km. The pipeline would have a modest daily oil capacity. Despite the project's lack of economic appeal, China is ready to invest in this pipeline route. China is interested in obtaining oil and gas from Central Asia due to strategic security concerns because of her reliance on importing these commodities via maritime channels in the Persian Gulf. In 2004, China and Kazakhstan announced plans to build a pipeline that would run from western Kazakhstan to Xinjiang, covering a distance of 2,800 km. The pipeline

would have a modest daily oil capacity. Despite the project's lack of economic appeal, China is ready to invest in this pipeline route. China is interested in obtaining oil and gas from Central Asia due to strategic security concerns because of her reliance on importing these commodities via maritime channels. Additionally, the United States guards this naval channel since it is the sole place where the world gets its oil supply. China's investment in pipeline networks from Central Asia is driven by worries about the security of its supply route. China offers a variety of options for Central Asian States and has taken upstream positions in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Asia as a whole is interested in investing in Central Asian oil, not just China. As compared to China and India, Japan and South Korea are more reliant on oil and gas imports to maintain their economies. However, these nations do not share China's security worries over the U.S. Navy's dominance of sea lanes and do not share China's closeness to Central Asia geographically.

## CONCLUSION

From a regional standpoint, the history of Central Asia and Pakistan can be divided into two categories: 1) Islamic 2) a pan-Asian attitude. These two opposing viewpoints were influenced by Soviet rule over Central Asia, but it maintained strong ties with the region even during the cold war.

The collapse of the Soviet Union and the rise of independent Central Asian Republics have altered regional and global geopolitics. The emerging geopolitics of the area must also contend with a conflict of interest between several regional and international powers over access to and control of the region's energy resources. How to get energy reserves from these landlocked nations to the global market is the fundamental issue that international investors in Central Asia are dealing with. The choice of pipeline will have a significant geopolitical impact on the future of the Central Asian area. Oil from Central Asia (particularly Kazakhstan) is being transported by pipelines via Russia to the port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea, which places a heavy burden on Russia and benefits it economically through high tariffs. There are five directions for pipeline routes:

- The northern route meets Russian demands and makes use of the current pipeline infrastructure in Russia. The problem with this plan is that Russia will have to keep an eye on the pipeline even though it doesn't need to, and there are security concerns because the pipeline

goes through Chechnya.

- The western route serves Georgia, Azerbaijan, Georgia, and the US while providing access to Europe. This pipeline plan would deliver the oil to Europe through the Bosphorus and the Black Sea. Even though this is a good idea, it is hard to put into action because of the high cost (\$2.9 billion) and security concerns because this route goes through unstable Kurdish territory.
- The Gulf gives the south a good way to reach Asian markets, which helps the economy, but the US doesn't like it because of its rivalry with Iran.
- Through the eastern route, which also feeds the Asian market, oil would be carried from Kazakhstan to China. China is willing to pay a lot of money to build a pipeline in Kazakhstan that would only go for 2,000 kilometers but is seen as important from a strategic point of view.
- An oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan and subsequently to India via Afghanistan has been proposed by the American oil corporation Unocal. This route transports energy resources from Central Asia to the Asian market. Geographically, this route is sensible, but like all other routes, it passes through unstable Afghanistan.

There are competing interests in controlling the transport routes from Central Asia to the world market, and regional and global powers are supporting these pipelines according to their advantages over the others. It is clear that regional and international countries have geopolitical and geoeconomic interests in Central Asia. By assisting the CARs in developing their oil and gas sectors and fields, the US hopes to reduce Russian influence in the area and the CARs' reliance on Russia from a geopolitical standpoint. The growth of the oil industry in Central Asia creates financial opportunities for oil and construction companies in the United States. The US will exercise geopolitical control over other significant energy resources and increase the supply of its own sources. Global and regional actors' interests have advantages over each other.

The phrase "new great game" has been overused, misconstrued, and overblown. The geopolitics of Central Asia have altered, and a number of states now exert influence there and support the region's energy security. Russia and the United States are now competing for control of the energy resources in Central Asia. The US has backed private enterprises for the growth and expansion of the region's oil industries and is not yet ready to acknowledge Russian dominance in the region.

The US wants to prevent Russia from having control of the energy resources in Central Asia. However, Russia is unwilling to give up its geopolitical and geoeconomic influence in the area. Russia is concerned that Western financial support and its interests will be diverted from Russian oilfields (in Siberia) and that the Central Asian oil fields will seize the Western market. Russia plans to utilize its oil and gas strengths to further its foreign policy goals. Russia is cognizant of the geopolitical importance that energy resources in Central Asia play.

Russia has strong reservations about western participation in central Asia, particularly with regard to U.S. and NATO activities in Almaty, which is home to a sizable Russian minority in Kazakhstan. China also sees Central Asia's foreign participation through a geopolitical lens. The Xinjiang province has a border with Kazakhstan, has strong linguistic and cultural ties to Central Asia, and is also where China conducts its nuclear tests. As a result, China views American involvement in Kazakhstan through the prism of security concern, and China National Petroleum Corporation (CNPC) has become involved in two energy projects there. Additionally, China is working to secure oil and gas transportation agreements so that it can profit from the natural resources of Western Siberia, Eastern Siberia, and the Russian Far East. China has certain energy security challenges in the twenty-first century because of the country's growing reliance on Middle Eastern oil supplies, which are dominated by American and Western interests and might affect China's stance toward Russia and Central Asia. China views the US-Russian rivalry in Central Asia from the standpoint of the balance of power, and this conflict may encourage China to increase its own geopolitical strength in the region.

In addition to OPEC, Central Asian energy reserves offer another source of supply. In addition, there are significant political and economic factors that draw regional and international players to Central Asia. First off, the Central Asian republics need assistance from international firms like Unocal and Chevron, which are willing to provide sizeable cash as they lack the capital and technology to explore the oil deposits. Second, the oil from Central Asia is high-quality and an excellent substitute for Persian Gulf oil. Thirdly, a significant portion of the oil will be exported because Central Asia has relatively low oil consumption demands, and these nations wish to boost their economies by selling oil.

Pakistan will make millions of dollars a year in freight,

port, and cargo fees for import cargo and export products as a result of the outflow of commodities and oil from Western China and Central Asia through its territory. The export of petroleum resources from CARs to Japan, the Far East, and Western nations via Pakistan has the quickest route through Baluchistan. It would be possible to increase trade and commercial activity by building connectivity infrastructure (roads and trains) from Central Asia to Pakistan via Afghanistan. Pakistan serves as the primary commerce route for Central Asia's interior, and it is working to increase connections with CARs by way of Afghanistan and China. This geopolitical power competition in Central Asia has two purposes:

- To regulate Central Asia's oil and gas production
- To keep an eye on the pipelines that move oil reserves from Eurasia to the rest of the world.

Energy resources in Central Asia are reshaping the region's geopolitical landscape. The future of Pakistan and the CARs' political and economic ties will depend on who controls the pipeline's route. It will determine the economic relationship with the West and its place in the region, as well as that of Russia, Turkey, China, and the United States. Additionally, it will define how the strategic triangle between the United States, China, and Russia will be repositioned, as well as the geopolitical ramifications of less reliance on Persian Gulf energy.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

The most logical historical and geographical route for Central Asia to reach the sea (Arabian Sea) is via Afghanistan and Pakistan. Among all the competitive land route alternatives, Pakistan provides the shortest and economically most feasible land route. It has made Pakistan significant for Central Asia. All the global and regional actors must be invited for negotiations on an equity participation basis in the oil development projects and pipeline construction and operations. It has been recommended that

- For the bright future of Central Asian Republics, an outlet or opening to the Indian Ocean is necessary. China, Russia, the U.S., Turkey, Iran, India, Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan, all of which are competing, must work together for the region's economy to work.
- Western oil companies and the USA should see the Chinese pipeline out of Central Asia as an opportunity, not a threat. The diversity of supply from Central Asia will benefit the global energy system more than it will harm it.

- The Asian Development Bank and the US Administration should play a crucial role in making the TAPI project successful.

International politics has hampered economic development between Pakistan and Central Asia, as well as blocked trade and commerce relations between the two countries.

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