

## Dynamics of Interest in Central Asia



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- Vol. II, No. I (2017)
- Pages: 99 – 107
- DOI: 10.31703/gpr.2017(II-I).11
- p- ISSN: 2521-2982
- e-ISSN: 2707-4587
- ISSN-L: 2521-2982

### Key Words

Central Asia, Pakistan, USA, Russia, Iran

### Abstract

*This research is an endeavour to examine the dynamics of interest determining the complex political situation in Central Asia. These states have come into being from the trauma of freedom and became the master of their own destinies. The region has energy resources which attract the other countries of the world to get access to them. Many world countries such as Pakistan, Iran, India, China, U.S. and Russia have economic, political and strategic interests in the region. Its geo-strategic location makes it difficult for the Central Asian Republics to ignore it. The article concludes that only culture and history cannot be a bank on for the improvement of cooperation among the nations. Still, new strategic policies and the dynamics of the modern geopolitical world must be kept in mind while formulating a policy to follow the economic targets.*

## Introduction

The Central Asian states were a challenge and a possibility to determine their own independent national policies after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Various segments of society were left without any particular direction due to the fall down of communism. Such type of situation created a moral and ideological vacuum in Central Asia. The newly created states did not have any knowledge and experience about any substitute to communism. An opportunity was created, due to the absence of the advanced and experienced official, for the old nomenclature system of the communist trained and conformist minded people to keep the power in their own hands. The Central Asian Republics faced severe social, political and economic problems. The situation was unclear due to the incompetence of new leadership that whether the states in the region possess the institutional capability for the implementation of sound and lasting domestic reform and what appropriate role the big powers and the international community has to play in regard. (Hussain, 2015)

On the other hand, big powers and the neighbouring countries intend to get access to these states as this region is rich in gas, oil and other mineral resources. The primary interest for Russia in the area is to safeguard the interest of millions of ethnic Russians living in these republics. U.S. military presence at large-scale in Afghanistan and its war on terror determined the U.S. interests in Central Asia. For America, the growing influence of Iran in the region is also a matter of great concern. China has been prompted China to increase border and intelligence collaboration with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in recent years due to the fears that separatists in Uighur might join with Islamic extremists. The Central Asian Republics are trying to diversify its military and economic relationships with the neighbours such as Iran, China and Russia possibly thronging out direct American influence in the region. Iran is taking due interests in acquiring energy resources of the area. The region remains critical for the energy and security needs of India.

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Pakistan is extensively moving into economic cooperation with Central Asian states. (Johannes L, David T. 2006) It has been a missing element in their mutual bilateral relationship. Economic cooperation is the central point, while the dimensions related to security and defence cooperation has been changed. At different levels, People-to-people contact is increasing. All these signs show that in all fields of mutual benefit, Pakistan's relations with Central Asia will continuously grow on the right track.

The political conditions of the region reflect the checks and balances mechanism, to limit the power of one another and provide for the workable interrelationship of the countries having vested interests. The paper is an attempt to dissect the dynamics of the political, strategic and economic, interests of immense power and neighbouring countries and shot in projecting the future results likely to arise from this conflicting situation.

## **Significance**

The study could help considerably in improving our understanding of the actual scope and effect of the political scenario prevailing in central Asia. The use of qualitative analysis could not only help to determine causes why Central Asia is the focal point of attention or why authorities of those states choose to adopt neo-liberal policies which have been already discussed by numerous political scientists, but it can also identify the underlying relation or correlation effects between political, economics and socio-economic environment in Central Asian Republics. One of the significant of the studies is that it attempts to look differently at conventional doctrines that had dominated the field of modern political science. For example, several liberal intellectuals are of the view that socio-economic development is the result of a successful democracy. Developing nations have shaped their foreign policies keeping in view this approach. Nevertheless, they understand that stable socio-economic development not possible only through democracy; therefore, most of the developing countries are adopting alternative ways of governance.

The alternatives models are based on social, cultural and political variances existing among countries, and the possibilities of cultural clashes could be avoided through it. On the other hand, the study explains patterns of economic and political collaboration that are going on in this area. It would focus different financial and geo-strategic issues which have shaped the policy of Pakistan and America towards the region, but in the formulation of policies, would explain the fear of Indian impact on the region as a significant factor. Finally, the author has very skillfully consolidated dispersed knowledge about the involvement of the big powers and various neighbours of Central Asian states into a strategic image of the region that is valuable to both the academic and policy-making communities.

## **Research Question**

How the U.S., China, Russia and neighbouring countries contend with each other when pursuing interests in one region and what are the dynamics at work and boundary conditions at play in public sector redesign in these newly born states. How could outside factors influence it?

## **Methodology**

The study is based on primary and secondary sources. The relevant data were collected from books, journals, newspapers, online sources. Descriptive methods were employed. The fieldwork, in this study, involves visits of embassies of the Central Asian States and the United States in Islamabad to observe and collect the right information.

## **Review of Literature**

According to Asif (2011), competing interests of global and different regional powers, which have access to the resources of Central Asia, remains an obstacle in the cordial relations of Pakistan and CARs. The presence of American and NATO troops in this region has impacts on inter-state relationships, specially

US-Russia ties. Two vital factors which most likely determine the foreign policy of the CARs are potential financial benefits and to get rid of the radical elements having links with Al-Qaeda and Taliban.

There is a prominent place for CARs in Pakistan's foreign policy. (Musa K, J, 2003) The relations of Pakistan and CARs are based on mistrust and economic interdependence. For the international trade of these states, Pakistan is an ideal route. Nevertheless, this route remained disturbed for long due to Afghanistan's instability. The Karachi and Gwadar port of Pakistan can help these countries to develop their trade links with the outside world for their benefit. These states share a common history and culture and face common threat perceptions and economic problems in contemporary politics. Fully funded training facilities are provided to the countries by Pakistan. The training program includes courses like the English language, banking, accounting and diplomacy. Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Afghanistan signed an agreement, in the energy sector, for a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan to Pakistan; the estimated cost of it is US\$2 billion. Pakistan wants to get benefit from the hydroelectric potential of Tajikistan. An agreement has also been signed in this respect. Pakistan also agreed to import electricity from Kyrgyzstan through Afghanistan and Tajikistan.

Associate Professor of Strategy and Policy at the U.S. Naval War College, Dr Timothy D. Hoyt, in October 2003 in a speech before the House Committee on International relations said that the Pakistani intelligence, active and retired Army officials are supporting terrorists and this country is providing them hideouts. He expressed that it would not be possible to eliminate Al-Qaeda and terrorism in the region as long as Pakistan support them for its political ends.

Central Asia cannot ignore Pakistan because of the latter's geo-strategic location. The shortest access to the sea for Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan is through Iran. For all other states, the shortest access is through Pakistan via Afghanistan. Islamabad is closer to Tashkent by air than it is to Karachi. The latter is the nearest port city for CARs. Islamabad is only an hour's flight from Dushanbe, and the distance by road through Afghanistan from Karachi to Dushanbe is 2,720 km.

In contrast, the Bandar Abbas port is 3,400 km, Rostov on the Don 4,200 km and Vladivostok 9,500 km away. (Ahmed R. 2002) This shows Pakistan's significance for CARs. It seeks its best increase its ties with Central Asia through China and Afghanistan.

Russia is trying to sustain its influence in the FSU states to protect the interests of the ethnic Russians residing there and due to its geographical proximity. The FSU states wish to pursue a more independent policy while they also desire cordial ties with Russia. As each republic has its unique ethnic and territorial aspirations and socio-economic priorities, their emergence has created several challenges in the region. Another dilemma faced by these states is that they are fond of the West, but they are also not ready to cut off their ties with Russia (Nivedita D, K. nd). According to Cooley (2011), for Russia, the major interest for Russia in the region is the protection the interest of millions of ethnic Russians residing in CARs to maintain its cordial relations and influence there like a big brother (CSIS Russia and Eurasia Program, 2014). Masha Udensiva (2012) is of the view that the nature of the new "great game" described by Cooley was different. The regional interests of America, Russia and China, and do not certainly contradict; instead, in their dealings with CARs, these countries often cooperate. ([http://www.columbia.edu/cu/creative/epub/harriman/june13/harriman\\_mag\\_june13.pdf](http://www.columbia.edu/cu/creative/epub/harriman/june13/harriman_mag_june13.pdf) Unlike the Central Asia of Kipling's time, CARs are sovereign. In order to manipulate the big powers, they have established their own "local rules". Central Asia, According to [F. Stephen Larrabee](#) (2007), was part of the Russian empire; therefore, it is still dependent on Russia in energy and economic field. Due to long years of Soviet rule, the elites of Central Asia are highly Russified.

China has concerns regarding the separatist in its Uighur Autonomous Region. The Uighur Muslim population in Xinjiang province has cultural and religious ties with the Uighur community in neighbouring Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. China fears that the separatists of Uighur might join hands with Islamic extremists of the CARs. This was the reason which stimulated China to increase its intelligence

collaboration with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan. For the insurance of economic growth of China, the stability on its western border is of immense importance.

According to Sergej Mahnoski and others (2009) it not clear that whether these states possesses the institutional capability for the implementation of sound and long-lasting internal policies and what would be the appropriate role of America and the world at large. There is no record on the ground for the arguments of some scholars that the region will politically and economically develop due to the presence of U.S. military forces. Central Asian states will broaden the horizons of its military and financial relationships with Iran, China and Russia, and will decrease direct American influence in this region. Though might not be true the policymakers of U.S. should make efforts to ensure these states that the primary purpose of their presence in the area is not for the economic resources but to the elimination of terrorism and drug trafficking. According to Amiy Liedy (2011) (<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/person/amy-liedy/#sthash.bVow7LT2.dpuf>) he political forces at work in Central Asia today are the same which were during the "great game" period. The three big hegemonic powers Russia, America and China their specific geopolitical goals. CARS also have particular strategies to deal with these incredible powers.

Olga Olicre and others (2007) In the U.S. security strategy, the U.S. military must have a significant but comparatively minute a role towards Central Asia. To engage its forces in Central Asia, American's effective futuristic policy would consist of some important components. Mainly it would try to maintain infrastructure having a semi-warm base; it would choose a program for the military carefully to military interactions; and would encourage the exchange and use of basic information bet the Western and local army. (Yonah A. Michael F. December 2012)

The U.S. is intended to prevent the potential rise of regional empires, such as the re-birth of the Chinese empire and the re-emergence of the Russian empire. China and Russia would try to decrease the influence the U.S. and would try to dominate the region in case these states become weakened. There are three main goals of Russia "great game" in the Central Asian States. Russia and America have a common interest in Moscow's primary objective in this region. The first goal is to eliminate terrorism for the maintenance of the stability of the state. Russia is a country having a large size and geographical proximity with Central Asia. It has focused on the strength in these republics because it wants to secure its borders. (Stephen B. 2012)

To ensure the status quo in the region is the primary goal of Moscow. Russia agreed that Islamic fundamentalism would be the only viable alternative form of the Government in the Central Asian Republics. In this way, the Russian Federation could remain as a regional power. However, the United States would try to support democratization in this region. Russian aim regarding the government structure in Central Asia differs from that of Washington. Their interests clash with each other at this point. Russia seeks to maintain the authoritarian form of Government that current exists in CARS.

Blank has explained that Russia is also ambitious in maintaining the "neocolonial status quo" in this region. It would try to preserve the existent authoritarian form of Government in Central Asian Republics as a "direct correlate of the nature of the regime" in today's Russia. This type of political environment granted a dominant position to Russia to influence her relatively weaker neighbouring countries. The main geopolitical interest of China in the region is the preservation of its integrity. China does not want the Central Asian States to dominate it or to influence it in one way or the other. Secondly, the Chinese Government shares the objective with the United States and Moscow to maintain stability in the region. Around China, they strive to ensure a "zone of stability and peace".

Moreover, the Chinese Government shares the abovementioned security concerns over the probable introduction of religious fundamentalism in the infrastructure of Central Asian politics. Blank argued, Similarly, China also wants to increase its economic and political influence in this region. If the Chinese Government succeeds in achieving this goal, it would surely be able to reach its destination, i.e. to gradually supplant the Russian Federation as the critical commercial presence in the Central Asian region. Blank concluded that "the great game is not going to go away; in fact, it is going to intensify. (Stephen B. 2012)

## **Conflicting Interests**

### **US Interests**

After overthrowing the Taliban government, the U.S. involved in the region and its strategic interests got increased. Apart from that, the U.S. wants to ensure market-oriented economy, and it expressed its will regarding the economic integration of CARs for promoting good governance, the rule of law for ensuring vibrant civil society in the region. (Olga O. 2011) The central Asian States, after their independence in 1991, have been involved in border disputes in Central Asia. America also showed its interests in the sphere of strategic peacebuilding in Central Asia. Central Asian Microfinance Association is an essential step in this context. Democratization remained a continued goal of America in Central Asia after 9/11, but America did not get real success in bringing democracy in the region. Apart from uprooting terrorism, the U.S. also wanted to counter extremism from this area that's why the U.S. opposed Islamic movement Uzbekistan and Hizb-ut-Tahir Al-Islamic for this purpose. The U.S. considers these organizations as a significant threat for its interests in the region. Extremist influence and develop secure access to Caspian energy. (The NATO Archive. 2005)

Besides this U.S. also wants to counter the influence of Russia w, which has been a traditional ruler of the land. America and Russia after World War II entered the ninefold war, at that time the world was divided into two blocks: Soviet block and the American block. American block formed an alliance known as NATO and, the alliance made by the Russian federation is known as WARSAW. When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, America became sole superpower, and the world became unipolar. Regardless of the fact America still has reservations about the growing influence of Russia in Central Asia. The U.S. wants to counter regionalism to avoid any hegemony in the region for easy achievements of its foreign policy goals. "U.S. keenly interested in the exploitation of untapped natural resources of the Central Asian Republics and Caspian region is the need of the hour, it is expected that by 2050, CARs could account 80% of American's Oil supply" (Baku, Tbilisi, and Ceyhan) pipeline. BTC pipeline is an attempt to offset Iranian, Russian and Chinese influence. The U.S. has signed various trade agreements with the Central Asian States to keep its hold on the region. The U.S. showed interest in the region to eliminate nuclear and biological weapons of Soviet era. (James N. 2013)

### **Russian Interests**

The specialists of Russian foreign policy and security apprehended that great U.S. involvement in Central Asia will lead to an ultimate military presence. With the presence of American troops in three Central Asian Republics with no signs of coming and going out of the region reveal that it has paved the way for reservations among various circles of the region. Growing U.S. power in Central Asia has enhanced Russian anxiety. These states provide the first protective line for Russia against possible foreign attacks. (Olcott, Martha B. 1996) The region serves as a buffer zone between Russia and Iran, Afghanistan as well as China. Minorities living in Russia are a great concern for Russia because it fears that the minorities living in Russia may not try to seek independence as the Central Asian Republics did. Russia is more interested in its stability because any disturbance in the Central Asian States will be costly to Russia, and it would create significant refugees problem for the Russian Government. (James N. 2013)

### **China Interests**

China wants to protect its western border, that is why it arrived in republics of Central Asia after the conclusion of the Cold War. It also intends to diversify its energy supply. Through cooperation of China with the Central Asian States and Russia increased from the mid 1990, however, the energy-based relations didn't develop expressively during the initial few years. This happened because of the less political importance of energy covenants with Central Asian republics and their infeasibility at the time and Russia's

expression of green signal to enhance energy transportation to China. China revived its interests in energy collaboration with these republics in the 21st century. (Vyacheslav B. 2005)

There were several reasons for that which includes the setback over the Siberian oil pipeline, emergence of Japan as a competitor, indecisiveness of Russia on the matter and the point that Kazakhstan has appeared as a new feasible option. Moreover, the September 11, incident changed the entire strategic perspective of these newly independent Republics and compelled China to affirm its effect in the region actively. In general, the rise of China as a critical power in the Central Asian region, become an unquestionable fact. (Ro'i, Yaacov. 1995) This is only because of the energy resources and political visibility in the region. China is declaring its influence with a fast pace, and it is definite that the republic of China will endure a key player in the region in coming times.

### **Iran Interests**

Iran wants to expand its influence in Central Asia for its security against external forces while Washington is trying to block the Iranian approach to the former Soviet republics. The Government of Iran is eager about its neighbours in the north who are connected to Iran in terms of culture and language and even known as "Greater Khorasan" after the northeastern province of Iran in previous times. Iran strives to enhance its prominence as an energy corridor for republics of Central Asia's huge gas reserves and to stalemate USA exertions to keep it out of the equation by executing its alleged "New Silk Road" program, a chain of overland energy and shipment linkages connecting Central and South Asia to both China and Europe. TAPI pipeline is one component of this project. The pipeline would transport gas from Turkmenistan to Pakistan through Afghanistan and then the Indian market. (Hunter, Shireen T. 1996)

The advantage of having deep warm water ports is the leverage of Iran over its neighbour CARs. There are two biggest exports which can transit through Iran, i.e. cotton from Uzbekistan and gas from Turkmenistan. Construction of road and rail tracks is a step of Iran to enhance such trade and to engulf more in transit taxes. It is investing hundreds of millions in Persian speaking Tajikistan in infrastructure projects. Iran invests \$ 3 billion to build "the tunnel of Death" or Anzab tunnel which will link Iran to China through Afghanistan and Tajikistan. The role of Iran got strength in Tajikistan as the relations of Uzbekistan and Tajikistan become cold on the issue of hydro projects. Uzbekistan think that the projects will damage its cotton industry.

### **India Interest**

India's primary interests in the region are to acquire energy, to minimize the influence of Pakistan and present itself as significant player in the interplay of extra-regional powers which taking shape. (Azmat H, K. 2004). The core hurdle is linking the resources of Central Asia to the market of India. However, still she is committed to find an economic market there and the fact can't be denied that the products of India are accessing Central Asia. Establishment of road links via Afghanistan will definitely accomplish Indian hope of hegemonic position in the region. (Hafeez M. 2006)

The growing Indian presence in Central Asia would weaken Pakistan's desire for economic and political integration in the region. (Nirupama S. June 16, 2006) The convergence of US-Indian interests is on the growth as both of them are reluctant to see exclusive Russian or Chinese influence in the region. India was worried about a decline in the influence of Russia in the 1990s when there was a proportional rise in Chinese influence. Competition of great power in Central Asia will give a tough time to India in pursuance of its interests. That's why it's become a compulsion of Indian diplomacy to shake hand with significant powers to ensure stability in Afghanistan and the Central Asian region as well. This region remains indispensable for energy and security needs of India.

### **Pakistan Interest**

Pakistan, to improve its relations with Central Asian republics, took active diplomatic initiatives. At the same

time, she is using the channel of multilateralism to strengthen its ties with regional countries, especially under the framework of SCO. Pakistan's primary objectives in Central Asia haven't changed, which are economical and commercial, also, to create political goodwill to strengthen its relations further. (Ahmed R, nd) Pakistan is eagerly interested in serving western China, landlocked Afghanistan and CARs as trade and energy corridor. For this purpose, necessary infrastructure like Gwadar seaport and upgrading KKH is being developed. In addition to it, China Pakistan Economic Corridor is also under consideration. (Daily Dawn Islamabad, nd). China shows its agreement to invest in up-gradation of Karakorum highway and construction CPEC. The quadrilateral agreement on transit and trade, signed among Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Kazakhstan has been working since 2004 which will be extended to Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as well. (Tarik J, 1993)

In the sector of energy, Iran, Pakistan and India pipeline (IPI) and TAPI Tajikistan Afghanistan, Pakistan and India gas projects will soon be materialized. Pakistan has the muscels to contribute significantly to SCO in term of geo-economic, geo-politics and geo-strategic as it is located on a most suitable location to not only promote but to play a critical role in adopted interests in the charter of SCO as well. Pakistan is naturally a chokepoint between SCO countries which connect the Eurasian hub with the Arabian Sea and South Asia. Pakistan offers precarious overland routes and connectivity for commonly advantageous trade and energy transactions. Also, it is a hub of economic activity linking the neighbouring regions through railways, highways, and ports, thus serving as a trade and energy corridor. (Annette B. 2009)

## **Conclusion**

When any alien power the even USA enters into a region from which it doesn't belong, and which has no cultural or historical links with it. Hence, the natural inhabitant of the area consider them as imperialist and occupying forces. Such perceptions of the people whose territory are being interfered by any foreign influences often led to war or conflict and chaos. With the establishment of military bases in the region territorial integrity of Pakistan, China, Iran and Russia came under the question mark. The capability of American propaganda after the September 11 incident successfully gain the support of China, India, Iran and Russia and got entrance to Central Asia directly for the first time. (Alexander, 2011)

The fact is that the region has plenty of natural resources, and America wants to get all these resources. From 2008 America is facilitating the development of Northern distribution network to support the supply line for its troops in Afghanistan that transit and benefit to many Central Asian states. Russia has kept Southern borders protected and upheld strong political and economic ties with Central Asia. China filters the infiltration of radical Islam from central Asian neighbours and presents itself as a crucial trader and investor in most of the states of the region. (Johannes F, L. 2007)

To America, Iran is a significant threat to its interests in the region. Iran is trying for full pledge membership of SCO and also keen about the energy resources of the area. Its pipeline politics is of concern for the USA. To secure its interests in the region, Iran is expending its influence to Central Asia on the ground of its time long relations. Another major threat to U.S. objectives is (CSTO) collective security treaty organization; Russia's led defence pact to counter U.S. influence in the region and to promote Russian interests.

Further Russia wants to get back its status of security provider to the region after the drawdown of U.S. from Afghanistan in 2014 which didn't fully materialize, and she will remain in the region to protect its interests. Different players have different strategic agendas in Central Asia. To the U.S., the area remains of peripheral interest in its energy security and war on terror. U.S. military is still present in Afghanistan, but it is difficult to predict the height of its appeal. Russia views Central Asia as it's near abroad and essential for reproducing itself as a global power.

China believes that it can secure its interests in the region through economic means. Both China and Russia want to abolish American military existence from Asia, which brings them close in cooperation. Still,

it just produces a short-term marriage of convenience instead of establishing a new strategic alliance. In the long term, both are likely to be rivals in Central Asia for their influence.

India is facing complex situation where she will manage its relations while to engage Pakistan and to enhance its involvement in Afghanistan and Central Asia without any direct involvement with any power in the region. In term of variable Iran is most potentially influential. The whole strategic scenario of the region would change dramatically if normalization takes place in relations of Iran and USA, will cause a change in the strategic calculation of regional and extra-regional actors.

Pak-CARs relations are a complex mixture of economic interdependence and mistrust. Both have shared culture and history and common financial problem and common threat perceptions in contemporary politics. (Mushid H. Sep, 4, 1993) Economic prosperity is garmented with a common strategy to coup with these problems. Future cooperation and strong international partnership in the region would promote democratization, stability and economic reforms in the region.



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