

Geopolitics in Central Asian Region: Implications for India

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to provide a brief history of evolving geopolitics in Central Asian Region (CAR). The geostrategic and geo-economics importance of the region have been addressed in this paper. The abundance of natural resources, particularly hydrocarbons located in this region has turned global attention to it. To have an access to these resources there is an ongoing rivalry and competition between great powers. The paper seeks to provide an outline of regional and international actor's interest in the region, as well as their impact on India-Central Asia relationship. The paper has emphasized on connectivity of this region with other regions as the Central Asian region is a landlocked area. The lack of direct connectivity has hindered India's ability to strengthen its relationship with the region. The geopolitics revolving around the CAR may harm Indian interests in the region. It still as good relations with all the republics in Central Asia which are undergoing transition, but the growing influence of other major powers in the region will be a setback to India. The paper clearly deals with how the presence of other countries in the region can have implications for India. Moreover, the greater threat has also emerged to India from the Taliban in Afghanistan which can have its reach to Central Asian republics.

Keywords- Central Asia, Geopolitics, Great Game, hydrocarbon reserves, Oil

Introduction

Central Asian region (CARs) comprises five nations which are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. In north-south the region extends from Russia to Afghanistan while in the east –west it extends from China to Caspian Sea. The region also serves as a connecting bridge between Europe and Asia and has a geostrategic significance to the world because of its location and its vast natural reserves (Roy, 2001). Central Asian region has also gained a lot of

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attention and become an arena of intense political rivalry because of its immense natural resource; the presence of ample amount of hydrocarbon reserves is majorly located in the three nations of Central Asia - Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Kazakhstan has 3 percent of world's total oil reserve making it a country with the 2nd largest proven oil reserves in Eurasia (after Russia) and 12th largest in the world. Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, on the other hand, have significant amount of natural gas reserve; Turkmenistan has ten percent of the global natural gas reserve making it the 4th largest proven natural gas reserves in *the* world.

Central Asian region was a part of the Soviet Union. After the disintegration of the later in 1990s, there was a political vacuum created in the Central Asian region, in which various regional as well as external actors were trying to establish their presence in the region. The newly independent nations of Central Asia wanted to explore more for their benefit in this process as each went through a great transformation. These used their abundant natural resources as a tool of foreign policy and for economic development. Each Central Asian nation had its own policy to interact with external actors. In this regard, Kazakhstan was favourite of all because it was most stable and opened which attracted the foreign investment mostly through its 'multi-vector' policy. While Turkmenistan applied the policy of neutrality and gave no political leverage to any external actor to increase its presence on its land, whereas Uzbekistan followed the path of self-isolation and became self-reliant. It was after 2016 when new elected President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev made some moderate changes in its policy to attract investors. As only Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have middle economy, rest all three- Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have weak economy. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan don't have much of hydrocarbon resources but both can be very vital in the production of hydro power electricity as both the nations have a lot of potential in this sphere. Most of gas production in Uzbekistan is used to meet its own domestic requirement.

Since the ancient time, this region has held historical significance as most of the trade used to flow from the ancient Silk Road through which merchants traded with one another. It was also the route from where ideas and culture flew from one civilization to another. The region had a rich heritage of the prominent scholars such as Al-Biruni who was born on 973AD in Uzbekistan and was called as the "founder of Indology", "father of comparative Religion". Avicenna also known as Abu Ali Sina,

born on 980AD in Uzbekistan, was a physician, thinker and astronomer. Also, Sufism flourished and spread from this region towards India and then to rest part of the world (Menon & Rajiv, 2019). Even Buddhism from India via ancient silk road to Central Asian region went to East Asia, from this region evidence of Buddhist cave were found in few parts of Central Asia.

Great Game and the Soviet Union

The Great game is referred to as the historical rivalry between Russian Czars and British Indian Empire and culminated in late 19th and early 20th century. As both the empires had an expansionist mindset so the Central Asian region along with Afghanistan became a zone of contention between them. This power struggle between them to establish a hold in the region is termed as the Great Game. In this great game, the British Indian Empire was fearful of Russian empire intension, that if they occupied the region of Samarkand, Bukhara and Khanate of Kokand (prominent ancient regions of Central Asian region) then they could advance towards Afghanistan and from there they could get an easy access to the North-western frontier Province of British Indian Empire. Later this fear of British Indian Empire became a reality when Russia annexed Tashkent in 1865 and later after one year it also occupied Samarkand and Bukhara which further deteriorated and boiled the tension between British Indian empire and Russian empire. To prevent Russian advancing towards the eastern side, British Indian empire tried to create its dominance in Afghanistan through a series of Anglo-Afghan wars (first in 1838, second in 1878 and third in 1919) in which both were trying to contain each other in Afghanistan and Central Asia. Later in 1884 to terminate the Great Game, Russia and Britain demarcated the border between Afghanistan and Central Asia. Afghanistan was the centre of conflict and later acted as a buffer zone between the great powers. As both the empires had mutual distrust and they were wary of that other can create unrest in their region, therefore to avoid any sudden turmoil they acted accordingly. This great game was waged to block any further Russian and British expansion in this region.

In 1914, First World War started in which Russia was preoccupied with the ongoing war because of which it was not able to devote much attention as it was required in CARs. During this period, Russian empire went through turmoil which led to unrest in the empire which later got converted into Russian revolution (also known as Bolshevik revolution)

that started in 1917 and resulted in the end of Czarist regime in Russia. With the end of civil war in Russia, Bolshevik established the Soviet Union by merging various regions including the Uzbek SSR (Soviet Socialist Republic) and the Turkmen SSR which were formed in 1924 and a new region was created and renamed as the Kazakh Autonomous SSR in 1925. Tajik SSR was formed by separation of Uzbek SSR in 1929. Lastly the Kyrgyz autonomous oblast became a part of SSR in 1936.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the former Soviet Socialist Republics (SSR) became newly independent nations and five among them are collectively known as Central Asian region comprising republics of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.

The New Great Game and Big Power Rivalry

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, new independent Central Asian Republics emerged on the world map as five-stans. The region is the heart of Asia because of its geography, economic and geostrategic location. This region holds enormous quantity of natural resources especially hydrocarbon reserves which are present in the region. Although Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan have border with the Caspian Sea but the landlock characteristic of this region limits its trade and economic growth. Due to the landlock status, this region is mostly dependent on its neighbours for proving feasible trade route for the flow of their commodities to the outside world and for economic prosperity of the region (Batsaikhan & Dabrowski, 2017).

During the Soviet period, the economic structure of the region was controlled from Moscow. They followed a policy of 'one region one production' in which and all the construction of infrastructures and pipelines for the flow of oil and gas was made via Moscow. Hence the independence of these nations from USSR created a lot of turbulence in Central Asian region which had all their setup created in convergence towards Moscow. Numerous complications came in to run nations with limited economy and infrastructure setup. There was problem of ethnic disruption which arose in the region. All Central Asian republics (CARs) mostly share common history and culture but have ethic issues in Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, many regional and international actors showed their interest in CARs to have an access to its natural resource potential. The oil and gas sector received most attention from the outside world. There was a significant shift in world focus towards the geopolitics of this region, mainly from Russia, USA, European Union, China and to some extent from Iran, Turkey, India and Pakistan. In the guise of establishing stability and developing the region, the foreign powers had their own interest in mind. This shift of the world's focus towards Central Asian region is termed as New Great Game.

Even after the collapse of Soviet Union, Russia (the largest and most populous of the former soviet socialist republics) remained the dominant power in Central Asia, as economies of CARs was hugely dependent on Russia because of the lack of infrastructure development in the region. For this reason, Russia saw Central Asian region as its own backyard. The dependence of CARs on Russia and its dominance in the region was seen by other actors as a threat to their own interests in the region which can later be a challenge to the global world order.

Russia also utilised its energy diplomacy to challenge growing Western presence in the region. Russia has dominance in the region because of its historical connection and for the flow of CARs trade Russia was only viable option available for them for many years. Russia handled the hydrocarbon trade between CARs and the European Union with ease and was able to establish friendly relations with both. However, the European Union later made significant investments in the region, including the construction of new energy corridors that avoided Russia. Merging with new powers such as Turkey may severely erode Russian dominance in the region, and NATO's military presence might allow this valuable region slip from Russia's grasp. To deal with this, Russia established the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) in 2002, a military alliance of former Soviet Union member which consists of Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (withdrew in 2012) (Joshi, 2005). Later, in 2015 Russia, Belarus, Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan formed the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU). It was built on the European Union model, in which there will be a single market with free movements of commodities, services and people. Russia established two organizations to bring former Soviet Union members together on a single platform to discuss security and economic challenges faced by them. By doing so, Russia hopes to reclaim its lost dominant position in the region.

USA's approach towards the Central Asian region has many aspects. Firstly, after the collapse of the Soviet Union, USA was wary of Russia's influence in the Central Asian Region and was concerned that this region might go back to its former communist ideology. Hence, to decrease the influence of Russia in this region, USA started to show interest in CARs energy sector. With the active involvement of the European countries, USA was able to establishing its own influence in the region. The countries of European Union are highly dependent on external sources for their supply of energy. Russia is the main supplier of crude oil, natural gas and solid fossil fuels to the EU. In order to diversify its energy resource and have regular and secure supply of energy, the European Union is actively involved in the Central Asian region – as it has an abundance of hydrocarbon reserve. This is the primary objective of European Union's active involvement in this region. Previously, Russia used to import oil and gas from CAR at a reasonable rate, and then exported that to the European Union and earned huge profit from it. This used to happen because CAR lacked connectivity owing to its landlocked feature and infrastructure development; in order to supply its energy resources, Russia was the only option available to them. This directly influenced Russian presence in the region. To reduce Russia's growing influence in the region USA led NATO was able to polarise Georgia and Azerbaijan, former members of the Soviet Union. With the help of Turkey, the western countries wanted to create a new trade route between CARs and European union bypassing Russia and Iran. Turkey had ethno-linguistic ties with CARs from its historical background; post-Soviet time turkey played a key role in forming a bridge between newly independent states with Western countries and worked to curtail Iranian presence in the region. Turkey was greatly backed by western powers for their own interest. This entire formation in CARs region helped Turkey to become NATO member.

USA backed many major projects that could diversify CARs export routes especially towards the western world. With the development of pipelines, such as Baku- Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) pipeline connecting Azerbaijan to Turkey via Georgia transports oil from Caspian Sea towards Mediterranean Sea. Another is South Caucasus pipeline that runs parallel to the BTC pipeline. USA also endorsed Trans-Caspian gas pipeline; this project was purposed to transport Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan's natural gas to European Union via Turkey. Many thinkers stated that USA aiding support and endorsing in the region's energy

sector had more of a political dimension than economic benefit for the USA (Raimondi, 2019). The western countries employed energy diplomacy to enhance their influence in the region while decreasing Russian presence in the region. Hence to pursue these objective western countries invested in this region, but they failed to exert concrete influence in the region, because Russia and China already had a stronghold in the region.

USA's second approach to the region was for security reason. Following the terrorist attack on the United States on September 11, 2001, the United States initiated a global collective response on terrorism and launched 'War on Terror'. Immediate actions were taken in Afghanistan from where most of the terrorist organisations used to operate; it resulted in trafficking and narcotics trafficking from Afghanistan to Russia via CARs. USA along with NATO forces began with counter-terrorism operation in Afghanistan and was able to establish military bases in Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. Many thinkers were of the view that the event of September 11, 2001, transformed the global scenario in such a way that big powers viewed Central Asia as the new conflict-ridden region. After the attack, there had been a drastic shift in the geopolitical situation where CAR became the focal area for many big powers. Eventually, these events led USA to lead its military forces step up in this region which promoted more cooperation between western countries with CARs with new level of technical cooperation and formulating new trust of mutual understanding.

China has shown great interest in the region from past two decades. It has many reasons to have cordial relations with CAR, such as for security of Xinjiang region - an unstable region with ethnic Muslim minority issue; this part of China shares border with three central Asian countries Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan which have almost similar ethnicity and tradition as practiced in Xingang region (Pradhan, 2017). Hence, there is possibility of spread of religious extremism from CAR towards Xingang region. This can be one of the biggest challenges for China's national security. China is world's largest energy consumer and is dependent on others to fulfil its huge energy demand. For China, the Central Asian Region is very vital to meet its domestic energy requirements. Therefore, it invested heavily in the CARs and got access to their major oil and gas field stakes with the construction of Central Asia- China pipeline, started in 2007 and operating since 2009. This is the world's longest pipeline that connects Turkmenistan to China via Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Currently this pipeline fulfils 20 percent of

China requirement of oil and gas requirements. The massive investment by China in this region has resulted in establishing stability in the region; it also stabilised the Xinjiang region by developing its infrastructure and connecting various projects through this region.

China knows the significance of Central Asian region for success of its ambitious project of 'One Belt One Road' which is a Global Infrastructure Development Project connecting Asia, Africa and Europe through rail and road connectivity. Central Asian region is the only option for China that could provide a bridge to connect with Europe. This project was announced from Astana capital of Kazakhstan (the biggest and most stable country in Central Asia) by Chinese President Xi Jinping on September 2013. Currently China has surpassed Russia and has become CARs biggest energy trade partner. Its growing influence through huge investments has marked China as the new dominant power in the region.

India's Perspective

Central Asian region is of utmost significance for India because of its geographical location and presence of abundant amount of natural resources. The region is regarded as India's extended neighbour, as India does not share a physical boundary with it. Due to lack of direct connectivity with the region, the cordial relations have been constrained in their ability to strengthen the economic and strategic relationship for the benefit of both the Central Asian region and India. For India, the Central Asian region is critical for security, meeting its energy needs and combating China's expanding footprint in the region.

India and Central Asia have had a long-standing relationship dating back from ancient times. Many scholars from this region visited India in order to learn about Indian culture and to interact with their belief system. There was flow of ideas and culture from India which spread in some parts of Central Asia. Also, via the old silk route, there was a massive flow of trade between the two. At present, both have undergone significant transformations and are struggling to revive old cordial relation which they had in ancient times. Since India's independence, India has friendly relations with former Soviet Union republics which is seen as the foundation of forming a healthy relation with the Central Asian region after the collapse of the Soviet Union. India was one of the first countries to recognise the newly formed Central Asian states. Later,

the former Prime Minister of India P.V. Narasimha Rao visited four out of the five countries of CAR; Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan in 1993, followed by Turkmenistan and Kyrgyzstan in 1995 (Menon & Rajiv, 2019). The objective of visit by the former Prime Minister was to strengthen India's relation with the CARs in the field of trade and investment and drawing attention on common threats such as religious fundamentalism, Islamic extremism, illegal smuggling of small arms and narcotics.

In order to secure its border in the north western region, India needs to have a significant presence in the Central Asian region, as if Central Asian republics fail to create stability within the region, then religious extremism, terrorism and ethnic dispute can start to flourish in the region and this could severely impact India's national security as India is currently facing separatist movement in Kashmir valley and if its neighbouring part gets in control of any terrorist or extremist group, it can create more trouble for India. Moreover, Afghanistan has become another threat to CARs as well as to India's security. Hence to maintain peace in this part of country India needs to counter any growing threat in CARs.

Another significant aspect of this region for India is the enormous amount of the hydrocarbon present in this region, as India is dependent on the import of hydrocarbon to fulfil its domestic energy requirements. The issue of the connectivity with this region is the biggest barrier for India in order to maintain energy relation with CARs. To overcome the connectivity issue, India has tried to develop or to become a part of some projects. Such as India along with Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan initiated a gas pipeline project known as TAPI gas pipeline project in 1990s that would export natural gas from Turkmenistan to India, through Afghanistan and Pakistan. Later in 2010 inter-governmental agreement (IGA) was signed by the heads of the all four members; but the project is still pending because of mutual distrust between India and Pakistan and the instability in Afghanistan. The motive of this project was not just limited to the transportation of gas but it could have had a substantial impact in fostering cooperation thereby establishing peace and security in both the regions.

The International North-South transport corridor (INSTC) is another project by which India will try to connect with Central Asian region. INSTC is proposed to connect European Union's port of St. Helsinki, which is on the top of St. Petersburg in Volga river basin and will go through Caspian Sea to reach down to Iran port of Bandar-Abbas, thereon it will be connected with the Mumbai port (Adnan & Fatima, 2015). As in March 2016 India agreed to join trade transit agreement which is also known as Ashgabat agreement which would enable India to have access in Central Asian region. Hence synchronizing INSTC with Ashgabat agreement would open a route of connectivity of India in CARs.

India poured many efforts to establish its ground in Central Asian region but all those were constrained to some extent which could provide a strong ground for India to strengthen its relationships with CARs. Such as in 2012, India's External Affairs Minister E. Ahamed tried to draw an attention on Central Asian region by giving "*Connect Central Asia policy*"; the policy focuses on the cooperation between India and CARs in the field of strategy and security, energy and connectivity. He also highlighted the growing significance of Central Asian region on global politics and the impact on world order with the sudden shift in regional geopolitics in past few years. Even then, there was limited progress that India could achieve from Connect Central Asia policy in the succeeding years (Menon & Rajiv, 2019). India's 'Connect Central Asia Policy' was reinforced in 2015 when Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India visited CARs between 6th to 13th July 2015. He also became the first Indian head of state to visit all five countries of CARs (Menon & Rajiv, 2019). Since then, there has been significant progress in cooperation, particularly in the field of defence, energy and connectivity. His visit in Central Asian region has a chartered new life to India's revelation in establishing a foothold in the region.

In the field of defence and security cooperation with Central Asian region, India has been able to create strong alliances almost with every country in Central Asian region despite having direct connectivity issue with the region. As when there was an ongoing civil war from 1992 to 1997 in Tajikistan, which was backed by Pakistan in the form of

establishing Afghan Mujahedeen. To counter the growing Afghan Mujahedeen India started to provide Tajikistan forces military training on its own soil. In 2002, India signed bilateral defence agreement with Tajikistan under which India refurbished Ayni airbase (various means of media speculated that India was very much interested in the establishment of a military base at Ayni in order to expand its strategic footing in Central Asia). It is India's only overseas airbase at Farkhor in Tajikistan which is operated by Indian Air Forces with the collaboration of Tajik Air Force. India started to hold bilateral military exercise with Kyrgyzstan from 2011 named as "Khanjar" which focuses on high altitude and mountain operations to counterterrorism. Its 8th edition was conducted in the month of April 2021 where Indian troop's contingent was welcomed by Kyrgyzstan forces.

Indian Prime Minister Modi's visit to all the Central Asian countries in 2015 has enhanced India's defence cooperation through bilateral level meeting with all countries of CARs. The visit marked the signings of MOUs and agreements with Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in the field of defence and military technical cooperation. India and Kazakhstan also initiated a joint military exercise in 2016 Prabal Dostyk, which was later renamed as KAZIND, in 2018 (Menon & Rajiv, 2019). The focus of this exercise was to counter insurgency, counter terrorism, low intensity conflict and jungle warfare. With Uzbekistan, India agreed to expand its cooperation in the area of military education and military medicine in 2018 and cooperate jointly to eliminate terrorism with counterterrorism exercises.

India had already signed strategic partnership agreement with Kazakhstan in 2009, Uzbekistan in 2011 and Tajikistan in 2012, in order to enhance its relation with these nations in the field of security cooperation and jointly work to develop economic and health infrastructure in the Central Asian Region.

Implications for India

The significant shift of the world towards Central Asian region is due to the presence of natural resources in this region such as oil in Kazakhstan, gas in Turkmenistan and cotton in Uzbekistan, as western countries

along with China and India are highly dependent on import of energy; especially hydrocarbons to fulfil their domestic energy needs. For them CARs is the most reliable source to fulfil their energy demands because of the uncertainty in Middle East region and the ever-changing terms and conditions of OPEC on supply and price. One of the key concerns for every nation in the twenty-first century is to ensure energy security for itself (Joshi, 2005). Today, nations which are dependent on others to fulfil their energy demands, are trying to diversify their sources as much as they can, to tackle any unwelcome situation. India and China's expanding economies and populations have resulted in very high energy demand, which has a direct impact on global energy demand. The Central Asian region has the potential to be one of the most consistent and dependable sources for both India and China to achieve their energy requirements.

In recent times, China has affected the regional geopolitics with its giant economy. In order to fulfil its demand of energy, China has heavily invested in CARs infrastructure projects, developing gas pipeline projects that provide connectivity for the transportation of CARs gas energy to China (Indurthy, 2016). It has also brought stakes in major oil fields of CARs particularly in Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. Currently Turkmenistan exports 80 percent of its total gas export to China, which can give a broad picture of China's growing influence in the region. Before China established its foothold in the region, the regional geopolitics was revolving around Russia as its centre. As Russia always treated this region as its "natural sphere of influence" as CARs member were part of former Soviet Union.

In comparison to other regional actors such as China and Russia, India's trade and commerce with Central Asia is quite limited. There are several reasons for India's low trade flow with CARs. Previously, India's foreign policy was focused on its immediate neighbours and Indian leaders did not give much attention to the importance of this region to maintain or improve the relationship that existed in ancient times. The lack of direct physical connectivity with this region is one of the key causes that has affected India-Central Asia trade relation. In the post-1999 era, India took steps to boost its relations with Central Asia but the geopolitical rivalry among the great

powers to a great extent stymied its greater engagement in the region, where India tried to establish energy relationship with individual countries of CARs. After much competition with other powers present in the region India was able to secure a stake in Satpayev oil Bloc of Kazakhstan. Gradually, India also took steps to get a share in the energy sectors of Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan; also India got a stake over hydroelectric projects in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. In 2008, Kazakhstan supported India to be allowed in civil nuclear cooperation without being the part of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Later both the nations signed civil nuclear deal in which Kazakhstan supplied around 2,100 tonnes of uranium to India in 2014. This civil nuclear deal is now ungraded in which India is planning to increase its uranium supplies from 7,500 tonnes to 10,000 tonnes (Chaudhury, 2019). India has also signed a uranium supply agreement with Uzbekistan.

From past two decades there is an ongoing India-China rivalry to have an access on CARs hydrocarbon reserves. The growing Chinese dominance in the region has been detrimental to India, like in 2005 when Indian ONGC Videsh Mittal venture was offered to purchase stakes in Petrokazakstan's, but due to political pressure on Kazakhstan from China, the deal went from India's hands to China (Raimondi, 2019). In 2013, again 8.3 percent stakes of Kashagan oil field deal slipped from India's lap and went to China (Ali, Khan & Gul, 2019). India needs to gain mutual trust with Central Asian countries by investing in their infrastructure, supporting them on global dice and cooperating with them to counter the rise of China in the region. As China is trying to trap Central Asian region in its "debt trap diplomacy" via which China will dominate in the region.

The withdrawal of USA troops and Taliban seizing power in Afghanistan has serious security concerns in neighbouring countries. The porous borders in some parts of Central Asian countries have raise the issue of flow of Afghan refugees on their land; along with cross-border arms and drug trade and exportation of terrorism. The local terrorist groups operating in CARs have ties to the Taliban, so the growth of the Taliban will have an impact on regional stability and national security. Afghanistan land could become a hotbed for foreign terrorist fighters (FTFs) as recently Al-Qaeda praised Taliban after Taliban capture Kabul

and urges its support for liberation of Kashmir (Mehra & Wentworth, 2021). The Taliban gaining control in Kabul will not only poses security but will also have economic challenges which India needs to address.

India was an observer member of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) for twelve years before becoming a permanent member in 2017. India can use SCO as a platform to address common threats and opportunities with Central Asia. The SCO has provided a stage to India, where it can frequently meet the head of states, ministers and diplomats of CARs, through which India can consolidate its relations with Central Asia on strategic as well as economic level. In 2019, the first India-Central Asia dialogue was organised jointly by India and Uzbekistan in Samarkand (Gupta, 2020). It was a significant step taken by India in a direction to establishing its ground in Central Asian region. In addition to this, India initiated “India-Central Asia Business Council (ICABC)” to promote business and economic diplomacy in the region.

India is not unwelcomed by Central Asian countries; they embrace India because they want to diversify their trading partner and routes. Because their landlocked status limits options and these want to have an access of sea routes. Thus, India should engage with them by providing assistance in the field of transportation, agricultural, information technology and military training to build a strong and lasting relationship with the region. The withdrawal of American soldiers from Afghanistan and the resurgence of Taliban in Afghan will have direct impact on the CARs peace and stability, which will, further, have an impact on India’s national security. China, on the other hand, is trying to create its domination in Central Asian region with its economy.

The Central Asia has emerged as the epicentre of global geopolitics; all this has compelled India to strengthen ties with the region. Also, India’s economy would grow rapidly in the upcoming decades and will require more energy to meet its energy demands. Hence, this is the correct time for India to ensure and diversify its energy sources with keeping Central Asian region of the top priority.

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