

## GEO-STRATEGIC ANALYSIS OF CENTRAL ASIA AND INTERESTS OF PAKISTAN

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### ABSTRACT

*The main purpose of this study is to demarcate the boundaries of the geopolitical systems, within which the action or the actions of the geopolitical factor stated in the Central Asia and related matters are to be examined. Energy is emblemizing the geopolitics of the 21st century. It has helped to reduce dependence on the other hegemonic tackles of military and politics. In present times, energy has converted a goal of geopolitical struggle into a nuclear arms race as compared to cold war times in which armed forces were maintained. Central Asian States have excessive energy reserves and these states are also strategically important in world politics. Pakistan is facing energy crises. CASA 1000 and TAPI (Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India) projects are very important for the development of Pakistan. Kazakhstan has the biggest energy reserves in the world. Uzbekistan is the leading producer of gold and cotton and Turkmenistan has the largest reserves of natural gas in the world. Central Asia's enormous energy reserves and its geostrategic location have attracted great powers to attain control of the Central Asia in order to achieve their interests.*

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**Keywords:** Geo-strategic Location, Reserves, Energy Resources, Central Asia, Caspian, Advantage Proxy, Tulip Revolution

### CONTEXTUAL ANALYSIS

“Geostrategic, a subfield of geopolitics is a type of foreign policy guided principally by geographical factors as they inform, constrain, or affect political and military. Geo strategic means the importance of a country or a region as by virtue of its geographical location. Furthermore, geography can be described as *the mother of strategy* (Colen.S, Gray & Geoffry Sloen, (2013) “Geo political is defined as, stressing the influence of geographic factors on the state power, international conduct and advantages it derives from its location planning” (Mirza Muhammad Saleem). Central Asia has momentous significance in world politics. It is known as heart of Asia .Its geo- strategic location as well as its gigantic hydrocarbon reservoirs has made it a bone of contention among great powers. It is surrounded by three BRICS countries (China, Russia and India). Not only great powers but some other players are also involved in this region. Every state wants to gain its maximum share and to make its hegemony in the region to pursue its

strategic interests. Central Asia's geographical location as well as its oil and gas deposits has played a very important role in determining its significance and place in world politics since the time immemorial. Kurecic was rightly said that "Central Asia will be the jewel in the crown of any economic power that will be able to facilitate it first and effectively" (Kurecic, 2010).

The emergence of five Central Asian Republics (CARs) has changed the geo political milieu of the global politics. There are main three factors which raise the influence of Central Asia in the region. First and foremost factor is the location of the Central Asia. It is a landlocked region and needs proper routes of pipelines to export its resources to the world market. Secondly, it is the neighbour of two Great powers China and Russia. Thirdly, this region has plenty of oil and gas reserves which increased its significance in the eyes of Great powers and it becomes an apple of discord among Great players. The political characteristics as well as its economic structure mainly marked by due to its geographical location. The survival of Central Asian states essentially depends on the maintenance of several corridors and links.

Dick Cheney, the former Vice President of the Bush administration, highlighted the importance of Central Asia in the world politics during speech to oil industrialists in Washington, D.C. in 1998, "I cannot think of a time when we have had a region emerge as suddenly to become as strategically significant as the Caspian" (Abilov, 2012).

#### **GEO STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF CENTRAL ASIA**

The geo strategic location of Central Asia has made it worthy for the rest of the world especially for the great powers. Except energy Central Asia is also very important for its location. Its geo strategic location makes it very important and a magnet for great powers like Russia, US, and China (Jaffe, 1998).

Central Asia's 4 million sq.km area is quite important strategically and it is matched with the Heartland Theory of Mackinder. It has significant worth for attack and defence operations. Central Asia is located in the southernmost part of Russia. Pamir Mountain and Tian Shan are located in the East and Kopet Dag mountain range is located in the South which is almost impassable. This territory was a buffer region for both marine geo-strategic realm (with the leadership of United States and its allies in North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its branches including South East Treaty Organization (SETO) and Central Treaty Organization (CTO) and continental geo-strategic realm (with leadership of Soviet Union and its allies in Warsaw Pact (Jaffy, 1998).

The Marine routes of Caspian Sea make it possible to connect Central Asian Countries multilateral ties with Russia, Iran and the Caucasus. Kazakh

plains and low heighted mountains connect Central Asian countries with Russia via roads and railway routes. Central Asian countries are important because they are located between two great powers Russia and China along with strong regional players like India, Turkey, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan. The land locked position of this region makes it quite important for China, Russia and USA.

The presence of USA in the region is due to counter the menace of Iran and Russia in the region who have border proximity with Central Asia. Central Asia is the only possible way to enter in Russia and it's the main reason of Russia's resistance against great powers (China, USA) to enter in the region. Russia's security will be at stake if China and USA make their strong foothold in Central Asia. From the Eastern side, Xing Jiang is located and China will not permit any Trans-regional power or great powers (USA, Russia) to enter this region which is geo politically important for it (Ahmadian, 2006).

Central Asia's geo-strategic location is the core of North-South and West-East communication corridors. Caspian Sea has great significant for the region as it is the source of food and the hub of hydrocarbon reservoirs. Most of these reservoirs are untapped and Central Asian states are not in a capacity to extract them. As energy security is the lifeline of any country, great powers are trying to extract and import these reserves through the diversification of pipeline routes. US and Russia along with China have shown their interests in the region due to its geostrategic importance (Aman, 2009).

Central Asia is the neighbour of the two permanent members of Security Council i.e. China and Russia. The allegations of sharing a common border with Russia and China are manifold. It offers opportunities of diplomatic depth and trade for the Central Asian states as well as it provides a path for the existing world hegemony US, to keep a check on its competitors. Attainment of control in Central Asia is vital for these great powers. China can couple its extensive economic growth and use it as an instrument to achieve a durable political support by enchanting control of Central Asia. China is trying to create a knock-back situation to the US which is eager to magnify its control in the region. Similarly, Russia has lost its position in the region in 1991 and it needs to improve its control in Central Asia so that it may endure to take advantage proxy.

Central Asia is also very important to settle the Muslim bloc as it borders with Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran and Middle East. As the possibility of Muslim bloc is apparent, it will become a continuous threat for the rest of the world. The internal conflicts and severe segmentation in the region makes this quite impossible to be a Muslim bloc over here. "Even if an Islamic bloc were to emerge, for it to be a uniform propagator of radical Islam, due to

such great variance among the countries, is next to impossible” (Akbar, 2012).

USA has both long terms as short term policies in the region. Its short term objectives is to quash Iran and control Islamic fundamentalism whereas establish control over the entire region and control over its energy reservoirs has its long terms objectives. USA foremost interest is to meet the energy requirements of west. Russia’s ultimate aim is to gain geo-strategic leverage over Central Asia as these states were the part of USSR in 19<sup>th</sup> century. Due to its geo strategic importance, USA used Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan in war against terrorism in Afghanistan.

Bush administration especially focused on Central Asian region in its foreign policy due to its geo strategic significance. Iran is trying to draw various security and political benefits by making ties with Central Asian states. Iran has come closer with these states by developing transport and trade links and by establishing several multilateral arrangements. These measures helped their leaders to work for their shared interests in the region to maintain regional security and stability.

Iranian interests in the region are more concerned with security rather than economy. The northern border of Iran mainly populated with Azerbaijanis and it may be affected by the Caucasian conflicts, jeopardizing Iranian integrity. Iran is also in fear of the western influence in the region as it may extend the influence of NATO to Iranian border.

Strategic significance of Central Asia also boosted Turkey to strengthen its ties with this region and support the construction of transit route across Turkey instead Iran and Russia. It will also helpful for Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan to diminish their dependency on Russia. Main interest of Turkey in the region is the BTC (Baku-Tbilisi Pipeline) which will be the main pipeline to the export of oil and gas from the region. In the contemporary era, growing energy demand, the threat of terrorism and ethnic violence is being increased and it is disturbing the global economy. In the absence of any other suitable energy resources, the priority of the entire countries to find out more channels will lead them towards conflicts and clashes. The Caspian region is emerged as a most significant area in term of energy and security and it will be a direct area of contention among various great powers and regional players. USA directly involvement in the region is geo-political as well as geo strategic because it has military bases in the region and economic interests too (Aman, 2004).

#### **GEO-POLITICAL INTERESTS OF PAKISTAN**

**Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Gas Pipeline (TAPI):**  
The Turkmenistan–Afghanistan–Pakistan–India (TAPI) gas pipeline project aims to bring natural gas from the Yoloten and adjacent gas fields in

Turkmenistan to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. The ADB is acting as the facilitator and coordinator for the project. ADB funded a feasibility study of the project in 2004, which was conducted by a British consulting firm PENSPEN. The feasibility study, proposed to lay a 56-inch diameter 1,680 KM pipeline with design capacity of 3.2 billion cubic feet of natural gas per annum (BCFD) from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan up to Pak-India border. Pakistan has been selected Chairman of the Board of TPCL. Leaders of Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India broke ground Sunday on a \$10 billion gas pipeline expected to help ease energy deficits in South Asia and stem tensions in the divided region. Presidents Gurbanguly Berdimukhamedov of Turkmenistan and Ashraf Ghani of Afghanistan attended the ceremony in the Karakum desert outside the South Eastern Turkmen City of Mary, marking the beginning of work on the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India They were joined by Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Indian Vice President Mohammad Hamid Ansari.

In a major development, Pakistan and Tajikistan have cleared a key hurdle as they have reached an understanding on the price of electricity to be supplied by the latter under the Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) 1,000 project, officials say. The project, aimed at easing energy shortages in Pakistan and utilising surplus power in Tajikistan, has the backing of the United States and World Bank, which has approved millions of dollars in financing to execute the programme. Pakistan has been facing an energy crisis, which has disturbed normal and business life and erased 3% off economic growth every year. Aware of the gravity of the situation, the present government has pledged to tackle the shortages but it believes power outages will not end before 2018CASA-1000 project: Pakistan, Tajikistan agreed on electricity tariff (Zafar Bhutta, 2014).

India is also a rising power and it is also interested in Central Asia due to its geo harbors political objectives. India is not ready to give up its efforts for ensuring its strategic presence in the region in Central Asia because other regional players and great powers are also playing their role in the stage of the New Great Game. India is also ready to join this New Great Game along with great powers in Central Asia. According to Central Asia watcher: India cannot afford to be left out in the cold while China, Russia, Pakistan and even the EU devour Central Asia's resources, and cement strategic bases in the region (Lurelene, 2010).

As India clearly knows that it is beyond its reach to gain hegemony in the entire Central Asia because it has too weak and even too late against great powers i.e. Russia, China and USA but he must do whatever he is capable to do in order to ensure its presence in the region for gaining its strategic interests.

**Geo Political Importance:** After the independence in 1991, Central Asian states have tried to penetrate their particular status in the political, regional and economic group. The nascent states tried their level best to rise themselves as a nation. The great game between Great Britain and Russia has ended now. The New Great Game has started on the threshold of 21<sup>st</sup> century.

The Central Asian states are located between two powers Russia and China and some other important countries such as Pakistan, Iran, India and Afghanistan also. Trans-regional powers like India, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan have increased the geo political importance of the Central Asian states. The on-going competition among great powers as well as the rivalry of trans-regional players has created crises in Central Asian region. Central Asian region have to face many challenges and problems like drug trafficking, prostitution, smuggling, unemployment, poverty and weapons of mass destruction have made this region unstable.

Various Islamic movements in Central Asia against central governments to gain independence for example the domestic war in Tajikistan under the leadership of Abdullah Nuri in 1992 and the Islamic movement in Kyrgyzstan in early 2000, has also weakened the region (Ahmadian, 2006).

Moreover, many Islamic fundamentalists like IMU in Uzbekistan are fighting to hold and establish their rule over the country. These fundamentalists are not only the threat for Central Asian countries but also for other states as well. Tulip Revolution, Color revolution, unrest in Kyrgyzstan are the major issues to be solved for ensuring the regional stability. Economic growth is also hampering due to the border disputes among the CARS resulted the absence of mutual trust and cooperation. These border disputes have a very deep-rooted history. After the division of the states by Russia, the conflicts arose by various ethnicities claiming combined borders due to distinct ethnicity. All these factors have resulted fall in economic growth, although World Bank negates that these disputes have any impact over economic growth (Kavalski, 2010).

Water is also very important element and is considerable factor both geo politically and geo economically. The region has very harsh climate. People mainly depend on agriculture which is not developed yet. The issue of water emerged after the independence of these Central Asian states. The Central Asian states are well aware about its importance. It is said that in future oil and water will be exchanged between in Middle Eastern countries and Arab countries (Ahmadian, 2006).

**Geo Economic Importance:** Central Asian states have plenty of natural reservoirs like oil and gas along with various colourful metals for example silver, gold, uranium, manganese and different industrial raw

materials like copper and iron. All these reservoirs enhance its importance in the eyes of west and this region has become an apple of discord among great powers and Trans regional players. For Russia, Central Asian region is like a security territory, USA considers it as a hub of hydrocarbon reservoirs and it wants to gain control over these resources. After 2001, USA has tried to expand its control over the region in the name of war against terrorism (Ahmadian, 2006).

Sea reservoirs have great importance in the eyes of the great powers. Caspian Sea reserves has vital role in the energy strategies of great powers. The great powers have the ambitious to control over these resources to boost up there energy exports in the world market. To attain their vital interests, these powers have to make gigantic efforts to counter geographical hindrance and geo political and geo-strategic challenges (Lear, 2004). The oil quality of this region is quite good. Kazakhstan is one of the richest countries in Central Asia. Its gas reserves have ranked as 6<sup>th</sup> in the world. Among 110 elements of the periodic table, 99 are discovered in this country. It includes gold, uranium, zinc, oil, chromate, gas, copper and gold etc. It has world highest oil reservoirs estimated 30 billion barrels.

Turkmenistan is the world 4<sup>th</sup> gas reservoirs estimated 7.5 Trillion cubic meters. Kazakhstan has 2.41 Trillion cubic meters of gas reservoirs and Uzbekistan possessed 1.84 Trillion cubic meters gas reservoirs. The entire Caspian basin possesses 46 percent of world gas reserves. Kyrgyzstan is the world 8<sup>th</sup> biggest goldmine and it exports a large amount of gold to the world. Moreover, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kazakhstan have a massive amount of quality cotton (Akbar, 2012).

## **CONCLUSION**

Due to its vast tapped and untapped reservoirs, the external players are trying to keep control over this region. Pakistan is taking interest to keep energy from this region. The hold on this region means the complete access over vast amount of hydrocarbon reservoirs as well as their export. The rulers of these states are unable to cope with their internal challenges and external threats. The power of these leaders was reinforced by Russia, China and USA support that had to establish cordial terms with these leaders. Great powers are trying to enhance economic and political cooperation in this region. The leaders of these states had tried hard to create balance among great powers (Russia, China, and USA) in order to gain significance financial benefits from these great powers and regional countries as well.

Due to the lack of infrastructure and capital these states cannot explore these reserves independently. For the development of these oil fields, all great powers have a chance to invest in the region. The Central Asian states have faced many problems externally and internally. It consists of various



ethnicities. Moreover, the region has been experienced so called democracy since its independence and the region aristocrats are not ready to share their power with the public. With the help of Great powers, they are able to gain their purpose. Central Asian region is considered as one of the best choice for great powers and they are trying to intensify their power and using several scanty strategies for their objectives. Geo-political competition in Central Asia has appeared to be more figurative than actual.

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