

JAPAN-PAKISTAN & CENTRAL ASIA IN WAR ON TERROR

Khalil-ur-Rahman Shaikh

PhD Research Scholar, Area Study Centre,
Far East & South East Asia, University of Sindh, Jamshoro

ABSTRACT

Central Asia or "Shredve Asia" in Russian language is widely known as "Middle Asia" to the Russians. It comprised of Tajkistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Krugizstan and Kazakhstan. The region shares common borders with Iran, China, Russia and Afghanistan.

The heartland of Central Asia is Mawaran-nahar (literally "that which is beyond the river" viz Amu Darya) i.e Trans-Oxiana-really the valley of Zarafshan, the Golden River-the River of Rodaki, the Persian poet of 10th century A.D which had nourished the cities of Bokhara and Samarkand of medieval fame and which was the home of the ancient civilization of Sogdiana, based on the capitals of Afrasiab and Panchikant ¹.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE REGION

The states of Central Asia were subjugated by the Red rule of the Soviet Union when the state of Bokhara was finally merged into the country in 1924. The Communist colour failed to paint the states in its color. Distinct religion, culture and literature etc of the states maintained their existence as separate region. They attained their independence when the process of disintegration of the Soviet Union began in 1991.

NATURAL RESOURCES

Central Asian Republics are characterized by vast natural resources especially large reserves of oil and gas. These resources combined with human riches available in the region have a potential to transform this region into an economic power house. Yet this hypothesis is undermined by the fact that all the CARs are

land locked therefore facing problems to open themselves to the world due to instability within and outside the region.

Central Asia always remained important from geopolitical point of view. From middle to end of 19th century, oil areas of Baku were producing half of the world's oil supplies.² Germany's dictator; Hitler tried during World War II to capture Baku and Caucasian oil fields as part of his strategy to dominate the world. The Soviets retained these areas as reserves, choosing to exploit oil deposits in Tataristan and Siberia.³

Oil and gas reserves of Central Asia are estimated as the second largest in the world. The Geologists estimate that oil deposits of Caspian sea can not be compared with those of the Persian Gulf from quality point of view, but they can prove of excellent quality and second alternative of energy supply in the 21st century.⁴ The region possesses undeveloped oil reserves of 10 billion barrels and 6.6 trillion cubic meters of natural gas.⁵ The Caspian Basin estimated 5 trillion US dollars of oil and gas resources.⁶ Kazakhstan has estimated reserves of 79.6 billion barrels of oil and 2.9 trillion of gas. Turkmenistan possesses 10 trillion gas reserves.

GREAT GAME IN THE REGION

Collapse of the Soviet Union gave birth to Great Game aimed at getting control over Eurasia. The essence of this new geopolitical game in Central Asia is two fold: first, control of production of the oil and gas and second, control of the pipelines which will transfer oil to the western markets.⁷ The United States, Russian Federation, India, Japan, China, Pakistan, Iran and western powers are stakeholders to this great game. Their political and economic interest gave birth to rivalry amongst them.

The United States wanted to supercede all the stakeholders and establish its dominance in the region so that its dream to rule the world may not suffer setback. With this view, the US continued its political involvement in Afghanistan even after collapse of the Soviet Union because of the possibilities of an oil pipe line through Afghanistan.⁸

Afghanistan occupies a strategic position between the Middle East, Central Asia and the Indian sub-continent and lies squarely between Turkmenistan and the growing markets of India,

China and Japan etc."Afghanistan's significance came from an energy stand point stems from its geographic position as a potential transit route for oil and natural gas exports from Central Asia to the Arabian sea. This potential includes proposed multi-billion dollar oil and gas export pipelines through Afghanistan".⁹

WAR ON TERROR

The US depended on Gulf countries for oil supply before 1973. Oil crisis in the same year and increase in oil price compelled the country to search for alternative supply line. The main objective of the US to start war on terror, apparently on the pretext of capturing Osama Bin Laden and destroying hideouts of terrorists in Afghanistan, in October, 2001 was to get control over the gas and oil reserves of Central Asia and its supply lines. Other US interests in the region are:¹⁰

- (i) to prevent re-emergence of "Russian radical or ideological expansionism" which could re-create global nuclear confrontation;
- (ii) to cause civil war or break up of nations;
- (iii) to avoid nuclear proliferation;
- (iv) to avoid the development of radical anti-western forms of political Islam;
- (v) to support the spread of democracy and human rights and;
- (vi) To enable the US to have a role in the economic development of the region especially its raw materials.

Japan and Pakistan also considered it in their favour to join war on terror as they found energy interests in Central Asian Republics (CARs). Afghanistan was main hurdle in extorting benefit from the natural resources of the region. Though, Pakistan enjoyed cordial relations with Taliban government of Afghanistan for more than three years, but opposition of the Northern Alliance and other Taliban opponents did not pave the way for it to carry out peaceful transit facilities to CARs through Afghanistan. Japan was at quarrel with Taliban government on the issue of the destruction of the statues of Bhuddha. More over, anti west attitude of Taliban government also kept Japn away. Latter did not enjoy diplomatic relations with the former.

The U.S led war on terror provided Japan an opportunity to root out Taliban government from Afghanistan and assist to establish pro US government aimed at exploiting oil, gas and uranium sources of CARs through Afghanistan via Pakistan's sea ports of Gawadar and Karachi being the nearest sea ports to the region.

Establishment of US protégé Afghanistan government under Hamid Karzai proved against Pakistan and increased tension between the two countries. Afghanistan accused Pakistan of supporting terrorists to act inside the former. India exploited the situation and established its Consulates in Afghanistan which became centres of intrigue against Pakistan and its interests inside and outside the country.

INTERESTS OF INDIA

India is in pursuit of securing its energy interests in Central Asian states. It does not enjoy common border with the region which hampers its economic relations and trade. Strained relations between Pakistan and India minimize the chances of undertaking trade with CARs via Pakistan. Moreover, nearness between the United States and India and US hard stand and United Nations sanctions against Iran on uranium enrichment have roped the hands of India to carry out trade transactions with CARs via Iran. India shares common border with Afghanistan and it is in Indian interest that there should be friendly government which may pave the way for India to take benefit out of natural resources of the region.

Sikri has painted the map of interests of India in the region in the following words:¹¹

"India's interests in the region are fundamentally strategic but also include economic. India's interests are three pronged. From the security perspective, it would like to encourage the development of stable and secular regimes in Central Asia, lest weakened; unstable states with centrifugal tendencies become base for terrorist, separatist and fundamentalist elements, which could link up with counterpart in Afghanistan and Pakistan. In tandem, India's interests coincide with ensuring that any instability and chaos in the region does not lead to a "domino effect" of which there is a serious danger. On the role of major

powers in the region, India is watchful of the possible impact of developments in Central Asia on the Xinjiang region of China that could have a direct bearing on India's security interests. Beyond that India seeks to have a firm foot hold and exercise influence in Central Asia along with other great powers so that this strategically located region does not become an area dominated by forces inimical or hostile to India's interests. In concert, it is in India's interests to track any military presence in the region that could potentially threaten it. From the commercial stand point, India's interests determine that it gain access to the region's rich natural resources, such as oil, gas and uranium, rare earths and minerals, copper, gold, diamonds etc and to acquire, if possible, some specialised defense technologies and defense production facilities."

India has also fear of creation of Muslim bloc in Central Asia which may contribute strengthening of freedom movement in Kashmir. Any advance by Islamic militants in Central Asia could invigorate similar elements active in Kashmir.¹² Consequently; it will prove dangerous for integration of India as other separatist movements inside India may get inspiration and impetus from it. To thwart formation of Muslim bloc and keep Pakistan away from the region, India claimed that Pakistan had obtained uranium from Tajikistan for its nuclear program.¹³

Central Asian states have border with Afghanistan. Strengthening of Jihadi powers and religious extremism in Afghanistan may promote sentiments of jihadi organizations like Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan and it is dangerous for secular governments of the region. This factor has also brought CARs and India together."

Dianne L. Smith in his report regarding relationship of India with CARs wrote:¹⁴

"The breakup of the Soviet Union and the loss of its superpower patron created serious concerns for India. New Delhi feared that Central Asian instability would mirror the chaos of the Caucasus. Border realignment, ethnic disputes, resurgent Islam and civil war would directly affect the territorial integrity of Afghanistan, which, in

domino fashion, would influence Pakistan, Iran and Kashmir. In such an environment, drug trafficking, illegal arms, and crime syndicates flourish, threatening not only Central Asia but all its neighbours. Such a scenario would have inevitable consequences for India's national security. India is also alarmed at Pakistan's call for Central Asia as a strategic hinterland and its Islamic initiatives such as the ECO. As a consequence, India is seeking new security arrangements with the republics of Central Asia."

India has established military base at Farkhor in Tajikistan which indicates growing presence of the country in the region. India imparts training to military personnel of Tajikistan on its soil. "These manoeuvres would be a roadmap for further military exercises with other Central Asian Republics".¹⁵ Professor Stephen Blank of the US military War College analyses the situation as under:¹⁶

"Since more of these bases are air bases, ground forces to defend them will also eventually appear. Moreover, given that India has to fly over Arabian sea and Iran to reach Central Asia by air, Uzbekistan must be involved in this project and at least approve of it so that Indian plane can traverse its air space to and from India. There is hence reason to suspect a quid pro quo. India's security relationship with Uzbekistan based on a common antipathy to Islamic radicalism and terrorism not differentiated by either is rapidly growing and has clearly deepened since 2001. India is even buying a MiG-29 from Uzbekistan upon which it apparently intends to mount an Israeli PHALCON, an AWACS-like system to provide reconnaissance activities over Central Asia and Pakistan".

INTERESTS OF JAPAN

Regarding interests of Japan in the region, the country is interested to diversify its energy imports away from the Middle East and Southeast Asia by using the oil and gas reserves of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.¹⁷

The Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry, Government of Japan announced its national policy of energy in May, 2006. It provides for strengthening ties with resource rich

countries, promoting nuclear energy, and securing energy resources abroad through the fostering of more powerful energy and increasing the ratio of "Hinomaru oil" from the current 15% to 40% by 2030.¹⁸ "Central Asian Plus Japan" dialogue was launched on the initiative of Tokyo in August, 2004 when then Japan's foreign ministr, Yoriko Kawaguchi visited Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Tajkistan and Krygyzstan. The participants of the second meeting of the Dialogue held in Tokyo in early June, 2006 agreed to strengthen cooperation in fighting terrorism, ensuring the safety of regional oil supplies and approved Action Plan calling for joint efforts to combat drug trafficking, fight poverty, promote human rights and boost trade in the region.¹⁹ The Plan urged Japan to support for construction of roads to ensure smooth route from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean.²⁰ Tokyo aims to build roads and pipelines from Central Asia to the Indian Ocean via Afghanistan to carry oil and natural gas for import into Japan. Moreover, Japan also wants to secure uranium abroad as global demand for nuclear power rises aimed spikes in oil and gas prices and growing environmental concerns.²¹

The easiest and nearest approach to CARs to Indian Ocean are ports of Gawadar and Karachi located in Pakistan. Calculated from Dushanbe, capital of Tajkistan, Valadivostok on the Pacific Ocean is some 9,500 km away, Rostov-NA-Donu on the Black Sea, 4,200 km, Abadan and Bandar Abbas on the Gulf around 3,200 km and Karachi and Gawadar on Arabian Sea about 2,700 km and 2,000 km respectively.²²

Japan may take benefit from the nearest approach (Pakistan) to CARs for exploiting their natural resources of gas, oil and uranium subject to fact that normalcy is returned to Afghanistan.

PAKISTAN'S INTERESTS

Central Asia is important for Pakistan from political and economic point of view. The natural resources like oil and gas may help Pakistan to meet its increasing demand in view of expanding population. Moreover, availability of uranium in the region may be used for power production in Pakistan. It may also give relief the country from energy crisis.

Central Asia is expanding economic market and Pakistan may export its products to the region and earn huge amount of foreign exchange.

The increasing Jewish influence and Indian presence in Central Asia are main challenges for Pakistan.

Pakistan has also invented its interests in the region. Afghanistan is gate way to Central Asia and easiest road link to it. The country is separated by Wakhan strip of Afghanistan from the Central Asia. Being easiest, nearest and quickest link on Indian Ocean, the CARs may undertake trade with outside world through the seaports of Pakistan.

While addressing the Foreign Affairs' Committee of the German Bundestag in Germany in April 1994, former Prime Ministr of Pakistan, Benazir Bhutto said:²³

“Pakistan is not only a South Asian country but by virtue of its location and close historic and cultural ties with the Muslim countries to its west, also enjoys a privileged position in relation to Central Asia and the Middle East. We are linked with Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey and the countries of South Asia in ECO, which provides a frame work of great potential in stimulating economic exchanges among the member states”.

In fact, Pakistan fosters common faith, historical background, cultural attachment, trade, commerce and literary proximity with the CRAs. Central Asia was a life-line for land (now compising Pakistan) route commerce to Russia and Europe at a time when the region was open to world market upto the beginning of the 20th century and it was that commercial activity that brought the people and rulers of the region (CARs) to this land and this close contact roped in the pople of the two areas into common political and cultural activity.²⁴ “From the steppes of Kazakhstan to the Arabian Sea and from the Caspian to the mouth of the Indus, this vast stretch of Asian heartland is on cultural one where people have common religion and ethnic history. For many centuries, it is this Central Asian land which served as the great Silk Road, over which passed traders and businessmen, scholars and missionaries, artists and artisans and invaders and conquerors between east and west. The entire area fom the Aral to the Arabian

Sea has actually been on great economic zone which was characterised by free trade and free movement of people".²⁵

After disunion of the Soviet Union and independence of CRAs, natural sources of the region are open to world for exploitation. Pakistan desires to meet its oil and gas needs through CARs.

Pakistan and Japan are handicapped to establish cordial and warm economic relations with CARs unless Afganistan attains peace. The United States started war on terror by landing coalition forces in Afghanistan. It has succeeded in removing Taliban government and partly destroying hideouts of al-Qaeda in Aghanistan. It has installed its titular government there. Simultaneously, it has been facing tough resistance there since inception of war on terror. Japan is ally of the US through Mutual Security Treaty signed in 1951. In case the US gets success in overlapping opponents and normalcy returns in the country, it will ultimately serve the interests of Japan. Pakistan will also take benefits by undertaking trade and commerce with the Central Asian republics.

Pakistan should remain conscious from Indian designs in the region as its unequivocal support to US in war on terror and presence in the region may take Japan away and bring both to evolve common strategy to exploit the natural resources of CARs at its cost. In this regard some proposals are suggested to secure the interests of Pakistan:

- i. Pakistan should redefine its foreign policy towards Central Asia aimed at creating common understanding with India to exploit energy resources in the interests of their respective subjects;
- ii. In the Great Game Pakistan should extend cooperation to all the competitors so that all may take benefit of the energy reservoirs of the region;
- iii. Pakistan should discourage emerging of extremism and religious fundamentalism in Central Asia which will certainly endanger interests of all the countries;
- iv. Pakistan is making efforts for establishing peace in Afghanistan. Stability and peace in Afghanistan will pave the way for exporting of oil and uranium from Central Asia to rest of the world through sea ports of Pakistan.

- v. Peaceful transit route from the region to Pakistan will brighten chances of export its products and goods to Central Asia.
- vi. Pakistan should enter strategic and security dialogues with India, China, the U.S and Russian Federation for ensuring safety of the resources in the region.

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