

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF PAKISTAN-CENTRAL ASIAN REPUBLICS RELATIONS

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Abstract

The centuries-old historical and religious ties encouraged Pakistan to prioritize Central Asia in its foreign policy after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 when five Muslim independent countries emerged: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan. They have economic, political, and strategic prospects for each other; therefore, giving a special place in the foreign policies to their engagement. Since 1991, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics (CARs) are enjoying good and mutually advantageous relations. They are doing economic, strategic, and political cooperation both at bilateral levels and multilateral levels. The centuries-old links between the two regions have provided a strong base for their cordial relationships. Since the independence of CARs, most of the countries of the world established relations with them but Pakistan's engagement with them has special importance because of its geo-strategic location and mutual interdependence. This study is aimed to explore the existing level of political, economic, and strategic relations of Pakistan with all these five republics, the importance of their relations, and the potential, and opportunities they have for each other. It also analysis the problems they are facing in their relations.

Keywords: *Pakistan, Central Asia, foreign policy, Political, Economic, Strategic*

INTRODUCTION

Central Asian Republics (CARs) refer to the five Muslim countries of Central Asia: Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan, which get independence after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991. These landlocked and resource-rich republics appeared to have prominence in the foreign policy circles of Islamabad. The geographic closeness of these Muslim countries had fuelled Pakistan's wish to improve connections and establish cordial relations with them.

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After its independence in 1991, CARs improved relations with Pakistan. Pakistan was the second country to recognize CARs, after Turkey, and quickly established diplomatic relations with these republics. It offered up new avenues for bilateral collaboration with Pakistan with these countries, with which Pakistan had deep historical, spiritual, and cultural links. Pakistan and CARs' bilateral relations are based on shared history, religious identity, cultural values, customs, and geographic closeness. However, apart from the cultural, religious, political, and cultural relations, the two areas established economic ties, mainly with the development of the Silk Route.

Over the previous 30 years, Pakistan and Central Asian republics have increasingly developed their political, economic, cultural, and security ties. Islamabad benefited from similarities with Central Asian people in terms of religion, culture, and customs, creating a favorable environment for improving relations with these nations. Improved reciprocal ties are, in fact, in the national interests of both parties. They have cooperated in a variety of areas, including banking, IT sector, insurance, tourism, regional peace and security, financial stability, development, international trade, energy sector, textiles, pharmaceutical industry, agricultural apparatus, technical cooperation, education, infrastructure and communication development, media exchanges, and so on.

After the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, new countries emerged Called Central Asian Republics. Soon after their independence, Pakistan established friendly relations with them. The following sections of this article discuss in details Pakistan's bilateral political, economic, and strategic relations separately with all five CARs, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to assess the political, economic, and defense relations of Pakistan with the five Central Asian countries using descriptive and qualitative social science approaches. The research problem's data, facts, information, and other supporting evidence are obtained from a variety of secondary sources. The thematic analysis technique is used to assess the data.

FINDINGS AND ANALYSIS

Pakistan-Tajikistan Relations

Geographically Tajikistan is the closest country to Pakistan among the Central Asian Republics. A narrow strip called the Wakan corridor of Afghanistan is the only 16km territory located separating Tajikistan and Pakistan. When Tajikistan proclaimed independence on September 9, 1991, Pakistan was one of the first nations to recognize Tajikistan, formed diplomatic ties, and established an embassy in Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan. Pakistan and Tajikistan to date have signed a total of 64 agreements, conventions, memorandums of understanding, and protocols to increase cooperation in the fields of insurance, communication systems, economic, energy, and investment opportunities, banking, air and land transportation, food industry, agriculture, science and technology, road construction, education, tourist industry, health, culture, and to increase trade. Both countries are also working together to combat illegal narcotics trafficking, terrorism, extremism, and regional security and stability.

Pakistan-Tajikistan Political Relations

Pakistan and Tajikistan formed diplomatic ties on June 6, 1992. The Embassy of Pakistan started its operations in Dushanbe in 1994. In 1997 General Consulate of the Republic of Tajikistan was opened in Islamabad and on February 23, 2005, Tajikistan Embassy started its operations in Pakistan. During the last 30 years of friendship the founder of Tajik National Unity and Peace, the President of Tajikistan, his Excellency Emomali Rahmon has paid official and working visits to Pakistan in 1992, 1994, 1996, 1997, 2004, 2009, 2011, 2012, 2015, 2017 and 2021 respectively. Likewise, the presidents of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan visited Tajikistan on 2-3 June 2002, 28-30 July 2009, 1-2 September 2011, 24-26 March 2012, and 19-22 June 2018. Ministers of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan have paid several visits to Pakistan, including in December 1998, 29-31 January 2004, 20-21 November 2014, and 8-9 December 2015. Pakistan Foreign Ministers visited Tajikistan in April 2002, 1-2 September 2011, and 11-12 October 2018. More than 56 bilateral agreements in different sectors constitute the legal basis of relations between these two countries (Embassy of Tajikistan in Pakistan, 2020).

From the very beginning, both countries have tried to establish good relations and improve inter-regional connectivity. In the summer of 1992, an agreement was signed on trade and economic cooperation, and a decision

was made to build a Peshawar-Jalalabad-Kabul-Baghlan-Kunduz-Tajikistan railroad and created a commission for analyzing the question of building a Khorugh Wakhan Corridor Pakistan highway (Kazakova and Komissina, 2001).

Soon after the independence of Tajikistan, a civil war broke out in the country in 1992 which ended in 1997, took the lives of about 100,000, and displaced about 700,000 people (Kilavuz, 2011). Islamabad gave hands of support to help out the cooperation among various Tajik groups to restore peace in the country. The ceasefire accord was extended because of the Foreign Minister of Pakistan Asif Ali's real commitment. In October 1994, the third round of discussions between the Tajik groups took place in Islamabad as part of the peace efforts (Syed and Khan, 2019). Pakistan also remained a member as an observer of the committee appointed to resolve the crisis. During the civil conflict in Afghanistan, Pakistan took in a large number of Tajik refugees. Many of them are still living in Pakistan.

At the time of the visit of Tajikistan's President to Islamabad in 1994, the two nations inked 12 Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) on trade and economic ties, cooperation among universities in education and research, technical cooperation between anti-corruption agencies, cooperation in the arts and culture sector, transportation sector, and collaboration of the foreign offices of the two nations. The signed Memorandums of Understanding reinforced the legal foundation of their bilateral ties and expanded cooperation and collaboration in a wide range of fields of common interests.

Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf visited Tajikistan on May 30, 2002, and Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz visited Tajikistan on September 13, 2004. In January 2004, the Foreign Minister of Tajikistan visited Pakistan which was followed by the official visit of the President of Tajikistan Rahmanov to Pakistan in 2004. Eight contracts were inked during this visit, including the elimination of visas for diplomatic passports holders, the removal of dual taxation, the collaboration between the justice and education ministers of both countries, the fighting of narcotics trafficking, and collaboration between the state news organizations, as well as the protection and promotion of invested capital in each other countries.

The then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Tajikistan four times during his third tenure on June 17-18, 2014, June 9-10, 2015, May 12, 2016, and July 5-6, 2017. On March 1, 2017, the President of Tajikistan Emomali Rahmon visited Pakistan to take part in the 13th Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organisation (ECO) in Islamabad. On June 2, 2021,

again Emomali Rahmon paid an official visit to Pakistan, during which 12 documents to increase bilateral cooperation were signed. On March 31, 2021, at the Foreign Ministry of Tajikistan, a bilateral meeting between the Foreign Minister of Tajikistan, Sirojiddin Muhriddin, and the Foreign Minister of Pakistan, Shah Mahmud Qurayshi was also held (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Tajikistan, 2020).

During the June 2021 visit of the Tajikistan president to Pakistan in his meeting with the Pakistani Premier Imran Khan, both leaders agreed on increasing collaboration in economic affairs, bilateral trade, energy security, investments, transportation, cultural relations, tourism sector, interregional connectivity, education, climate change, and people-to-people links. During the discussions, the two sides pledged to hold meetings of the Pakistan-Tajikistan Joint Commission on Commercial, Economic, Scientific, and Technical Cooperation regularly to strengthen mutual financial relations by discovering new prospects and channels. They also decided during their meeting to strengthen the Joint Business Council's role in organizing regular trade shows and business conferences, as well as creating an environment that is sociable for investments to attract and assist common ventures. They also decided to improve mutual collaboration in the arena of defense to defeat common security issues and also highlighted the necessity to improve collaboration in counterterrorism, cross-border crimes, and drug and human smuggling. Both nations inked several agreements and MoUs ("Pakistan, Tajikistan agree to further deepen relations in diverse fields", 2021).

On September 16, 2021, Imran Khan visited Tajikistan to attend the *Shanghai Cooperation Organization* (SCO) summit. He also met with Tajikistan's President Emomali Rahmon and held bilateral discussions aimed at strengthening commercial, economic, and investment relations, with a special emphasis on regional connectivity. This was his third visit to Central Asia after assuming power as Prime Minister of the country in August 2018, highlighting Pakistan's increased engagement with the Central Asia Republics (PM Imran Khan in Tajikistan to attend SCO summit, 2021).

Both countries also remain closely engaged in political consultation regarding matters of bilateral interests. On January 11, 2013, in Dushanbe, the first political consultations between the Foreign Ministries of both countries were conducted. As an outcome of the meeting "Program of Cooperation between Tajikistan's Foreign Ministry and Pakistan's Foreign Ministry for 2013-2016" was signed. On May 4, 2015, in Islamabad, the second round of political consultations was held. On February 9, 2016, in Dushanbe city, the third round of political consultations was held. On April

26, 2018, in Islamabad, the fourth round of political consultations was conducted (Embassy of Tajikistan in Pakistan, 2020b).

Pakistan-Tajikistan Economic Relations

From the very beginning, Pakistan and Tajikistan enjoy good economic relations. Soon after the independence of Tajikistan as a goodwill gesture, Pakistan provided 10 million dollars in credit, 0.1 million dollars worth of medicines, and 5000 tons of rice (Rahman, 2007). The 10 million dollars credit was provided to start collaborative projects in textiles, garments, cotton, pharmaceuticals, medical equipment, telecommunication, and agriculture. Islamabad announced a 600 million dollar investment in the Rogan Dam construction at the beginning of the 1990s, however, the civil war in Tajikistan hampered the opportunity (Muzalevsky, 2011).

The two countries have many potential opportunities to increase their engagement in different fields of common interests, but they are facing some challenges which have limited their cooperation. The main impediment to successful commerce, trade, and other forms of collaboration is the lack of smooth connectivity. Both nations have access to each other via Afghanistan, however communication via Afghanistan is very restricted owing to security concerns, significantly impacting commerce, trade, transportation, and a variety of other forms of interactions between the two nations. They have a pretty decent alternative in the shape of the Wakhan corridor, which has been under discussion since the Tajikistan president's first visit to Pakistan in 1992 but yet not materialize. Due to improvements in Tajikistan's political situation, efforts were made again in 1995 to renew collaboration and wanted to establish a direct road between the two republics via Wakhan, but the realization of the project was hampered by the continued conflict in Afghanistan. There is no doubt that the construction of the Islamabad-Dushanbe route will benefit not just the trade between Pakistan and Tajikistan and their commercial links, but also with other CARs. All these plans and agreements are merely theoretical at this point.

The current state of affairs in the area precludes its adoption shortly. Another potential opportunity is that Tajikistan requires access to the seaports of Pakistan through the Maghob-Kulma route, which connects the country to the Karakoram Highway. This is a good opportunity because it provides a good possible way for Tajikistan and other CARs to connect Pakistani ports. The completion of the Murghab-Kulma motorway, which connects Tajikistan and China can connect Pakistan through the Karakoram highway. It will boost Tajikistan's transit trade via Pakistan once it is

operationalized for Tajikistan. There are many other opportunities to improve collaboration between the two countries, therefore, the necessity for stronger collaboration between the two nations is always emphasized.

Pakistan-Tajikistan Strategic Relations

Pakistan and Tajikistan have limited strategic collaboration, although it is developing. During Tajikistan President Rahmon's recent visit to Pakistan in June 2021, the two nations inked several MoUs for collaboration in different areas of common interests, including the sale of Pakistan-made weapons to Tajikistan ("Pakistan to Provide Arms to Tajikistan", 2021). They have also stated cooperating for the restoration of peace in the region particularly focused on the Afghan issue. Pakistan had trained many military officers and senior diplomats of Tajikistan. At the start of 2021, 200 military officers of Tajikistan received training in Pakistan. In addition, Pakistan also offered to help with capacity-building, defense and security, and diplomatic programs ("Tajikistan assured of early completion of Casa-1000 project", 2021). Pakistan's Foreign Minister met with Tajikistan's Defence Minister Sherali Mirzo, during his recent visit to Tajikistan in March 2021, the two nations agreed to work together to combat extremism, terrorism, drug smuggling, and crimes.

Pakistan-Turkmenistan Relations

One of the first nations to recognize Turkmenistan as a sovereign state was Pakistan when it declared independence on September 27, 1991. On May 10, 1992, Pakistan established diplomatic ties with Turkmenistan. Since its independence, the foreign policy of Turkmenistan has been founded on "neutrality", a strategy of collaboration and actively engaging with other parties without taking sides or becoming part of block politics. It has transformed the country into a significant player in international politics and a desirable figure for other nations in international relations. Pakistan and Turkmenistan have signed 47 agreements, conventions, MoUs, and protocols to increase cooperation in the different fields.

Pakistan-Turkmenistan Political Ties

Pakistan and Turkmenistan are enjoying close political relations based on mutual trust and cooperation. Regular bilateral official visits by Heads of Government and States provided a solid basis for their friendship. Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif visited Turkmenistan in 1992, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited in 1994, President Farooq Legari visited in 1995 and 1996, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in 1997, and President Pervez Musharraf

visited Turkmenistan in 2000. Turkmenistan President S. Niyazov visited Pakistan in 1994, 1995, and 1997 (Kazakova and Komissina, 2001). Likewise, on November 6, 2001, Pervez Musharraf again visited Turkmenistan, Prime Minister Jamali visited on December 27, 2002, and Foreign Minister of Pakistan Khurshid Kasuri visited Turkmenistan on May 3, 2006.

Both nations have close cooperation in several areas. During these visits, several agreements were signed, including avoiding double taxation, bilateral trade, financial, technical, scientific, and cultural collaboration, collaboration in military education, and development of tourism, as well as protocols on granting credits. Both countries also enjoy good parliamentary, political, cultural, and social connections. Pakistan has also provided training in banking, English language courses, and training courses to the diplomats of Turkmenistan. Following the visit of Turkman President Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov to Islamabad on March 16-17, 2017, this partnership has entered a new chapter. It is an indication of the fast development of political ties between the two nations. Before this Mr. Sharif had already visited Turkmenistan two times, in May and December 2016. "On November 28, 2021, Pakistani president Arif Alvi also visited Turkmenistan for the two-day official visit" (President Arif Alvi arrived Ashkhabad, 2021). These regular high-level bilateral visits are showing that both counties are giving immense importance to their bilateral relationship.

Pakistan-Turkmenistan Economic Relations

Soon after the independence of Turkmenistan as a goodwill gesture, Pakistan provided 10 million dollars in credit, 0.1 million dollars worth of medicines, and 5000 tons of rice (Rahman, 2007). Both nations signed several deals and MoUs in areas of energy, oil, commerce, natural gas, livestock, agriculture, science and technology, healthcare, education, tourism, and sports to boost their collaboration. These accords strengthen Pakistan-Turkmenistan ties, which benefited both countries economically. Pakistan views Turkmenistan as one of its most important economic partners in Central Asia.

Important to mention that Turkmenistan holds the world's 5th largest natural gas resources. An important project in the sector of their economic relations is the building of the *Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI)* gas pipeline. The development of relations between them especially cooperation in the implementation of pipeline projects have good impacts on both South Asia and Central Asia. In addition to the TAPI gas

pipeline, Pakistan and Turkmenistan have planned to construct an oil pipe, from Chardzhou city of Turkmenistan to Pakistan. Uzbekistan has also shown interest to participate in this project (Kazakova and Komissina, 2001). Electricity import is another attractive area of mutual collaboration as Islamabad is interested in purchasing *Turkmenistan's* electricity.

Pakistan-Turkmenistan Strategic Relations

In the area of defense, bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Turkmenistan has significantly developed. Many officers from the Turkmen Military Services including aviation, naval, and ground armed forces have received training in Pakistan. Both nations have also increased bilateral cooperation in counter-terrorism. It is a potential threat and weakens the endeavors of socio-economic growth. In the joint press conference in Islamabad with Turkmenistan president Gurbanguly, Nawaz Sharif the then Pakistan's Prime Minister, emphasized to do efforts together to eliminate both extremism and terrorism. He emphasized that fighting common hazards is a common objective for both nations (Khan, 2017).

Pakistan-Uzbekistan Relations

When Uzbekistan got independence on December 20, 1991, Pakistan immediately recognized it as an independent country. The two nations established diplomatic ties on May 10, 1992. Islamabad's interaction with the Central Asian governments grew rapidly following their independence, with Pakistani-Uzbek ties taking the central stage. The then-premier of Pakistan Nawaz Sharif, paid a visit to Tashkent in June 1992 to establish bilateral relations with this newly independent country. Following this Islam Karimov, the then President of Uzbekistan also visited Islamabad in August 1992. It denotes the importance of bilateral relations from the beginning (Jaspal, 2017).

Many agreements on economic collaboration, joint trade ventures, cultural and scientific collaboration, education, and tourism have been inked by the two nations from time to time which provided a firm foundation for close ties between them. Both countries consider each other as beneficial neighbors and are working to create friendly bilateral political, social, economic, and defense ties. They have signed 69 treaties, accords, and MoUs since 1992, providing a strong foundation for cooperation in a variety of fields. Trade and economic relations, cooperation in the medical field, agriculture, sports, science and technology, mass media, communications, banking, the tourism sector, transport, anti-terrorism, legal assistance,

education, and defense cooperation are among these fields (Amir, 2017). Pakistan is seen by Uzbekistan as a significant South Asian nation with enormous political, economic, and defense potential.

Pakistan-Uzbekistan Political Relations

Pakistan and Uzbekistan are enjoying cordial relations from the very beginning. These high-level trips laid the base for their cordial relations. After the establishment of diplomatic relations, Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif and Uzbekistan President Islam Karimov exchanged visits. During their meetings, the Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation was signed and several inter-governmental agreements on trade and economic relations were signed. These included hydraulic engineering, power engineering, irrigation, mutual stimulation and protection of investments, postal services, and telecommunications.

In addition, agreements were signed about cooperation in the cultural sphere, health care, science, mass media, and tourism. A joint inter-departmental commission was formed for developing trade and economic relations. It was believed that these agreements would create favorable conditions for increasing cooperation but did not prove much successful. Cooperation was strengthened when Benazir Bhutto became the prime minister of Pakistan in October 1993, and Sardar Asif Ahmad Ali became the foreign minister of Pakistan. He visited Tashkent in 1994 which paved the way for a series of bilateral visits of Pakistani parliamentary, trade, economic, and cultural delegations. Though no major agreement was signed during the visits of these delegations, the meetings had performed a crucial job in bilateral ties and prepared the ground for subsequent summit meetings.

In 1995, Pakistani Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited Uzbekistan twice in spring and fall. She held meetings with Uzbekistan's leadership about the Afghan issues and its settlement, and the construction plans for a transportation route from Termez through Afghanistan to Karachi. During her visit in spring, the idea of drawing up a joint Uzbek-Pakistani draft of a UN resolution regarding the introduction of an embargo on arms deliveries to Afghanistan was approved. Several other agreements were also signed, including reducing income and property tax fraud and avoiding double taxation (Kazakova and Komissina, 2001).

The 9/11, 2001 attacks posed several challenges to Pakistan's ties with CARs, particularly those that share a border with Afghanistan, such as Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. In January 2001, Uzbekistan's

Foreign Minister visited Pakistan and held talks with Pakistan's then-Foreign Minister. Both countries signed several agreements on customs and diplomatic partnerships. In January 2002, they signed an extradition deal to preserve the security situation in the area of their control, and prevent criminals from disrupting the ties, and create any problems for their bilateral relations. On March 5, 2005, President of Pakistan Pervez Musharraf paid a visit to Uzbekistan, his visit played a vital part in boosting their relations. In May 2006, Islam Karimov, the then-Uzbek President also visited Pakistan. During his visit, nine agreements on economic and trade relations and counterterrorism were inked. Both parties committed to strengthening commercial and economic relationships as well as cooperating in counterterrorism efforts. They also intended to establish rail and road linkages aimed in particular Uzbekistan and generally, the whole of Central Asia could utilize the seaports of Pakistan to trade with other countries.

On the special invitation of Shavkat Mirziyoyev, the President of Uzbekistan, Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan did an official visit to Tashkent on July 15-16, 2021. The two leaders discussed the present state of bilateral ties in all matters of common interests and decided to enhance their multidimensional relationships in the fields of politics, commerce & economics, energy, communication, science & technology, education, and culture. During a meeting with the premier of Pakistan, the president of Uzbekistan praised the establishment of centers for the study of Zahiriddin Babur and Alisher Navoi's heritage at the Peshawar and Punjab universities of Pakistan, as well as the initiated cooperation with the Babur and Alisher Navoi institutions of Uzbekistan. They praised the start of academic and cultural cooperation and decided to begin work on compiling an Islamic Encyclopaedia and join with the scholars and professionals of both countries as soon as possible. They expressed hope that the publishing of this important book will help both countries to contribute significantly to the advancement of contemporary Islamic Civilization and interfaith harmony and peace.

During the visit of Pakistani Premier Imran Khan to Tashkent in July 2021, both countries pledged to increase mutual collaboration in all fields of common interests and emphasized the significance of resolving the Afghan dispute through a domestic political process for regional peace and development. They also co-hosted a business forum in Tashkent titled "Central and South Asia 2021: Regional Connectivity Challenges and Opportunities". Several MoUs and agreements were signed to boost bilateral cooperation in a wide range of sectors. A protocol on the sharing of pre-arrival information on commodities transferred over the state boundary, a

transit trade agreement, armed forces training collaboration, and a protocol on the simplifying of visa processes for businessmen and tourist groups were among them. MoU was also signed by Pakistan's Foreign Service Academy, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Uzbekistan, and the University of World Economy and Diplomacy of Uzbekistan. A cultural exchange program for the years 2021-2026 was also signed, as well as a memorandum of understanding on tourism (Raza, 2021).

The opening of Urdu Departments at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy and the Institute of Oriental Studies in Tashkent were other important steps in improving connections and developing understanding between the two countries. The development of an Urdu-Uzbek dictionary, which includes 4000 common words in both languages, is one of the key achievements of their academicians. Scholars from both countries often visit each other's universities to deliver lectures and participate in discussions with students and academics at each other's research and academic institutes. Deep ties have been developed between many institutions in both countries during the past 30 years. For instance, regularly, the Foreign Services Academy of Pakistan, and the National Defence University Islamabad, give training to different officials from Uzbekistan (Noor, 2017).

Both nations have also assisted each other in international forums. Tashkent has continuously supported Islamabad in its fight against terrorism and acknowledged the country's and its people's contributions and sacrifices not just regionally but also internationally. Both governments have also done a significant job in encouraging regional peace processes and economic restoration, with a particular emphasis on trade and economic relations. Both countries want to deepen their bilateral ties, but collaboration in the region is fraught with difficulties due to many reasons. The major challenge is the insecurity in Afghanistan, which borders both Pakistan and Uzbekistan. The Afghan issue must be addressed because regional stability and successful economic cooperation cannot be accomplished until the solution to this problem is materialized. Although there are several ways to look at the relations between these two countries, their common goals and strategies for global and regional security remain constant. As a result of their shared cultural, religious, and historical roots as well as policy aims, they are more inclined to go forward with a positive mentality and work together for regional growth and stability.

Pakistan-Uzbekistan Economic Relations

Pakistan and Uzbekistan also enjoy good economic relations. The first Pakistani industrial and trade delegation visited Uzbekistan immediately after its recognition. Soon after the independence of Uzbekistan as a goodwill gesture, Pakistan provided 10 million dollars in credit, 0.1 million dollars worth of medicines, and 5000 tons of rice. Later on, the credit amount was increased to 30 million dollars for Uzbekistan (Rahman, 2007). Uzbekistan has huge economic potential for neighboring countries. For example, the country is the 17th biggest gas producer in the world, the 9th biggest producer of gold, and the 6th largest cotton producer. Apart from these resources, the country's agriculture sector produces cotton, grain, beef, wool, tobacco, vegetables, and fruits. Agriculture is a major pillar of the economy of the country. There are a lot of potential opportunities in the agriculture sector for both countries to increase their cooperation.

Pakistan-Uzbekistan Strategic Relations

Both countries have also good strategic relations and work together to combat terrorism. The security of both sides has been jeopardized by multinational terrorist organizations since terrorists associated with The Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) in the Pak-Afghan border region were a major source of worry for Tashkent until 2005. During President Musharraf's visit to Uzbekistan in March 2005, he expressed his commitment to Uzbekistan's president to fully eradicate terrorist elements including Uzbek elements from the tribal regions adjacent to the Pak-Afghan border.

The eradication of Uzbeks from tribal regions was generally attributed to Karimov's visit to Pakistan in 2006, during which the two nations signed a counter-terrorism accord, among other things. His visit to Pakistan was remarkable since it was his first visit to the country in the last 14 years (Rahman, 2007). Islamabad had even agreed to share information with Uzbekistan to combat terrorist funding. The agreement specifically mentioned the IMU, which Karimov saw as a potential threat to the national security of his country. The political leaders of both countries are well informed that fighting terrorism is difficult without joint efforts and the support of each other. Many radicalized Uzbek insurgents were shot by the Pakistani army. Notably, the IMU camps in tribal regions were destroyed by Pakistani troops, but still, they continue to operate from Afghanistan. Still, it is a serious threat to the security and interests of both Pakistan and Uzbekistan in the whole region. These groups are working against the public

interests of both nations.

Both countries are also cooperating on the Afghan issue. They consider the stalemate in Afghanistan to be the main hurdle in the way to connecting the two regions. Even at the end of 2000, Uzbekistan was ready to recognize the previous government of the Taliban (1996-2001) to facilitate the connectivity between the two regions (Kazakova and Komissina, 2001). Uzbek-Pakistani cooperation was also notable in settling the Afghan crisis within the framework of the "6+2+1 Contact Group" and beyond. It is an informal coalition and consultative forum comprised of China, Pakistan, Iran, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan, plus two each of the US and Russia, as well as Afghanistan itself. They need close work together to combat the danger of international terrorism and re-establish peace in Afghanistan.

Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Relations

On May 10, 1992, diplomatic ties between Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan were established. The centuries-old links between the two regions have provided a strong base for good mutual relationships between them. Since 1991 both countries have signed 28 agreements, protocols, and MoUs which provided a solid base for their close bilateral relationship. Past events and some well-known personalities have a deep influence on the relations between both countries. For example, Zahir Ud Din Babur, who was the founder of the Mogul Empire in the Indian Subcontinent, was born in the Fergana Valley, now the valley is shared by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan.

Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Political Relations

Pakistan has also good political relations with Kyrgyzstan. The President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, visited Pakistan in 1994, 1995 and 2005. In 1995, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Benazir Bhutto and in 1996 Farooq Ahmad Khan Leghari the then president of Pakistan visited Bishkek. These bilateral trips of high officials provided a solid base for future relations and helped the expansion of bilateral trade as well as economic, political, and cultural collaboration. Both nations signed two agreements on collaboration and reciprocal help in customs affairs and the prevention of dual tariffs during President Askar Akaev's visit to Islamabad on January 17, 2005. They also inked MoU on collaboration between the foreign ministries on a variety of regional and international issues. President Akaev also promised the provision of electricity to Pakistan. He was in Pakistan for the third time on

an official visit. Islamabad has also promised to assist Kyrgyzstan in its quest to get more international recognition.

In March 2005, the two-day official visit of President Pervez Musharraf to Kyrgyzstan also helped to strengthen the partnership and goodwill of Pakistan with Kyrgyzstan. They formed a cooperative working committee to examine the possibilities of importing electricity from Kyrgyzstan. The Kyrgyz President also supported and acknowledged the crucial role and sacrifices of Pakistan in fighting terrorism. He conveyed his gratitude to Pakistan for allowing access to its seaports. Kyrgyzstan also supported the ambition of Pakistan to enter the SCO (Javaid, 2016).

In March 2011, Syed Yousuf Raza Gilani, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan, made a two-day visit to Kyrgyzstan. He meets with the Premier of Kyrgyzstan, Almazbek Atambayev, President Roza Otunbayeva, and the speaker of the Kyrgyz parliament. Mr. Gilani also spoke to Kyrgyz businessmen and investors. During the visit, both countries signed MoU on the formation of a joint business council, and a military training agreement. Senator Ghulam Ali, the then head of Pakistan Chambers of Commerce and Industry was part of the prime minister's team that met with local businessmen to examine the possibility of cooperative investment and trade ("Gilani Visit to Kyrgyzstan," 2011). In May 2015 the then Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif visited Kyrgyzstan and the current premier Imran Khan also visited Kyrgyzstan on June 14, 2019, to participate in the SCO Heads of States meeting.

Collaboration in the education sector between the two nations is also a significant aspect of their relationship. Many Pakistanis are studying in the different educational institutions of Kyrgyzstan, mostly at medical colleges, while students from Kyrgyzstan are also studying in Pakistani Universities in fields such as business management, engineering, Information Technology, and learning the English language. According to the data from 2020 more than 1000 Pakistani medical students are currently enrolled in Kyrgyz universities (Fahim, 2020).

Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Economic Relations

Soon after the independence of Kyrgyzstan as a goodwill gesture, Pakistan provided 10 million dollars in credit, 0.1 million dollars worth of medicines, and 5000 tons of rice (Rahman, 2007). Kyrgyzstan has abundant reservoirs of different types of minerals, including gold, and coal. In 2018, the industrial sector accounted for 27.5% of the total GDP of the country,

which included mining, manufacturing, power, water, and gas. Furthermore, gold has contributed the most to export profit in the previous five years, accounting for roughly 42% of the total earnings of the country from export. Kyrgyzstan has also a solid agricultural basis with room for expansion in the agriculture industry and food processing. Agriculture, forestry, and fisheries account for almost 11% of the country's GDP (Waheed et al. 2020).

There are many potential opportunities for bilateral collaboration in these domains. Despite all these, the trade potential has not yet been fully realized. The inter-governmental Kyrgyz-Pakistan Commission was founded in 1994, but it must be revitalized to fully realize its potential for improving trade and investment. Both nations produce a variety of goods that might be very valuable in each other's markets and compete with other countries products in terms of affordability of price and quality.

Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Strategic Relations

Despite many prospects, strategic collaboration between the two nations is poor. Mostly, it is confined to training facilities. In Pakistan, several Kyrgyz military and foreign ministry employees were trained. In May 2010, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan signed an agreement for collaboration in which the former pledged to give training to Kyrgyz officials in counterterrorism and intelligence sharing. During Prime Minister of Pakistan Yousuf Raza Gilani's official visit to Bishkek in March 2011, the two countries signed a Defence Collaboration Agreement and committed to cooperating in the fight against terrorism.

Pakistan-Kazakhstan Relations

Like other Central Asian countries, Pakistan also immediately recognized Kazakhstan as an independent state after the pronouncement of its independence. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties on February 24, 1992, relations between Kazakhstan and Pakistan have been fruitful and constructive. They have a good working relationship. Since 1992, 39 bilateral agreements, contracts, and MoUs have been signed by them covering all spheres of their relations including trade, economic affairs, cooperation in education, science, and technology, and defense.

Pakistan-Kazakhstan Political Relations

Pakistan was one of the first countries to recognize the independence of Kazakhstan after it declared it on December 16, 1991. Pakistan established its embassy in Kazakhstan on February 24, 1992, and the two nations

established official diplomatic ties. On November 27, 1994, Kazakhstan established its embassy in Islamabad. A Pakistani team visited Kazakhstan in 1991, and the two countries have maintained cordial ties ever since, based on shared perspectives on global concerns, shared understanding, and friendliness toward one another.

President Nursultan paid an official visit to Pakistan in February 1992. That was one of his earliest visits to a foreign country. A proclamation on bilateral ties as well as protocols on cooperation in commerce and economy, research and technology, culture, sport, and tourism were signed during the visit. Nursultan again visited Islamabad in 1993. Benazir Bhutto, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan visited Kazakhstan in August 1995. Several agreements on bilateral collaboration, cooperation in judicial affairs, and avoiding double taxation were signed during her visit. A joint commission of both countries was also established to help the growth of cooperation. In 2003, again President Nursultan Nazarbayev visited Pakistan. It helped to improve further the mutual ties. Both presidents agreed to have annual foreign ministers meetings during their meetings. President Nazarbayev selected during his speech at the Joint Business Forum of both countries three areas of technical parks for biotechnology in which firms of Pakistan may invest.

On August 25-26, 2015, Pakistani Premier Nawaz Sharif along with a high-level delegation visited Kazakhstan and emphasized Pakistan's connection with Central Asia, notably Kazakhstan. He held a meeting with Premier Karim Massimov and President Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan to discuss a variety of matters of mutual interest. They hold talks about measures to strengthen further their relations for common benefits. They addressed a broad range of matters and the whole range of bilateral ties, as well as all the major regional and international challenges. The leadership of both nations decided to improve bilateral collaboration in commerce, trade economics, energy, research and technology, education, and most crucially land and air connectivity.

They also agreed to improve economic cooperation by making maximum use of existing institutional frameworks. Several agreements and MoUs were signed in the domains of trade and commerce, agriculture defense, and disaster management to strengthen bilateral cooperation. Bilateral trade now does not match its actual potential, according to the leadership. They decided to boost it by reviving the current processes. Inter-regional connectivity, defense cooperation, energy, culture, education, and people-to-people contacts were among the areas where they have pledged to

strengthen mutual collaboration (Embassy of Pakistan in Kazakhstan).

The President of Pakistan, Mamnoon Hussain also visited Kazakhstan in September 2017 to attend the OIC 1st Summit on Science and Technology in Astana, as well as the closing ceremony of “Astana EXPO-2017”. Also, on September 23-24, 2019, a legislative delegation from Pakistan headed by Speaker of the National Assembly Asad Qaiser traveled to Kazakhstan to attend the IV Forum of Speakers of Parliaments of Eurasian Countries, which was held in Nur-Sultan. Sheikh Ansar Aziz, the Mayor of Islamabad, attended the UN World Tourism Organization’s VIII Global Summit on Urban Tourism Development in Nur-Sultan which was held from 9th to 12th October 2019.

During the inaugural round of political discussions, conducted at the level of foreign ministries in Islamabad on February 28, 2020, both governments reaffirmed their desire to expand bilateral political cooperation. Both countries have good political relations and support each other on international forums. For example, Kazakhstan supported Pakistan’s non-permanent membership candidacy in 2011 for the years 2012, 2013, and 2016, and Pakistan supported Kazakhstan’s UN Security Council candidacy for the period 2017-2018. Nur Sultan praised Pakistan’s backing for hosting the international exhibition "EXPO 2017" in Astana city which turned out to be a major political success for the country. Kazakhstan also welcomed the assistance of Pakistan for its efforts to join the Asia-Europe Forum and the World Trade Organization (Farwa, 2018). Likewise, Kazakhstan also endorsed the full membership of Pakistan in the SCO. Islamabad backed Kazakhstan for a seat in the Statistical Commission for the period of 2017-2020. Kazakhstan backed Pakistan for a seat on the UNESCO Executive Board (2015-2019).

Pakistan-Kazakhstan Economic Relations

Soon after the independence of Kazakhstan as a goodwill gesture, Pakistan provided 10 million dollars in credit, 0.1 million dollars worth of medicines, and 5000 tons of rice (Rahman, 2007). Recently in April 2020, Pakistan provided a set of demanded medicines to Nur-Sultan as humanitarian aid to fight Covid-19. It was another manifestation of cordial ties between them (Embassy of Kazakhstan in Pakistan). In Kazakhstan, many Pakistani corporations and business firms are also functioning, Tabani is one of the largest among them. In the country, there are around 69 Pakistani business firms and companies registered (Javaid, 2016). Many citizens of Pakistan are also living in Kazakhstan. At present 559 Pakistanis

are living in various cities of the country most of them living in Almaty city. Some of them have small companies while the rest are professionals employed in the gas and oil companies. They are playing a significant job in the relations of both countries.

Pakistan-Kazakhstan Strategic Relations

Pakistan and Kazakhstan are also enjoying strategic and military cooperation. The governments of both countries are cooperating also in counter-terrorism and radicalism to guarantee regional stability and prosperity. An MoU was signed in a meeting between Adilbek Dzhaksybekov, the Defense Minister of Kazakhstan, and Muhammad Akhtar Tufail, the Ambassador of Pakistan to Kazakhstan. At the time Adilbek Dzhaksybekov described it as “an expression of the two countries’ commitment to creating bilateral engagement to improve security both at the regional and national levels (Javaid, 2016).

Both countries have also recently shown a desire in building systematically organized armed forces and technical collaboration in the field of defense since 2002, the Military Attaché’s office has been established at the Embassy of Kazakhstan in Pakistan. The present bilateral partnership is based on the Memorandum of Understanding and Cooperation, signed in Kazakhstan on November 14, 2012. According to the MoU, the key fields of collaboration are:

- Military training.
- Special forces training.
- Technical collaboration in military-related affairs.

The Joint Kazakh-Pakistani Military Commission has also played an important role in their bilateral defense cooperation. All military cooperation and related matters are dealing by this commission. As concerned the military-training cooperation, 38 military officers of Kazakhstan have been trained in Pakistani military training institutes since 2005 (Embassy of Kazakhstan in Pakistan). In 2020, four officers of Kazakhstan’s military completed their training at the International Centre for Peace and Stability (ICPS) of Pakistan. The courses on conducting peace-keeping operations and military observers at ICPS are particularly popular among the Kazakh military. A relatively new and promising area of Kazakh-Pakistani cooperation in the military field is the implementation of peacekeeping

missions under the sponsorships of the UN, in which Islamabad has vast experience. Kazakhstan is also interested to learn from the experience of Pakistan in fighting terrorism. The first counter-terrorism exercises “Dostarym-2017” between their forces were conducted in Pakistan in November 2017 (Farwa, 2018).

The second anti-terrorism joint exercise “Dostarym-2019” was conducted in 2019. The joint military exercises strengthened their operational, strategic, and strategic military collaboration further. Kazakhstan has often expressed a strong desire to strengthen its relationship in the areas of defense collaboration, manufacturing, and training of officials, education, and other related disciplines. In this respect, the officials of the Defence Ministry and the Aerospace Ministry of Kazakhstan also visited Pakistan and participated in the 10th edition of the International Defence Exhibition and Seminar (*IDEAS 2018*) (Khan, 2020). Further, both nations must study and locate numerous untapped possibilities in the domains of the military, defense cooperation, and manufacturing in a precise way.

CONCLUSION

Central Asia is Pakistan’s periphery, and the two regions have been linked for centuries. As one of the main foreign policy objectives of Pakistan is to establish good and mutually advantageous relations with its close neighbors, therefore, Islamabad duly acknowledged the opportunity created by the emergence of CARs after the collapse of the USSR. It extended immediate recognition and established good relations with them soon after their independence. Broadly speaking Islamabad is dealing with all five countries together under a unified policy called "Vision Central Asia". Though the five Central Asian Republics are different from each other and have complicated relations among themselves, Pakistan has maintained neutral relations with all. Regular bilateral official visits by Heads of Governments and States provide a solid basis for their friendships.

They are doing cooperation both at bilateral levels and multilateral levels in economic, strategic, and political affairs. To date, Pakistan signed a total of 64 agreements, conventions, MoUs, and protocols with Tajikistan, with Turkmenistan 47, with Uzbekistan 69, Kyrgyzstan 28, and with Kazakhstan 39 to increase cooperation in the fields of trade, insurance, communication systems, economic, energy, investment opportunities, banking, air transports, land transportations, food industry, agriculture, science and technology, road construction, education, tourist industry,

health, culture, political relations, and defense relations. Pakistan is also working with CARs to combat illegal narcotics trafficking, terrorism, extremism, and regional security and stability.

CARs have also supported and acknowledged the crucial role and sacrifices of Pakistan in fighting terrorism. They are also cooperating on the Afghan issue. They consider the stalemate in Afghanistan to be a main hurdle in the way to connect the two regions: Pakistan and Central Asia. Because of their shared cultural, religious, and historical roots, as well as policy aims, they are more inclined to go forward with a positive mentality and work together for regional growth and stability.

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