

## **New Great Game: Players, Interests, Strategies and Central Asia.**

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### **Abstract**

The hinterland of Central Asia had been the centre stage of nineteenth century imperial rivalry between Britain and Russia. The centrality of Central Asia did not diminish even in the New Great Game, though changed its dimension. The disintegration of Soviet Union changed the geopolitical realities in the region as well as in the world politics as the five Central Asian states, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan emerged. The three factors accrued significance to the Central Asian states in the International Politics. First factor is the geographical location of the region. Its geographical location makes it the landlocked region with no access to the Oceans. Hence it needs well developed land routes to access other countries. The second factor is the closeness of the region to the important world powers such as Russia and China. Thirdly these States are rich in energy resources such as natural gas and oil. These three factors play an important role in initiating the new phase of the Great Game in Central Asia. This research focused on the three dimensions of the New Great Game which are geo-economics, geopolitical and geostrategic with special reference of Central Asia. These three dimensions, according to this research, are interconnected and the development in one dimension affects the other. The major players of this New Great Game are Russia, China, United States, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan. These actors are pursuing their policies to achieve their objectives in the New Great Game. Regional actors such as Russia and China are trying to keep USA out of this region while USA aims to contain Russian and Chinese influence in the region. Another important aspect of the New Great Game is the pipeline politics. The involved stakeholders are trying to build the pipelines which fulfill their aims to dominate energy reserves of this region.

**Key words:** Central Asia, Energy reserves, geo-economics, geopolitical, geo strategic

### **Introduction**

Geopolitics, as the word indicates, studies the relationship between the politics and the geographical location of a region or of a state and its effects on the behavior in conducting the relations with other countries and directions it chooses to play its role in the world affairs. In geopolitics different factors such as economy,

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

demography, technology and strategic options play their role in deciding state's behavior in the world politics.

The world has witnessed the new trends and patterns of geopolitical relations after the collapse of the bipolar system because century long system of two power blocks changed after the disintegration of the Soviet Union (Dhaka, 2005 & Dwivedi, 2006).

Central Asia according to Mackinder's geopolitical theory is the Heartland of the world politics. It has been the chessboard of imperial rivalry existed between British and Russian empires caused by their expansionist policies. So there had been a competition between British and Tsarist Russia for influence over Central Asia owing to its location at crossroads of different civilizations and old silk route. The significance of this imperial rivalry was attributed by Mackinder's geopolitical analysis and named it as heartland. So whoso ever wanted to be an influential power player in terms of political dominance with economic fruition had to turn towards Mackinder conception of Heartland (Fatima, 2012).

The nineteenth and twentieth century imperial rivalry was ascribed as Great Game first by Rudyard Kipling then by Arthur Connally, an officer from the British East India Company. According to Hopkirk" the Great Game involved three phases. The first one began with the expansion of the Russian Empire in the Caucasus and Central Asia in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, generating apprehensions in the East India Company, the defacto power in India. Fearing Russia's intentions, the company sent officers to explore the way, by land to the northern border of India. During the nineteenth century, the British government sought to engage more intensely in Central Asian issues transforming the great game , until then , private in nature into an essential element of the defense of the empire as well as foreign and colonial policy."The first phase of old great game ended in 1907 with the signing of Anglo-Russian Convention. The second phase began with same tactics of spying and manipulating local population and tribes. This phase lasted till 1917. The communist revolution in Russia did not abandon to manipulate the political dominance by whatever means available, and the Bolshevik leadership resorted to "liberate by means of armed revolt, the whole of Asia from imperialist domination" (Hopkirk, 2012). The centrality of Central Asia remained unswerving during the entire period of old great game. This pattern of centrality can be easily found in the latest version of Great Game waged by currency of world powers.

The Great Game resurfaced under the rubric of **New Great Game** with new notions, new techniques, new players and new strategies led by differing objectives and aims.

### The New Great Game Defined

The resurgence of Great Game took place with diversified objectives, strategies, players and interests after a hundred years of period with the centrality of the energy reserves of the Central Asia as well as Caspian Basins.(Foster, 2008 &

Khan, 2006 & Kleveman 2003). It is a geopolitical game hinged on the energy resources of the Central Asian and Caspian Basin region. (Foster, 2008 & Abilov, 2012). This is the complex strands of relations in the economic as well as in the strategic spheres. This region is blessed with the huge reserves of natural resources, corollary is that the region became the theatre of global rivalry which is known as the New Great Game waged after the end of cold war. (Kurecic, 2010 & Khan, 2006). The New Great Game entails two phases emulating the old great game to some extent.

### **First Phase of the New Great Game**

The first phase of the New Great Game caused due to the rivalry of oil companies which are Bidas and Unocal (Abbas, 2012). This phase started from 1991. This was the year when Turkmenistan wanted western oil companies to invest in the oil and gas sector. During this phase the major stakeholders were:

- Central Asian state of Turkmenistan which shares borders with Afghanistan and enjoys close proximity with Pakistan and Iran. Saparmurad Nayazov was the head of the government.
- An Argentinean oil company Bidas. This was the first company which invested in oil and gas sector of Turkmenistan.
- A US based oil company Unocal. This was the company which emerged as the rival of Bidas.
- Taliban regime which came to power from 1994 to 1998.
- USA which supported Taliban regime in the initial years.
- Pakistan which backed the Taliban regime. (Khan, 2006).

At that time Argentinean company Bidas took a step forward and bid for leases in Turkmenistan. Other Western oil companies hesitated to invest in Turkmenistan because there was no legislation for the protection and safety of foreign investors. Bidas changed the whole scenario of the region by proposing pipelines to export the Turkmen oil and gas to the world markets (Rashid, 2001)

In 1991 Bidas was given Yashlar block which was close to the Daulatabad gas field. In 1992 Bidas was given Keimir block close to the Caspian Sea. Keimir started operation in 1994. Bidas started exporting oil from Keimer field in 1994 and also discovered a huge gas field in Yashlar block intended to explore markets in South Asia for the export of gas therefore it put a plan to build a pipeline from Yashlar field to Pakistan's province Baluchistan via southern Afghanistan. The proposed length of the pipeline was 875 miles. This proposal was an open access pipeline through which other countries could transport their gas. This pipeline was of interest to the Afghan warlords because they wanted to export their gas reserves in the northern country through this pipeline. In 1996 Bidas and Afghan government (headed by Burhan-ud-Din Rabbani) signed an agreement for the construction of pipeline and the creation of International consortium. For this purpose Bidas started negotiating with other oil companies. Unocal was an oil company which had experience in Asia. Unocal was introduced to the Turkmen

official for the first time during these negotiations in 1995. Before the finalization of negotiations differences emerged between Bridas and Turkmenistan on the prices and profits of the oil and gas. Rashid (2001) identified another reason for the emerging difference between Bridas and Turkmenistan. That was the Unocal's interest in constructing another gas pipeline from Daulatabad gas field of Turkmenistan without the cooperation of Bridas. Nayazov considered it an opportunity to attract USA to invest in the development of Turkmenistan (Rashid, 2001). USA paid less attention to the Central Asian states immediately after their independence and gave less priority to the CARs in the foreign policy (Cooley, 2008).

### Unocal's Projects in Turkmenistan

Unocal started following projects in Turkmenistan (Rashid, 2001).

- Unocal put a plan to construct a pipeline from Daulatabad gas field to the Pakistan's city Multan. Daulatabad field has gas reserves of 25 trillion cubic feet.
- Unocal also developed a group of oil investors. This was Cent Gas consortium. In this consortium Unocal reserved 70 percent ownership. 15 percent was given to Delta and 10 percent was given to Russian state owned company Gazprom. 5 percent shares were given to Turkmenrosgaz.
- Unocal also signed an agreement for Central Asian Oil Pipeline Project. This pipeline will transport oil from Chardzhou in Turkmenistan to Pakistan's oil terminal. The plan was to deliver one million barrel per day. Through this pipeline the producers of Central Asian states of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan can find markets in Asia.
- Unocal formed a group with US private Foreign Oil Companies in Washington to pursue their interests in Caspian region.

The USA started bypassing Russia in major projects. This was advantageous situation for the Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. Uzbekistan supported NATO initiative to establish Central Asian NATO battalion. Two alliances emerged out of this scenario (Rashid, 2001)

- a) First coalition was of USA, Uzbekistan, and Turkmenistan. USA was also using Pakistan, Turkey and Israel for its interests.
- b) Second alliance was of Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan.

During this Afghanistan witnessed a major development as Taliban captured Kabul. The regional scenario explained by Rashid (2001) was the regional grouping. In the one group there were USA, Pakistan, Taliban and Saudi Arabia. While in the second group there were Russia, Iran and Central Asian States. This scenario clearly showed the USA's interests in Taliban regime due to the pipeline strategy. At the same time differences emerged between Unocal and Bridas when Bridas charged Unocal of stealing its idea of pipeline. As Taliban captured Kabul Unocal considered it viable to construct a pipeline.

Turkmenistan blocked all oil and gas fields of the Bidas. It cancelled all the agreements with the company. But Bidas started negotiations with Taliban. Bidas offered Taliban to build pipeline without putting the condition of internationally recognized government in Kabul (Rashid, 2001).

Bidas used relations with Saudi Prince Turki to influence Taliban. On the other side USA used Pakistan and ISI to influence Taliban. Pakistan and ISI fully supported Taliban regime in Afghanistan. Both the company projected that their pipeline was to bring peace in the region. Bidas established its office in Kabul and its chairman concluded agreements with the Taliban. Unocal provided humanitarian support and initiated aid programs in order to hold Taliban in their orbit of influence. Taliban at the same time was fighting civil war with Northern Alliance (Rashid, 2001).

During the conference in Ashkhabad, an agreement was signed by Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Unocal. Under this agreement Unocal was to raise finances and to start the construction of the pipeline by 1998. The whole Game changed when Taliban were defeated by Northern Alliance in the Mazar-e-Sharif. Unocal linked the construction of the pipeline to the peace conditions in the Afghanistan. After these developments USA started looking other options to transport Turkmen gas. A major change in the USA policy towards this region was seen by its support for the Turkmenistan-Turkey gas pipeline via Iran. The USA support for this pipeline was a major blow to the Afghan pipeline. On the other hand Taliban ran out of time to control the internal situation in the country. Unocal's interests got another blow. The Iran and Australia's BHP petroleum announced that it would provide finance to construct Iran Pakistan gas pipeline. The major advantage of this pipeline was that it was not to cross from the conflicted areas (Rashid, 2001).

In 1997 Unocal, Pakistan and Turkmenistan signed a pricing agreement for the transport of Turkmen gas. Taliban were given transit fee of 15 cent per 1000 cubic feet. During this agreement the internal situations and the civil war in Afghanistan was ignored. In 1997 Bidas again started making efforts to influence Taliban and invited Taliban delegation to visit Bidas executives. This delegation was headed by Mullah Ahmad Jan. On the other hand Pakistan influenced Taliban to visit Unocal also. This delegation was headed by Mullah Muhammad Ghaus. The Taliban delegation once again wanted USA to recognize their government in Afghanistan (Rashid, 2001) when Taliban regime was not recognized by the USA they hindered the ideas of US oil companies to construct pipelines. USA decided to end the Taliban regime in Afghanistan and was waiting for better opportunity. This was gained after the event of 9/11 (Khan, 2006).

In 1998 civil war broke out in Afghanistan. This damaged the plans of both companies to construct pipelines. USA withdrew her support from the Taliban regime. There was no possibility of peace in Afghanistan. USA bombed the camp of Taliban leader Osama Bin Laden in 1998. After this the Unocal cancelled its CentGas consortium. The change in the prices of the global oil industry Damaged Unocal interests badly. It also cancelled the construction of pipeline in Turkey. Unocal's offices in Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan were

## **South Asian Studies 29 (2)**

closed. Bridas also realized that it was not possible under such conditions to construct pipeline in Afghanistan. No US oil company was ready to finance or construct the pipeline (Rashid, 2001).

The civil war in Afghanistan and the USA efforts to capture Taliban leader Osama bin Laden brought to an end the first phase of the New Great Game. The second phase started when USA waged a War against terrorism in which again Central Asia has a geopolitical role to play.

### **New Great Game: The Second Phase**

The rivalry among major powers in Central Asia entered into a new phase when USA started War against Terrorism (Burlles, 1999). Kleveman (2003) stated that the major players of the second and major phase of the New Game are different from the classical Great Game. In this New Great Game the new players try to achieve their interests and objectives in the region (Saidmuradov & Puseva, 2010). The involved actors can be identified as regional and trans-regional players.

### **Major Players**

- The Regional stakeholders in the New Great Game are Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey. Dhaka (2005) states that these countries are using their historic, cultural and geopolitical links to establish control over the Central Asian energy reserves and to benefit from the strategic position of the region.
- United States is the Trans regional actor in this New Great Game.
- Smith (1996) & Khan (2006) have identified that apart from regional and trans-regional actors the important aspect of the New Great Game is the role of Central Asian states. Their quest to use the major power rivalry to benefit their economy and to play their role in the world affairs is a turning point in the New Great Game.

The set of relations in this part of the world and its economic and strategic importance bears effects on the world politics. This region is witnessing the attention of the global powers. Major Powers are employing different strategies to achieve their objectives in this part of the world. Therefore these relations should be studied as the geo-economic and geostrategic trends and should be analysed at the global level. (Kurecic, 2010)

### **Three dimensions of the New Great Game**

The New Great Game in Central Asia has three dimensions:

### **Geo-economic Dimension**

This dimension revolves around the quest of the major powers to gain control to the energy reserves of the region and to secure energy supplies for the future.

### **Geo-strategic Dimension**

This dimension revolves around the security interests and strategies of the actors involved in the Central Asian region. This is linked with the strategic policies of the players to create hegemony over the energy resources.

### **Geo-political Dimension**

This dimension includes the role of Central Asian states and their strategies to find their own place in the world politics (Smith, 1996). Two factors are important in this dimension. These are energy reserves and the location of the region. Central Asian states are focusing these factors to enhance their importance (Ahrari, 1996).

In order to study the geo-economic and geostrategic relations and the complex nature of interest wars it is important to have an in-depth study of the Central Asian region.

### **Central Asia in New Great Game : Role and Patterns**

Central Asia is a landlocked region which is located at the Heart of the Eurasia. The clear definitions of this region are not given and there are different criteria according to which the region is defined in the academia. The historical facts revealed that the region was consisted of a large landmass which started from the southern parts of the Siberia and runs to the Pakistan Afghanistan and Iran. It also included Caspian Sea, former Soviet Central Asia, areas of Inner China, Chinese province of Xinjiang, areas of Tibet and Inner Mongolia. In historical definition the vast landmass was called as Turkestan (Kurecic, 2010).Kurecic (2010)stated that Central Asia's borders are not clearly defined according to the ethnical and cultural criteria. Central Asian population is a mixture of different ethnic groups. For instance in Kazakhstan the population comprises the mixture of Russians and Kazakhs. Central Asia inhabited by the Russian minorities owing to the colonization of the Central Asia by Russia in the nineteenth Century.

### **Geo-Political Profile of Central Asia**

The disintegration of Soviet Union in 1991 disintegrated the vast land mass of Central Asia into the smaller states. These are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan.(Chander & Arora, n.d) Kurecic (2010) estimates that the total population of the Central Asian states is about 60 million and the total area of the five states is approximately four million square kilometres.

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

Regional Geography informs that Central Asia shares borders with the major powers of the region including Russia and China and is also close to the countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran which are facing instability and are the theatres of the war on terrorism (Najmitdinov, 2007 & Foster, 2008). Kazakhstan's total area is 2.7 million square kilometres and it is the largest of five states. The smallest Central Asian state is Tajikistan which occupied the area of 143,100 sq. km. (Dhaka, 2005)

Kurecic (2010) stated that Caspian Sea is also considered as the part of the Central Asian region. Eastern part of Caspian Sea touches the Central Asian region. Caspian Sea is a landlocked water reserve (Foster, 2008). Caspian Basin is possessing huge energy reserves. It also increases the strategic significance of the states, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan, which are in possession of the parts of Caspian Basin. These energy reserves of Central Asia as well as Caspian Basin are the need of the economies of the world. In order to benefit from these reserves it is important to develop a geo-strategy in connection to the geo-economy. The energy strategy according to Kurecic (2010) in this region depends on different prevailing strategies.

Physiographic features mark it with steppe grasslands, deserts, plains, mountains and small water reserves. Dhaka (2005) defines the physiology of the region that the steppe grasslands are situated in the northern part of the region. In the western side of the region there are plains. The eastern and southern sides of the region are having mountain peaks. The mountain ranges included Koppeh Dagh of northern Iran, Afghanistan's Hindu Kush mountain range, Pamir mountain range which becomes part of Tajikistan southern side and the Tien Han mountain range which runs to the western China. Deserts and semi deserts are also parts of the Central Asian region. In Turkmenistan there is a desert of Karakum (Turkic: Black Sand). The western part of the Uzbekistan is a desert area which is Kyzylkum (Turkic: Red Sand).

Central Asian region has an inland water system. Its rivers and lakes are locked inside the region. The major rivers of the region are the Amu Darya and Syr Darya, both the rivers have tributaries which are the major source of the water in the Central Asian states. The largest river of the Central Asia is the Amu Darya. This river covers the distance of 1,578 miles and joins the Aral Sea in the north-westward. The main tributaries of the Amu Darya included Zeravshan River and the Kashka River. Both these rivers flow to the desert of Kyzylkum and end there. (Dhaka 2005)

The climate of the region is dry. The irrigation in the region is dependent on the water system of the region. The region experiences very low rainfall. The evaporation rate is high. (Dhaka 2005). Inter-regional trade is the vital factor of the economy of these states. The infrastructure in the region during the Soviet domination shows the dependency of these states on Soviet Union in the economic sphere. Khan (1994) stated that the infrastructure in the region is not sufficient to allow these states to benefit the opportunities of accessing the world markets.

After the disintegration of the Soviet Union the states of Central Asian were given independence. Kurecic (2010) identified that the dependence of these states on Soviet Union before their independence cost them heavily and they were unable to manage the economic affairs once they were declared independent. Immediate after independence the GDP of these states declined. They were not integrated to the world markets therefore it became a reason for the decline of GDP. After an immediate blow the GDP of the states started in the late 90s. In 2009 Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan witnessed the trends of increase in GDP. Major contribution in the increase in Kazakhstan's GDP was the oil export.



Map of Central Asia

Note. From "The New Great Game: Rivalry of Geo-strategies and Geo-economies in Central Asia" by Peter Kurecic, 2010, *Hrvatski geografski glasnik*, 72(1), p.22.

## The Geopolitical Environment of Central Asia

### Three parameters

There are three parameters according to which Central Asia's importance can be judged:

The geopolitical environment of Central Asia can be analyzed by understanding the neighboring countries and the involving powers. Central Asia is having major powers as her neighbors. Russia is the major power of the region as well as the former colonizer of the Central Asia. Central Asia touches Russia in the north and shares eastern borders with China which is an economic giant of the century. Iran and Afghanistan are neighboring countries at the southern border. It shares close ethnic and cultural links. This region is also experiencing close proximity to the countries like Pakistan. Central Asia and Pakistan share historic links and the strands of tribal movements also connect to Pakistan. Turkey is

## **South Asian Studies 29 (2)**

another important country with which Central Asia shares historic connections (Khan, 2006 & Dhaka, 2005).

In the geopolitical environment of Central Asia, according to Dhaka (2005), some trans-regional links are also important. Among these the USA and other powers, which join hands with US, are extending diplomatic ties with the Central Asian states. Central Asia's relations with the regional and trans-regional powers develop a geopolitical environment which enhances their importance in the global politics.

### **Geopolitical location**

Central Asia is a landlocked region (Balooch, 2009). It shares border with the major regional powers. On the northern side it touches Russia. On the eastern side it shares borders with China. On the southern side it borders with Iran and Afghanistan. Some trans-regional powers are also pursuing their policies in the region which includes USA and Turkey. The proximity of Central Asia to the regional powers and the involvement of global players in the region enhance its geopolitical importance (Khan, 2006).

### **Energy Reserves**

Wasi (2002) stated that Central Asia is a region which is blessed with the vast reserves of natural resources. The most notable are oil and gas reserves. According to her this region is hosting the second largest energy reserves. This region is also rich in colorful metals such as gold, silver, magnesium and uranium etc. these natural resources increased the geopolitical importance of the Central Asia. The global players and the regional powers are trying to dominate these energy reserves and are pursuing their policies to further their interests.

### **Geostrategic Pivot**

The geostrategic importance of this region is the result of geopolitical and geo-economic significance. Mackinder in 1904 stated that the Heart of the Eurasia would play an important role in the world politics. According to his Heartland theory the power which controls the heartland would control the world affairs (Blacksell, 2006). Mackinder's Heartland includes the Central Asian region also. Central Asia became the centre of attraction for the strategic players like Russia and China and some Trans-regional powers like USA. The region enjoys close proximity with the regional powers as well as the important countries which are now a days centre of strategic and security interests. These are Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. The location and the battle for interests among the involved powers in the region makes it strategic pivot.

**Interests of the Major Actors in Central Asia**

To understand the New Great Game it is necessary to discuss the interests and the strategies of the involved actors in the Central Asian region.

**Russia**

Russia is an important regional power. Kurecic (2010) stated that Russia is enjoying maximum benefits in the region due to its important geographical location. The basic objectives of Russia according to Malashenko (2013) are:

- To stabilize the region in order to prevent any outside power to exercise influence in the region and to maintain her own influence.
- Russia supports the authoritarian political system in the region. Malashenko (2013) states that Russia finds authoritarian system more helpful in achieving her objectives in the region.
- This region is the hub of energy resources which increased its importance in economic sphere. One important Russian objective is to monopolize the energy transit routes emanating from the region. Russia wants to control the pipeline routes to extract maximum benefits of regional energy resources and to secure her energy reserves (Malashenko, 2013, Gorodetsky, 2003).
- To protect Russian minorities living in the Central Asian states. (Dhaka, 2005 & Malashenko, 2013).
- To eliminate and stop the spread of Islamic radicalism.
- To contain United States' domination and influence in the region.

Russian strategy in the region, according to Kurecic (2010), is opposite to the western geo-strategy but Russian and Chinese interests converge in the region in economic as well as strategic realms. Russia is playing an important role in the exploration, exploitation, development and transportation of the energy resources. Russia's role in the export of Turkmen gas and Kazakh oil is very important step in the Russian policy towards the region. Duarte (2012) stated that Russia is exploiting the natural resources of the region. Russia purchases the oil and gas at the very low prices and then sales it to the world markets at very high prices. Russia is also using her strategic location to maintain her dominance in the region. The geographical location of the Russia provides her with an opportunity to control the pipeline routes for the export of the oil and gas reserves to the global markets. Malashenko (2013) states that Russia is focusing to play an important role in the energy projects in Central Asian states e.g. in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan Russia is an important stakeholder. Therefore Russia in order to serve her interests is trying to take the region in her orbit to eradicate extremism and terrorism from these states. Russia takes this region as a backyard and near abroad after 1991 (Gorodetsky, 2003 & Abilov, 2012). To maintain her hegemony in the region Russia maintains bases in the Central Asian states of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (Cooley, 2008). Central Asian states are also important for Russia from the

perspective of NATO enlargement. CARs, for Russia, serve the role of buffer zone against NATO enlargement (Gorodetsky, 2003).

## **China**

China is an important regional power as well as the emerging economic power in the world. Fu (2010) identified aspects around which Chinese interests revolve in Central Asia. China wants peace with the regional countries which include Russia and the Central Asian states with peaceful borders and stability to control the situation in Xinjiang province. The security dimension of Chinese interests is focused on the point to contain the nationalist elements in Xinjiang (Fu, 2010 & Burles, 1999). As China is world's economic giant, its energy needs are increasing day by day (Burles, 1999). China is an energy hungry country (Petersen & Barysch, 2011). Continued energy supply is important for Chinese economic growth in the future. This need is an important aspect of China's interests. It has always wanted to have control of the energy reserves of Central Asia to ensure future energy demands with explicit intentions to exploit the energy reserves and the location of the region in order to determine her role outside this region. The increasing control of the Central Asian region will give opportunity to China to secure a geopolitical position. China wants to establish multilateral relations with the CARs. China wants to develop partnership with the CARs in trade, energy and transportation sector (Fedorenko, 2013).

China is the fastest growing economy in the world. In 2004 China became second largest consumer of petroleum. This growing economy needs continued supply of energy and this demand can be fulfilled by the Central Asian energy reserves (Fu, 2010). Energy strategy of China has two aspects.

- To focus oil reserves of the Central Asian region.

To fulfill this demand Chinese National Petroleum Corporation signed deals with Kazakhstan which holds largest oil reserves in Central Asia. By this China aims to play her role in other oil projects in Kazakhstan and then makes her way to the Caspian energy resources.

Another aspect of China's energy policy is to focus the gas reserves. China, in order to achieve this objective is supporting the construction of pipelines to have an access to the gas reserves of the region. Turkmenistan hosts the largest gas reserves in the region. Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline started working in 2009. This pipeline is a major success of Chinese energy policy (Fu, 2010). China is also playing her role in other sectors such as security, trade and economy. Chinese policy aims economic integration of the Central Asian region through different regional organizations. For this purpose China is playing an active role in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (Fu, 2010).

**United States**

US is pursuing following interests in the Central Asian region (Blank, 2008):

- To contain Russian influence in the region.
- To contain Chinese involvement in Central Asia.
- To provide opportunities to the Central Asian states to access world markets outside the region (Blank, 2008).
- USA, according to Fu (2010), wants to control the oil and gas transportation routes to create antimonopoly over the resources of the region.
- Fu (2010) identifies an important objective of the United States which is to promote western democracy in Central Asia.
- To eradicate terrorism and Islamic extremism from the region(Weitz, 2006& Wishnick, 2009).
- Khan (2006)stated that US wants to establish bilateral relations with all the countries of the Central Asia in order to achieve the objectives.
- One of the major interests of the United States is to create a Greater Central Asia including Afghanistan as the centre of the concept. Frederick Starr first gave this concept in 2005. (Saidmuradov & Puseva, 2010)

To achieve all the above stated objectives USA is following the strategy to contain Russia and China in the region. To achieve the policy objectives, according to Starr (2005),USA is developing relations with the regional governments. USA is using different strategies to contain Russian and Chinese monopoly. These can be achieved by enhancing regional cooperation, promoting economic activity and by developing network of oil and gas pipeline network which can be used for two purposes i-e- to enhance trade and economic activity, to transport energy reserves of the region to the west. The United States' prime motive which is to contain Russia and China can be achieved by promoting regional integration. Regional states cannot play their role if they remain isolated Starr (2005) or if any opportunity to link their economy to the global market would be denied to them. Through economic activity the Russian exploitation of the natural resources would be contained (Starr, 2005). For a successful strategy it is important that regional governments must consider US developmental projects as beneficial opportunities (Starr, 2005)rather perceiving those projects as a threat. USA is encouraging Central Asian governments to introduce following reforms:

- a)Regional governments should conduct free and fair elections to promote democracy.
- b)Judicial reforms should be introduced
- c)Civil rights projects should be encouraged.

Central Asian region claims its importance after US started war against terrorism. US led war on terrorism brought new era of opportunities for Central Asia (Jonson, 2006). US focus in Central Asia after 2000 shifted to eliminate (Kurecic, 2010):

- Human trafficking
- Drug and narcotics

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

- Arms sale
- Religious extremism and terrorism.

To achieve the geopolitical objectives US focused on three countries which are Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan. All the three countries are important regional state as they share borders with China. Kurecic (2010) argued that these countries are strategically important and USA wants to eliminate the influence of Russia and China in these countries. USA wants to limit the Chinese strategic as well as political influence in these countries. Jonson (2006) stated that Tajikistan is a gateway to the Central Asian region from southern side. This becomes the route for drug trafficking, human trafficking, movement of weapons and ideas regarding extremism. Therefore US is paying special attention towards Tajikistan in order to achieve desirable results in the Afghanistan. Due to its strategic location Tajikistan has an important role to play in this New Great Game (Jonson, 2006).

USA wants to control the pipelines and the basic aim is to end the Russian monopoly in the pipeline sector. USA is having bases in the Central Asian states. These bases were established under the label of counter-terrorism and with the presence in the region US exploits the routes and communication links of the regional states. US support all those projects which allow no role for Russia (Kurecic, 2010). The US interests faced major setback when Central Asian states demanded to vacate the bases. The step was taken firstly by Uzbekistan government when US criticized the government operation against rebels in Andijon (Kahn, 2006).

US took some steps in order to achieve energy strategy.

- In 2005 US purchased an oil company Petro Kazakhstan which is a major step to achieve the energy objectives.
- In 2006 it also achieved China International Trust and Corporation.
- US also signed different agreements for pipelines with the Central Asian states.

## Iran's Interests in Central Asia

Iran is an important regional player. It shares borders with the Central Asian region. Iran's security stakes are high in region. Iran is pursuing following interests in the region:

- Smith (1996) argues that Iran wants stable and peaceful Central Asia.
- Iran wants access to the Central Asian oil and gas reserves and wants to control the routes which export the energy reserves to the global markets.
- To maintain cultural links with the Central Asian states.

Iranian strategy in the Central Asia revolves around Iran's cultural, security and economic concerns. Iran's prime objective, according to Smith (1996), is the stability in the Central Asian region. The fragile regimes and the instability in the states are major concerns for Iran. But the isolation of Iran at the international level prevents it to take any action regarding security concerns. Any action taken

by Iran would be unacceptable to the Russia and United States. Therefore Iran is dependent upon other regional actors such as Russia for the security and stability of the Central Asian states.

Iran is focusing to strengthen her relations with the Central Asian states. Turkmenistan is a Shia state so Iran is using the close cultural ties to take more benefits from the Turkmen gas reserves. Iran views Turkmenistan as a gateway to the Central Asia. Therefore establishing relations with the Turkmenistan would mean access to other regional states (Kurecic, 2010 & Behzadi, 2010)

Iran, according to Kurecic (2010), is pursuing the pipeline strategy which is to transport the Caspian Sea oil to Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Bandar Khomeini to be exported to the world markets. The success of Iran's strategy is based on gaining the influence in Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. But here other major actors involved in the region are such as Russia and United States would not accept any role by Iran in the region.

Iran also enjoys some advantages in Central Asian region. The ethnic ties with Tajikistan are strong. Tajiks follow Iranian culture. Dhaka (2005) identifies another advantage that is the model of Islamic government in Iran. This can bring Iran in close relations with Central Asian states in future. Dhaka (2005) stated that Iran's role in Central Asia becomes limited when it comes to the economy. Iran's economy faced major declines after the revolution of 1979. Then war with Iraq in 1980s becomes major setbacks for Iranian economy. Therefore Iran is economically not able to play a significant role in the region (Dhaka, 2005). Iran is trying to establish economic bloc including countries of Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to promote trade with the Central Asian states (Balooch, 2009).

Considering the economic conditions of Iran and her isolation at the international level it is very clear that Iran is unable to provide aids and assistance in cash to these countries. Iran can establish infrastructure and can initiate joint ventures (Dhaka, 2005).

To increase her influence in the region Iran-Turkmenistan gas pipeline is important for Iran. Through this pipeline Turkmen gas would be exported to European markets via Iran. Iran also concluded agreement with the Kazakhstan for oil pipeline which would transport 2 billion barrels of oil from Kazakhstan to Iran crossing Caspian Sea (Foster, 2008).

With the above stated scenario it is clear that Iran has a limited role to play under these conditions.

### **Turkey's Role in Central Asia**

Turkey is the regional actor in the New Great Game. Turkey is the US ally and trying to enhance its role in the global politics by engaging herself in the Central Asia which is considered as one of the most important strategic region (Fedorenko, 2013). Kurecic (2010) stated that Turkey herself holds strategically important position. It is situated at the location where it serves as the bridge between The

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

Middle East, South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea regions. Turkey's main aim is to play a significant role in transporting the energy resources of Caspian region, Middle East and Russia to the Western markets (Ipek, 2006). Turkey's strategy involves the completion of East-West Energy Corridor. This Energy Corridor is important as it aims to transport the energy resources of Caspian Basin and Central Asian region to the western markets without using Russian territory. The main aim is to bypass Russian role (Ipek, 2006). Turkey's role is enhanced by the following factors:

- It is a stable country
- A reliable western ally
- It is a country which allows routes of pipelines from Central Asian and Caucasus region to the west
- Its interests do not clash with the interests of the Western powers
- Turkish model of secular Islam is more familiar to the Central Asian people
- Turkey has strong ethnic ties with the Central Asian states

Dhaka (2005) & Ahrari (1996) stated that Turkey was used by US as a card to play in Central Asia. In the beginning Turkey focused education, telecommunication, transportation sectors and cultural linkages. But the western support reduces in the aftermath of the issues of Kurdish human rights. The unrest in the Kurdish areas makes them unfavorable for the pipeline routes. This reduces Turkish importance and as a result Turkey lost her influence in the region. Central Asian states also rejected Turkish role as a regional dominator.

## Pakistan

Pakistan's interests are derived by three main factors. These are:

- The Muslim identity and the historical cultural links with the region
- Pakistan is trying to take benefit from the geographical location. Pakistan is located between the regions of South Asia and West Asia. As Central Asia is a landlocked region it needs outlets to the world. Pakistan through its Karachi port and now recently developed port of Gawadar can be a shortest route for the Central Asian states to the outside world.
- Pakistan is hopeful about her gains in the Central Asian markets due to the experienced Business community which wants to extend their activities in the region.

Pakistan's main interests in the region are:

- To find a place in the economic activity and market development of the region.
- To enhance her trade with the region
- On the security front Pakistan is a victim of terrorism and same is the threat to Central Asia. The Uzbek tribes are also a part of terrorist activities. Pakistan wants to have bilateral relations with these states to curb the extremist elements and threats.

Pakistan has signed many bilateral trade agreements with the CARS. Pakistan is also building gas pipeline From Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan this pipeline will finally reach India (Khan, 1994& Abbas, 2012).

### Geo-Economic Dimension of the New Great Game

Geo-economic dimension of the New Great Game represents the rivalry of major powers for the energy resources of the Central Asian region. Energy reserves of the Central Asia and Caucasus are the main focus of the New Great Game. Malashenko (2013) highlighted the significance of Central Asian region by stating that there are transit routes for energy which are an important aspect of the New Great Game.

### Locations of Resources

Energy reserves of the region are concentrated in the following basins (Dhaka, 2005):

- i) South Caspian
- ii) North Caspian
- iii) Usturt
- iv) Mangyshlak
- v) Amu Darya.

Turkmenistan claims that it has 22 billion barrel of natural gas reserves. In Kazakhstan oil reserves are concentrated in Tangiz and Karachaganak oil fields (Dhaka, 2005).

### Energy Resources of Central Asia

Table 1  
*Oil and Gas reserves of Central Asia*

Country	Billions of Barrels			Trillion Cubic Feet		
	Proven	Possible	Total	Proven	Possible	Total
Azerbaijan	7	32	39	7	32	39
Kazakhstan	9-40	92	101-132	1	15	15.1
Turkmenistan	.55-1.7	38	38.55-39.7	9-40	92	101-132
Uzbekistan	.3-.59	2	2.3-2.59	.55-1.7	38	38.55-39.7

Note. From "Central Asia: Centre of New Great Game" by Abdul Hafeez Khan, 2006, *The Dialogue*, 1(4), p.63.

In Central Asia oil reserves are estimated to be 15-30 billion barrels. The natural gas reserves are 230 -360 trillion cubic feet (Dhaka, 2005).

Kurecic (2010) stated that quality of Central Asian oil is very good. The huge energy reserves and good quality attracts major powers to pursue their objectives in this region. The oil and gas reserves are the major point of conflict among the major actors involved in the region. The involved powers are trying to exploit

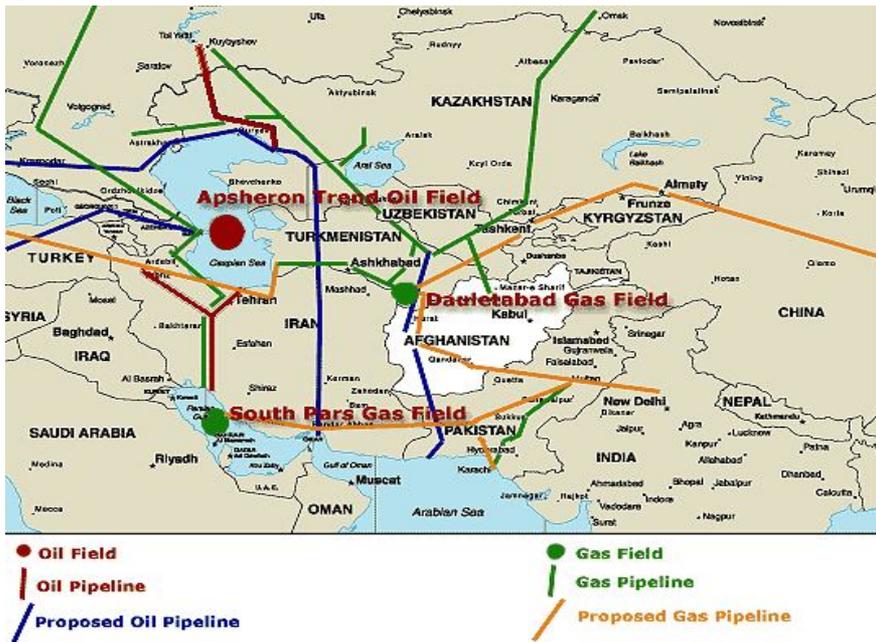
## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

these resources for their future energy demands. The major aim is to export these energy reserves to the global markets and to control the pipeline routes. But Kurecic (2010) indicates that these objectives are restrained by geographical limitations.

One important aspect of this New Great Game is that the Central Asian states do not possess such technology and also lack economic resources. This offers bulk of opportunities to the stakeholders to invest in these sectors and to establish their influence in the region (Kurecic, 2010).

Central Asian states depended heavily on Russia for the trade, economy and transportation of energy reserves. Russia is having firm control over the transport pipelines of gas and oil from the region to the global markets. USA and other allies are supporting the construction of pipelines with different routes to end Russian and Chinese monopoly in the region. For this purpose private oil countries at international level and the state owned companies of different countries paid attention to invest in Turkmenistan which is having huge gas resources (Petersen & Barysch, 2011).

### Pipelines Routes



### Oil and gas pipeline routes from Central Asia

Note. From “Central Asia: Centre of New Great Game” by Abdul Hafeez Khan, 2006, *The Dialogue*, 1(4), p.65.

Central Asia is a landlocked region. This region has no access to the Oceans; therefore it needs to construct pipelines to transport its oil and gas reserves to the

global markets. Through these pipelines this region gains access to other countries (Foster, 2008). To export the energy reserves of the region all the involved players are proposing different routes and pipelines which best served their objectives. The proposed routes run through Russia, Georgia, Afghanistan, Iran, Armenia and Turkey the routes and different consortia are as follows (Khan, 2006):

### The Northern Route

This route runs from Baku to the Russian cities which are Grozny and Tikhorestsk and then to the Black sea port of Russia which is Novorossiysk, this route can transport 120,000 barrels of oil which is aimed to be increased up to the 300,000 barrels of oil per day. Russia would be the major beneficiary of this route. It would increase Russian domination over the resources of the region (Khan, 2006). Russia is trying to influence the flow of gas from Central Asian region. The policy of Russia is to earn a role in the pipeline routes of the natural gas. Russia does not want Western bloc to exploit energy reserves of the CARs. If it is not possible to stop the flow of the natural gas from the region then Russia preferred markets in the east (Petersen & Barysch, 2011).

### The Western Route

This route runs from Baku to Tbilisi and the endpoint will be the Georgian port which is Supsa. Another pipeline is Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline (Walberg, 2011). USA and her ally Turkey decided to develop a route from Baku to Ceyhan which is a Turkish port in the Mediterranean. This route bypasses Russia Mihalka (2007). Its major beneficiary would be US and the Western bloc. US prime aspiration is to limit the Russian role in the region which can be fulfilled by this route. This proposed pipeline will be passing from Kurdish areas which are witnessing instability which will affect this pipeline construction. The East-West energy corridor for the export of energy resources of Caspian Basin and Central Asian region is an important strategy to develop western routes (Ipek, 2006).



Map of Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan oil pipeline.

Note. From *Postmodern Imperialism: Geopolitics and the Great Games* p. 143, by Eric Walberg, 2011, Atlanta: Clarity Press Inc.

### **The Caspian Pipeline Consortium**

In this group the regional countries and oil companies are actively involved. These include Russia, Kazakhstan, Oman, Chevron, Lukoil, Rosnft-Shell, Mobile, British Gas, Kazakh Munaigas and Oryx. Through this pipeline they plan to transport 1.34 million barrels of oil per day. This pipeline will run from Kazakhstan's Tangiz oil field to Tikhorestsk to the Russian port in the Black Sea Novorossiysk. This pipeline will utilize part of already existing Russian pipeline from Tangiz to Grozny (Khan, 2006).

### **Iranian Route**

Iran has proposed another route and pipeline. This will run from Azerbaijan to the Tabriz for refining process of oil. Then it will be exported through the Persian Gulf port of Iran. This route is facing US and other actor's objections. Turkmenistan and Iran has signed an agreement which facilitate the transportation of Turkmen gas to Turkey via Iran (Khan, 2006).

### **China's Proposed Pipelines**

China has also make plans to build an oil pipeline which runs from Kazakhstan to the China's Tarin Basin. This is a long range project and it will take much time to develop. It will transport 14 million tons of oil per year and will fulfill 5 percent of Chinese total oil export (Fedorenko, 2013 & Mihalka, 2007). China also concluded an agreement with the Central Asian states for the transport of the natural Gas. Through this project Turkmen gas is transported to China via Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. This project started functioning in 2009 (Fedorenko, 2013).

### **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India Pipeline**

With the coordination of the Asian development Bank Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan signed an agreement to transport Turkmen gas to the Pakistan via Afghanistan. India joined this project in 2008. The important aspect of this project, according to Foster (2008), is the support of United States for this project. Turkmenistan's proven gas reserves are 8 trillion cubic meters. This pipeline will connect Daulatabad gas field in Turkmenistan to the Afghan cities of Herat, Helmand and Kandhar passing through Quetta and Multan to the Indian city Fazilka. This pipeline will transport 33 billion cubic per year. Afghanistan as the bridge between Central Asia and South Asia will enjoy the maximum benefits of this pipeline project which will become largest developmental project in Afghanistan. The transit fee of US \$ 160 million per year will enhance the development in the country (Foster, 2008). Through this pipeline regional cooperation will be promoted (Palau, 2012 & Fedorenko, 2013).



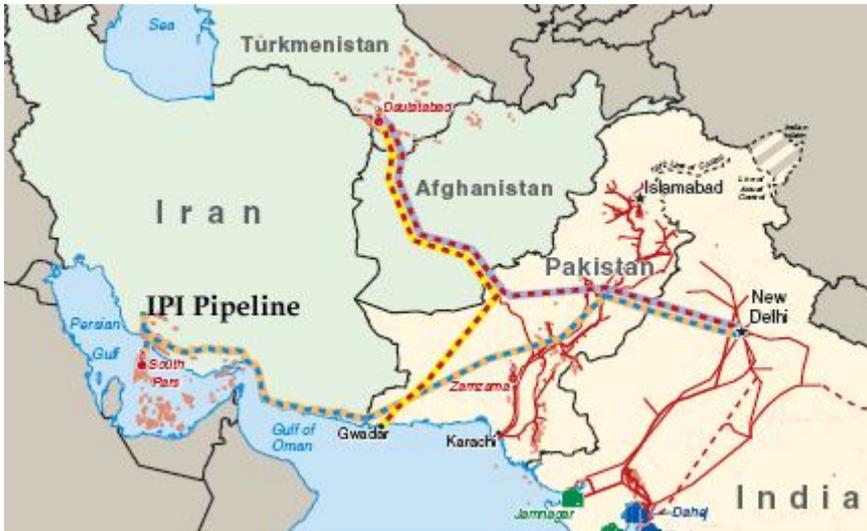
Map of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline

Note. From "IP and TAPI in the 'New Great Game': Can Pakistan keep its hopes high?" by Seher Abbas, 2012, *Spotlight on Regional Affairs*, 31(4), p.20.

### Iran-Pakistan-India Pipeline

Iran has vast reserves of oil and natural gas. Iran's reserves made it the second largest producer in the world. Iranian gas field South Pars was discovered in 1990 which increased the gas reserves of Iran. The discovery of South Pars gas field allows Iran to export its gas to the other countries in the region. Therefore Iran proposed IPI pipeline which is Iran- Pakistan and India pipeline. This is also called peace pipeline. The agreement for the construction of pipeline was concluded in 1995 in which Iran and Pakistan decided to construct a pipeline linking Karachi to the South Pars gas field. India later joined the agreement. This extension benefits Pakistan with the transit fee. Through this pipeline Pakistan will get 60 million cubic meter gas per day and India will get 90 million cubic meters per day. China is also trying to join this project (Asghar & Nazuk, 2007., Munir, Ahsan & Zulfiqar, 2013). Russian company Gazprom and Britain's company British Petroleum are showing interests in this project for the construction of the pipeline (Foster, 2008).

Foster (2008) stated that the two pipelines; TAPI and IPI, are considered as the rivals. IPI proposed the secure route to transport Iran's natural gas to the Pakistan and India. On the contrary TAPI will pass the war torn country Afghanistan and its route is not very safe.



Note. From “A pipeline through a troubled land: Afghanistan, Canada and the New Great Energy Game” by John Foster, 2008, *Foreign Policy Series*, 3(1), p.8.

The detail of Different gas pipeline projects which originate from Central Asian region and transport its energy reserves to other countries is shown in Table 2:

**Table 2**

Pipeline	Route (Source & recipient)	Len-gth, Vol-ume	Cost US\$ bn	Completion Date	Partners	Financing	Support	Oppose	Certainty of Supply
TAPI	Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, India	33 BCM 1,700 km	\$7.6	2015	Special venture company held by national companies. May bring in private partners	ADB	USA	Russia	Security problems
IPI	Iran, Pakistan, India	33 BCM 2,670 km	\$7.5	2015	Iran, Pakistan, India (may subcontract in private companies)	Partners separately	Russia	USA	Political problems US opposition
Caspian Coastal	Turkmenistan & Kazakhstan to Russia	20 BCM initially		2010	Turkmenistan Kazakhstan Russia	Partners separately	Russia	USA	Good
Central Asia-China	Turkmenistan & Kazakhstan to China	30 BCM 2,000 km	\$7.3	2011	Turkmenistan Kazakhstan	Partners Separately	China, Russia		Good
South Caucasus	Azerbaijan-Georgia - Turkey	8.8 BCM expandable to 20 BCM 692 km	\$1.2	2006	Consortium of companies led by BP & Statoil	EBRD	USA	Russia	Phase 1: OK Phase 2: gas additional to Azerbaijan (Iran, Turkmenistan)

									enistan )
<b>Trans-Caspian</b>	Turkmenistan-Azerbaijan	30 BCM	\$5.0	n.a.	n.a.	n.a.	USA	Russia, Iran	Hurdle : Russian opposition
<b>South Stream</b>	Russia to Italy & Black Sea	31 BCM 900 km		2013	Led by Gazprom and ENI		Russia	USA	Good
<b>Nabucco</b>	Turkey-Austria	3,300 km Rising to 31 BCM	\$12.0	2013	Project company owned equally by companies of Austria, Hungary, Romania, Bulgaria, Turkey, Germany		EU, USA		Hurdle : gas additional to (Iran, Turkmenistan)

**Gas pipeline projects from Central Asia.**

**Note. From “A pipeline through a troubled land: Afghanistan, Canada and the New Great Energy Game” by John Foster, 2008, *Foreign Policy Series*, 3(1), p.11.**

### **New Silk Road Strategy**

The New Silk Road strategy is a step by United States to maintain her presence in the Central Asia after the withdrawal of her forces from Afghanistan. In 2011 the New Silk Road strategy is announced by Hilary Clinton, US Secretary of State. US aims to enhance the regional cooperation in the sectors of trade, energy and transportation and to further promote the regional stability (Fedorenko, 2013).

The old Silk Road was the connecting route between Europe and Asia. For many decades the Old Silk Road served as a land route to conduct trade and other relationships between the regions. it was a big land route which connected Europe and Asia and many other smaller routes stemmed out of it after the technological advancement and the development of maritime routes the historic Silk Road lost its significance. The political situations in the region also faded away its value. The New Silk Road project is vital in improving regional cooperation, political scenario of the region. It allows Central Asian states to benefit from the diversify trade opportunities. At the same time it attracts investment in the sectors of energy and transportation. This will provide CARs with the opportunities to play their role in the New Great Game. The New Silk Road also focused development in Afghanistan after withdrawal of US forces (Fedorenko, 2013).

United States announced the New Silk Road project in 2011. By this project US aims to achieve regional cooperation and better trade facilities for the Central Asian region. It will greatly enhance the trade and economic activity in the region by attracting investments in the economic sector of Afghanistan as well as the Central Asia. The New Silk Road will also link the region with the global markets. Different trade routes emanating from the New Silk Road will increase the significance of the region in the global economy and it will allow Central Asian

states to play their role in the world politics. The important aspect of the New Silk Road strategy is to limit the influence and role of Iran in the Central Asian region (Fedorenko, 2013). In the New Silk Road strategy two projects are of prime importance. These are:

- Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. This pipeline will transport the Turkmen natural gas to the three countries. This pipeline will be functional in 2017. It will be a major pipeline route which will transport the Turkmen gas to the Pakistan and India via Afghanistan (Abbas, 2012 & Fedorenko, 2013).
- CASA-1000 is another important part of the New Silk Road strategy. It is a project in hydropower sector. In this project the hydropower from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will be delivered to Afghanistan and Pakistan.

### **Geopolitical Dimension of the New Great Game- The Role of CARs**

The role of Central Asian states is very important in the New Great Game. They are the regional stakeholders in this game. Their future depends upon their own role. This major power rivalry gives them an opportunity to decide for their alliances, friends and the government models and also to gain economic benefits from this New Great Game (Ahrari, 1996).

Central Asian states after the disintegration of Soviet Union were in a fragile economic condition. Their motive is to gain economic benefits and their enhanced role in the region. Considering the geopolitical developments in the region, the CARs slipped out of Russian influence by 1999. For their enhanced role in the geopolitical game they decided not to depend only on Russia. Therefore it was only Tajikistan who joins Russian military initiatives while other states declined (Mihalka, 2007). Their aim is to integrate their economy to the global markets. They responded to the initiatives of the other countries to balance the Russian influence (Petersen & Barysch, 2011). For this they want to use their economic resources which are much valued in the global market. The regimes of Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan are exploiting this power rivalry in the region by allowing western oil companies to invest in the region (Fu, 2010, Petersen & Barysch, 2011). The Central Asian states are building pipelines to export their resources to the world market. They are not building pipelines with one country or under Russian influence. They are building pipelines on different routes. This will reduce their dependence on one power Russia and provide economic benefits (Fu, 2010).

Malashenko (2013) identified that the fate of Central Asian states depends upon their strategic choice. These states opted not to depend on one actor involved in the region. Central Asian states decided to develop links with different players in order to gain maximum benefits of their involvement in the region. CARs are establishing working relations with United States, Russia, China and Europe. The objective of the CARs is to achieve a balance in promoting the role of the major players in the region. They are not ready to allow one major power to play a

dominant role in the region and to control the regional trade, transportation and energy resources. Central Asian states are trying to establish links with different powers in order to extract maximum benefits from the New Great Game (Malashenko, 2013).

The CARs are extending their cooperation to different countries in order to preserve their independence (Wishnick, 2009). The geostrategic dimension is providing them opportunities to play geopolitical role.

Some of the steps, taken by the CARs to secure their geopolitical role in the New Great Game, are as follows (Mankoff, 2013 & Weitz, 2006):

- In 2001 Kyrgyzstan provided Manas Base to US Air Force. This Base was used by US Air Force to transport. In 2003 Kyrgyzstan allowed Russia to establish her military base in Kant.
- Uzbekistan provided Karshi-Khanabad base to US in 2001. This base was later closed in 2005 after US opposed the operation by Uzbek forces in Andijon city (Weitz, 2006 & Wishnick, 2009). In 2004 Uzbekistan entered into a strategic cooperation with the Russian government for the use of military facilities located on their territories. Uzbekistan also joined Russian initiatives to create joint antiterrorism force (Weitz, 2006). USA and coalition forces needed Uzbekistan to provide them with bases for War against Terrorism (Jonson, 2007).
- Tajikistan provided facility of refuelling to the aircrafts of the coalition forces in War against Terrorism. Dushanbe airport was used for this purpose. In October 2004 Tajikistan provided a permanent base to the Russia's 201<sup>st</sup> Motorized Infantry Division. This base is located in Dushanbe.
- Turkmenistan also provided facility of refuelling to the aircrafts of the coalition forces.
- Kazakhstan developed a transit centre for the coalition forces. Kazakhstan extends cooperation to both regional states and trans-regional actors in order to come out of Russian influence. Kazakhstan gained importance in the geopolitical game after the discovery of its huge oil reserves. Kazakhstan is trying to minimize her dependence on Russia. Therefore Kazakhstan is taking steps to establish relations with various involved actors. Kazakhstan is extending relation with the west. It is a member of NATO, and also provides bases to USA and coalition forces. To acquire regional influence Kazakhstan became the member of SCO, CSTO, and Central Asian Eurasian Economic Community. Kazakhstan is also constructing pipeline with the cooperation of different countries. Kazakhstan aims to attract investment in its oil fields by extending relations to different stakeholders (Jonson, 2007).

Central Asian states are also playing important role in pipeline politics. They are taking initiatives in constructing different pipelines. This improves their relations with important regional and trans-regional countries and enhanced the geopolitical role of the CARs.

- TAPI is a pipeline which will transport Turkmen gas to Afghanistan, Pakistan and India.

## **South Asian Studies 29 (2)**

- Turkmenistan Kazakhstan and Russia constructed Caspian Coastal pipeline.
- Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan also constructed pipeline to transport natural gas to China.

Some other pipelines are also planned by Central Asian states to transport their energy resources to other countries.

## **Role of Organizations and Central Asia- A Geopolitical Dimension**

In Central Asia the regional organizations are established to promote economic integration which involves Central Asian countries. These organizations are promoting economic activity and also addressing security issues in the region. Most importantly the development of different organizations is an attempt by CARs to balance the influence of western organizations in the region (Cooley, 2008). Some of the organizations and groups working for the integration of the Central Asian states are as follows:

Common Wealth of Independent States:

After the disintegration of Soviet Union the five states of Central Asia and the three states of Trans Caspian region make a collective security arrangement which is known as the Common Wealth of Independent States (CIS) (Dettke, 1996). Dhaka (2005) stated that the important part of the CIS is the treaty which ensures the collective security which does not allow any CIS member to join such alliance which is against other members. It also ensures the mutual assistance if any of the member is attacked by the outside power. CIS work can be accessed by its efforts to promote and maintain peace in Tajikistan. Kurecic (2010) and Weit (2006) stated that after May 2000 the Collective Security Treaty was renamed as Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO). CIS later fragmented into two groups:

- a) Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Armenia and Belarus joins the Russian group
- b) Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Ukraine, Azerbaijan, Georgia and Moldavia formed a second group which was a strong opponent of Russian domination in CIS.

The objectives of the Collective Security Organization were to promote regional integration and to cooperate with other organizations such as UNO.

## **GUUAM Group**

The states of Georgia, Ukraine, Uzbekistan, Azerbaijan and Moldavia gathered to form an alliance which was to focus political as well as economic sectors. It also opposed Russian domination in the CIS. This alliance worked for the development of Eurasian, Trans-Caucasus transportation corridor (Kurecic, 2010).

## **Shanghai Corporation Organization**

In 1996 the Shanghai Corporation Organization was formed. Its members included China, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. It is a security organization and holds important role in strategic developments of the region (Weitz, 2006 & Cooley, 2008). In 2001 Uzbekistan also became member. SCO directly challenges USA increasing domination and influence in the region. Fighting terrorism and extremism is also the goal of SCO (Kurecic, 2010). This organization has worked effectively to improve the regional economic sphere. It initiated projects to develop land links among the regional states, telecommunication networks and infrastructure projects. (Cooley, 2008)

## **Conclusion**

Central Asian states are facing many internal challenges. These challenges lead the region towards the state fragmentation, exposing it to the menace of terrorism, crime radicalization, and internal problems of refugee flows. They are also facing the dangers of extremism, crime and drugs. The region again is gaining focus in the world politics by the rivalry of the great powers which are pursuing their interests in the region. This geopolitical game is due to the conflicts of the greater powers which include USA, Russia, China and other regional powers. The goal is to control the energy and economy of the region. This power contest in the region is neglecting the security threats these weak, fragile states are facing which is victimizing the stability of the region. Stability of the region can be achieved by linking it to the world economy. This can only be made possible with the Russian and Chinese support (Mankoff, 2013).

The role of the Central Asian states is very important in the war against terrorism. USA and other allies, at the start of the war, wanted Central Asian states to play their role in the war by extending their cooperation to the security organizations, including ISAF and NATO, which were conducting operations in the Afghanistan. Central Asian states accepted these roles. (Mankoff, 2013) stated following reasons for this acceptance:

- These states wanted to eradicate extremism and terrorism from the region to ensure stability and security of the region.
- These states wanted to come out of the Russian and Chinese influence by extending their support and cooperation to the US in the war against terrorism.
- Central Asian States wanted to extract maximum economic benefits of their geopolitical position by allowing routes and bases to the US and NATO troops. These states have shifted the focus of the US and allies to the region by allowing them transit routes for the supply line in Afghanistan. This has shifted the attention of the US and allies from Pakistan to these states. Central Asian states after these measures are gaining importance in the world politics from the security perspectives also along with the economic and energy dimensions.

## South Asian Studies 29 (2)

- The rent of the transit routes is a step to support their fragile economies.

The role of the Central Asian States in the war against terrorism enhanced the United States' involvement in the region which is a geopolitical strategy of these states. This involvement is helping these states to overcome regional as well as internal threats and challenges (Mankoff, 2013).

One of the major strategy and role played by the Central Asian states in the war against terrorism is to allow coalition forces to use their land in the war against terrorism. They allowed US to establish bases and station their forces in the region. They provided all logistical support through the Northern Distribution Network. Central Asian States allowed US and allied forces to establish bases in their territories. Details of the bases and facilities are as follows (Mankoff, 2013):

- a) Kyrgyzstan concluded agreement in 2001 allowing US to use the Manas Base. This base remained in the use of US Air Force. It provided transit facility. US used this base to transport equipment into the Afghanistan (Mankoff, 2013 & Cooley, 2008).
- b) Karshi-Khanabad base is located in Uzbekistan. The US and Uzbekistan signed an agreement in 2001 which allowed US to use this base for the land transportation of equipment as well as personnel. This base served as the logistic centre for US missions and operations. US-Uzbekistan relations got adversely affected by the criticism of US over the operation conducted by Uzbek forces against the protestors in the city of Andijon. After this Uzbekistan closed the base for US military use in 2005 (Mankoff, 2013 & Cooley, 2008).
- c) Tajikistan has also extending cooperation to the ISAF. Tajikistan is providing refuelling facility to the coalition aircrafts taking part in war on terrorism. For this purpose Dushanbe airport has been used. It also allowed coalition aircrafts to use her air space to enter Afghanistan for the operations.
- d) Turkmenistan allowed humanitarian operations to be conducted from her land. It also provided refuelling facility to the coalition aircrafts.
- e) Kazakhstan also extended her cooperation in the war. Kazakhstan allowed access to her facilities and also established a transit centre to be used by the coalition forces (Mankoff, 2013 & Cooley, 2008).

The development of the Northern Distribution Network in 2009 was also a geopolitical achievement of the Central Asian States. US, Russia, the Caucasus, Central Asian States, NATO and ISAF partners signed an agreement in 2009 and established the Northern Distribution Network. This network was established for nonlethal supplies which included food supplies, rehabilitation equipment, and vehicles. The ports of Baltic and Caspian Sea are connected to Afghanistan via Russia, Central Asia and the Caucasus through this network (Fedorenko, 2013). This network enhanced the role of Central Asian States in the war on terrorism and also provided them with the opportunity to play a greater role in the strategic game in the region. This network also shifted focus of attention from Pakistan to the Central Asian States. Before establishing NDN, USA was using

Pakistan's land routes for nonlethal supplies. About 90 percent of the supply was transported through Pakistani land routes by using Karachi port. After establishing NDN, US relied more on Central Asian routes and three-quarter of the nonlethal supply was transported through NDN. This minimized the US reliance on Pakistan. Mankoff (2013) stated that the allied forces route through Central Asian States is costly as compared to routes through Pakistan but they are comparatively more secure.

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