

Post-Cold War Geopolitics of Central Asia

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ABSTRACT

The world system has undergone significant changes as a result of the end of the Cold War. Five new Central Asian States—Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan—were created following the collapse of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). There is a power vacuum in the region as a result of Russia's withdrawal from the Central Asian governments. The Central Asian States are particularly important from a geopolitical perspective because of their location. The historical Silk Road, which connected China, India, and Iran with the West, runs through this area. The region acts as a convenient transportation route connecting other major regions in addition to acting as a historical buffer zone between Asia and Europe. Geopolitically, the area is particularly crucial because of its central location in the middle of the ancient Silk Road, as well as its enormous untapped reserves of oil, natural gas, and other natural resources. After the Soviet Union collapsed, there was a power vacuum that sparked a process of influence-building in the region. The region has become a playground of many regional and neighboring countries. This struggle to create an influence has given rise to a New Great Game in the region. In the given context this study is trying to analyze the importance of this region and the interest of many stakeholders in the region.

Keywords : Central Asia, Geopolitics, New Great Game, Power Struggle

The end of the Cold War resulted in dramatic changes in the world system. After the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), five new Central Asian States namely Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan came into existence. The separation of Russia from the Central Asian states has created a power vacuum in the region. The location of the Central Asian States makes them geopolitically very significant. This region is in the middle of the historical silk route linking China, India, and Iran with the West.

The region serves not only as a historical buffer zone between Asia and Europe but also as a convenient transit route connecting other major regions¹. The heartland location of the region in the middle of the ancient Silk Route and its vast undeveloped oil, natural gas, and other natural resources along with significant strategic location makes it geopolitically very important. The power vacuum

which has emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union initiated an influence-building process in the region. The region has become a playground of many regional and neighboring countries. This struggle to create an influence has given rise to a New Great Game in the region. Many players such as the U S, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, Japan, and India want to increase their influence in the region because of its vast amount of untapped natural resources and strategic significance. This New Great Game is different from the old nineteenth-century Great Game because, in the old game, these Central Asian States were not more than a pawn of Czarist Russia. But now in the changed scenario of the region, all these states are fully aware of their potential. So they individually want to influence the region, and for this, they are diversifying their relations with neighboring countries as well as the outside world.

The whole Central Asian region spreads over around

1. Meena Singh Roy, "India's Interest in Central Asia", Strategic Analysis, Vol.24, No.12, March 2001, p. 2273.

four million square kilometers, on the western side lies the Caspian Sea which is a good source of economies of Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan. On the northern side is Russia on whom they are still dependent for their trade. On the Eastern border is China, which presents a good prospect for the export of the region's hydrocarbon resources on the southern side are Afghanistan and Pakistan, and a few miles away from the Tajik border is Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK). The region is strategically connected to Russia, Mongolia, China India, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Iran, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Georgia. The geostrategic location of this region makes it very important and this importance has made it vulnerable as well because the scramble for dominance creates the fear of instability in the region.

These five Central Asian States are landlocked, and this makes them dependent on one another internally and especially on Russia externally for trade. The region still depends on Russian currency, market, expertise, transportation, and troops². This landlocked situation of the region confines these states' integration with the outer world as well as their economic development. Their boundaries were artificially drawn without taking into account crucial factors such as demography, history, and consent of the people in the Stalinist era³. These Central Asian states have been depending mainly on Russia for exportation and trade.⁴ These states want to reduce their dependence on Russia mainly in the sphere of Energy exportation.

Importance of Central Asian Republics after the Cold War:

The end of the Second World War resulted in two ideological blocks in the world. One was the USA-led block and the other was the Soviet Union-led one. These blocks acquired the policy of expansion of their own ideology which initiated the new kind of war called the

Cold War. After the disintegration of the USSR, five new Central Asian states came into existence on the horizon of the world. As earlier mentioned the Central Asian region has significance in many ways. According to an estimate given by the Central Asian sources the confirmed oil deposits are between 13 to 15 billion barrels, which is 2.7 percent of all the confirmed deposits in the world⁵. On the other hand, confirmed deposits of Natural Gas in Central Asia are around 270 to 360 trillion cubic feet, which constitutes around 7 per cent of the world's deposits⁶. Its location has made this region not only a bridge between Europe and Asia but has also positioned it at the crossroad of West Asia, South Asia, Russia, and China⁷.

The discovery of oil and gas and possession of uranium reserves by some Central Asian Republics have made this region an area for power politics⁸. The Central Asian region has a quarter of the world's known uranium reserves and a vast amount of gold. There is a world's largest gold mine which has a capacity of producing 50 tons of ore per annum. These states are good producer of cotton. CARs also have the presence of a sufficient amount of silver, coal, sulfur, and salt.

The Central Asian region is also facing many problems which are now of global concern. These problems include terrorism, religious extremism, separatism, drug trafficking arms smuggling, etc. These problems can harm the stability of the region which will consequently also affect the interest of the other countries in the region.

The disintegration of the USSR has created an ideological vacuum in the region. All the people of these states are religiously Islamic. Although people of these states can be differentiated on the basis of tribe, language, and ethnic culture, there is a fear of the spread of religious extremism. The reason behind this idea is that many states like Pakistan, Saudi Arabia, and Iran want to influence

2. Ashok kumarAttri, *India and Central Asian Republics*, (New Delhi; Regal Publications 2010), p. 45.

3. Shams-ud-Din, "The New Great Game in Central Asia", *International Studies*, Vol. 34, No. 3, 1997, p. 335.

4. Craig Oliphant, *Russia's Role and Interest in Central Asia*, *Saferworld*, October 2013, p. 6.

5. *A Report of RIS/CII Seminar titled "India-Central Asia Economic Relations"*, New Delhi, May 2005, p. 16, URL: http://www.eaber.org/sites/default/files/documents/RIS_Ris_2005.pdf.

6. Ibid.

7. P. Stobdan, "Central Asia emerging Strategic Equations", *Aakrosh quarterly*, Vol. 2, No. 4, July 1999, p. 57.

8. Attri, *India and Central Asian Republics*, p. 6.

these states based on their kind of Islam. The critical condition in Afghanistan especially in the absence of coalition forces has made these states more vulnerable to pernicious forces like religious extremism, terrorism, and separatism. The emergence of Islamic fundamentalist and mujahedeen guerrillas in Central Asia aided and abetted both militarily and financially by extra-regional powers (Pakistan and Saudi Arabia) has set a dangerous trend with enormous cause for instability in the region⁹. In the 1992 civil war in Tajikistan, activities of the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) are seen as critical and vulnerable to these states. Besides terrorism there are also religious extremism, drug, and arms trafficking are other concerns of these states. The finance for terrorist activities is provided by the money which is accumulated by drug and arms trafficking. A huge portion of the population in these states is indulging in arms and drug trafficking. Afghanistan is a hub of opium production. The entire illegal drug trafficking channel passes through the Central Asian region. All These negative factors can create the problem of instability in the region. This possibly has a spill-over effect on the other neighboring states. Countries like the USA, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, and India all have significant individual interests in the region. Stability in the region is also important for the exploration and extraction of its natural resources. Countries like Russia, China, and India have common concerns with the Central Asian states in respect of terrorism, separatism, and religious extremism. Russia, China, and India all have been facing these problems in Chechnya, Xinjiang, and Kashmir, respectively.

The economic condition of these States is not good. They have the potential in the form of natural resources to consolidate their economy. These states are going through a transformation period. Here, I have preferred the term transformation above transition because transition is an open-ended term. Transformation is a term that goes in a specific direction toward the aim that will have to be achieved. The landlocked situation of these states has barred them from easily contacting neighbouring states. This condition makes them dependent on one another. Besides this, they are lacking in infrastructure.

They do not have efficient technology for the extraction and exploitation of their natural resources. All these hurdles confine the economic development of these states and make them dependent on foreign aid for their development. Central Asian States are now diversifying their economic relations. It would be mutually beneficial for Central Asian Republics (CARs) and other countries as well as India to cooperate. This region with a fifty-five million consumer market has a huge potential waiting to be tapped¹⁰. In the transformation of these states, other neighboring, regional countries as well as India can assist these states which would be mutually beneficial.

The volatile condition in the Middle East has increased the importance of Central Asia. Today most of the countries of the world depend on energy imports from the Middle Eastern region. In 2006, more than 22 per cent of the US energy resources, 36 per cent of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) energy needs, 40 percent of the energy used in China, 80 per cent of the energy resources used in Japan, and the Republic of Korea, and 60 per cent of the energy resources in India were imported from this region. Canada also imports 45 per cent of its energy needs from the Middle East and the Persian Gulf. The growing needs of India and China towards energy resources are notable.

According to the International Energy Agency, 95 per cent of the global economy is dependent on the decisions of the 5 or 6 states in the Middle East¹¹. The Middle Eastern region is affected by many problems. Any unwanted activity in the region can affect the supply of energy to other depending countries. Hence major countries of the world want to diversify their energy resources and view the Central Asian region good option for diversifying their resources. Central Asian states also want to diversify their economy and in search for foreign investment in diverse areas for development. Thus This Energy-rich Central Asian region presents a good prospect for energy-striving countries to diversify their energy resources. So the critical condition of Middle Eastern states has increased the importance of the Central Asian region.

9. Ibid., p. 50.

10. Roy, "India's Interest in Central Asia", p. 2273.

11. Selina Williams and BhushanBahree, "Energy Agency Sets Grim Oil Forecast", The Wall Street Journal, Nov. 8, 2005, available on internet at <http://online.wsj.com/news/articles/SB113140619483590518>.

The above concise view shows why many countries want to dominate the region. The natural resources of CARs will be decisive in the future development of the region. Central Asian States have a vast amount of natural resources and hydrocarbon reserves. The volatile condition of the Middle East has also given impetus to the struggle for dominance in the Central Asian region.

Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

In 1991 five new Central Asian states emerged after the sudden and unexpected collapse of the USSR. These states are going through a transformation period of nation-building. The Central Asian region is situated at the heartland of the Silk Route which makes it geopolitically a highly important region. The region is full of natural resources. Kazakhstan has oil, Turkmenistan has natural gas, Uzbekistan is a rich source of gold and uranium, and Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan are having the potential for hydroelectricity power.

During the Soviet era, the Central Asian region was a part of the Soviet Union. So after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there is a power vacuum in the region. The strategically important location and the vast amount of untapped natural resources have attracted many neighboring as well as regional players to dominate the region. Many multinational companies are also struggling to get a stake in the exploration and exploitation of natural resources. These factors as a whole created an influence-building process in the region. The process of influence building is also called the “New Great Game”.

The location of the region makes it geopolitically very significant. Russia on the northern flank wants to regain its old influence in the region and shares a long border with Kazakhstan. China a fast-growing economy is located on the eastern side of the region and shares borders with Tajikistan Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. On the Western side are Iran, Turkey, and the Middle East. Afghanistan, Pakistan, and southern Asia are on the southern side. Besides its natural resource prospects, the region also has many implications in the form of religious extremism, terrorism, and drug and arms trafficking. These pernicious forces make the region

vulnerable. Any unwanted happening in the region can destabilize the region as well as other neighboring states. These problems are not limited to the region-specific. These problems are not only related to the Central Asian states but also related to the other players as well as India.

After the event of 9/11 US-led coalition forces were there in Afghanistan to eliminate the threat of terrorism. Although coalition forces have diminished the Taliban in Afghanistan the fear of re-emergence of these pernicious forces is still there. Recently in 2021, after the departure of the US-led Coalition forces from the Afghanistan and re-emergence of the Taliban stability of the region is once again at stake. Three Central Asian states Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan share a common border with Afghanistan. It is apprehension that pernicious forces like terrorism, and religious extremism can have spill-over effects on these states. For keeping stability all these Central Asian states are cooperating with coalition forces. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan have granted base facilities to the coalition forces at Karshi Khanabad and Ganci near Manas airport, respectively¹².

All the above-given factors as a whole contributed to the initiation of the competitive influence-building process. In this process, every player wants to influence the region. Here are some country-specific descriptions.

Within Central Asia among all five Central Asian states, two countries are competing for the leadership of the region. Two big countries, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan, have competed for the position of regional leader¹³. In the first place due to its strategic position in the region Uzbekistan represents itself as a regional power. Uzbekistan is the only country that touches borders with all other four Central Asian states. Uzbekistan is also a key state for any West–East transit route. But the problem is that Uzbekistan is facing a problem of Islamic militancy and extremist threat. Due to some commerce and duties contentions Uzbekistan’s relations are not good with Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan. On the other hand, Kazakhstan also has a desire for leadership in the region. Based on its huge area and the vast amount of natural resources Kazakhstan represents

12. Nirmala Joshi, “Geopolitical Perspective on Central Asia: An Indian view”, *Dialogue*, Vol. 6, No. 3, January–March, 2005, p.8. URL: http://www.asthabharati.org/Dia_Jan%2005/nir.htm..

13. Gulshan Sachdeva, “Central Asian Economic Transformation and Indian Response in Central Asia Present Challenges and Future Prospects” in M. Monir Alam and V. Nagendra Rao (eds.), *Central Asia: Present Challenges and Future Prospects* (New Delhi: Knowledge World International 2005), p. 273.

itself as a regional power. It is the only country that shares a 6600 km border with strategic partner Russia.

Russia's Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

The collapse of the Soviet Union changed the whole geopolitical scenario in the Central Asian region. These changes have created a power vacuum in the region. This power vacuum in the heartland of the Eurasian continent has attracted various nations to the region. In this changed scenario when many countries are indulged in influence building process Russia wants to regain its age-old influence in the region. Although these states are independent and are free to make their foreign policies and take their decisions they still depend on Russia for their trade and export to Russia. The region is landlocked which makes it depend on Russia for access to the outer world for trade.

The region is still very much dependent on Russian currency, market, expertise, transportation, and troops¹⁴. The settlement of the Tajik conflict and the northward containment of the Taliban are some events that have raised the reputation of Russia despite having an old negative impression of the USSR era. Now in today's changed global scenario, Russia has represented itself as a guarantor of regional stability in the Central Asian region. Besides this Russia also does not want increasing presence in the region because the US presence will fade away the Russian hegemonic status in the region. To counter the US presence Russia is cooperating with China and Iran. On the issue of war on terrorism, Russia is cooperating with the US because Russia itself (Chechnya problem) is affected by this problem. So in this regard US presence in the area would be beneficiary for Russian security and integrity.

China's Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

China is a rapidly growing country. Its economy is

swiftly developing. Like other powerful regional players, China also wants to influence and dominate the Central Asian region. China has many interests in the Central Asian region such as economic, strategic, and energy security. The geopolitically important location of the region also attracted China like other countries. Besides these China's Uyghur problem in the Xinjiang region also makes it conscious of any change happening in the region. China is making an impact in the region through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). China is welcoming allied forces' role in Afghanistan. Both China and U S have a common concern in Central Asia regarding terrorism¹⁵. It is assumed that the US is the lone power in the world that can tackle the terrorism problem efficiently. China knows that the growth of any pernicious force in the region can also affect the western borders of China (Uyghur problem in Xinjiang region). China is conscious about its interests and security which can be affected by the US presence. China wants to secure energy supply from Central Asian states, especially Kazakhstan oil and Turkmen gas. In this respect, the Atyrau - Alashankou pipeline that was developed by the CNPC and the Kazakh Company Kaz Munai Gaz is an important source of oil for the Dushanzi refinery in the Xinjiang Region of China¹⁶. In December 2009, the construction of the China - Central Asia Gas pipeline was completed, the pipeline connects the eastern Turkmenistan gas field with the Chinese grid that goes through Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan¹⁷.

Iran's Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

Iran is situated at the southern border of the region. Central Asia is considered in Tehran as a continuation of the region of the Persian Gulf, which is a vitally important zone of Iranian economic interest as a whole¹⁸. In this connection, the Islamic Republic traditionally defends the project of energy routes from CA states through its territory as the cheapest and most economically

14. Attri, India and Central Asian Republics, p. 45.

15. Pan Guang, "China and US in Central Asia : Role of the SCO and Possibility of Cooperation in Afghanistan", China US Focus, 7 September 2011, URL: <http://www.chinausfocus.com/peace-security/%EF%BB%BFchina-and-us-in-central-asia%EF%BC%9Arole-of-the-sco-and-possibility-of-cooperation-in-afghanistan/>.

16. Bernardo Mariani, "China's Role and Interest in Central Asia", Saferworld, London, October 2013, p. 10.

17. Ibid, p.11.

18. Guli Yuldasheva, "Geopolitics of Central Asia in the Context of the Iranian Factor", Vol. 2 No. 3, Summer 2008, p. 134.

grounded¹⁹. Except for Russia and China, Iran is the only country that can avail transit routes to Central Asian products and energy resources. The US does not have any desire that Iran can access Central Asian energy resources. Iran's strategy is to use Central Asian markets to reconstruct its own war-ravaged and constricted economy and project itself as a redeemer of Islamic values against all non-Shi'ite challengers (especially Saudi Arabia and Turkey)²⁰. The bad relations with the US are the main problem of Iran in its economic expansion in the region. Iran is in a deadlock because of the international sanctions due to its controversial nuclear program, Iran is trying to use its ties with the Eurasian republics to break free from this deadlock²¹. Iran has been improving its relations with Russia.

India's Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

Historically any development in the Central Asian region has had some effect on India and has been a major force in moulding India's history. During the Soviet era, the region was stable. India remained unconcerned for seven decades and felt safe in this region. It was also a reason for India to make good relations with the USSR because Pakistan and Chinese policies historically have been anti-Indian. The collapse of the USSR has initiated dramatic changes in the geopolitics of the region. Because of its proximity to the region, India needed to keep an eye on the development of the region. The region is very vital for India in various aspects whether it is strategic, economic, or energy. Continuation of peace and stability in the Central Asian region is very essential for India keeping in mind its security aspect. Three Central Asian states (Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan) share a border with unstable Afghanistan. The main source of terrorism and terrorist groups in Central Asian states is Afghanistan. Terrorist organizations like the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizbut-Tahrir are already active in the region. There is fear of the spread of Islamic fundamentalism in the region which possibly

can have a spill-over effect on Kashmir. Besides this being a rapidly growing economy, India also sees the region as an economic partner.

Central Asian region also has vast amounts of natural resources, especially Oil and Natural Gas. These resources give India an option to diversify its energy requirements. India's recent "Connect Central Asia" Policy is the depiction of its growing interest in the Central Asian region. Since the independence of CARs, India has been eager to establish relations individually with all five Central Asian Republics. In concern to other players of the region such as Pakistan, it is essential for India that Pakistan could not gain any hold in the region. Pakistan wants to make relations with these states to utilize Islam against India. If it happens it possibly can affect India on the issue of Kashmir. Fortunately, Pakistan could not fulfill its ambitions despite having religious commonality with these states. So, India must make sure that the region is stable.

USA Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

The USA is also very keen to capture or fill the geopolitical power vacuum in the region created after the breakup of the USSR. The US wants to influence the region. The US has a geopolitical and economic interest in the region. The US wants to check Russian and Chinese influence in the region. In this regard, the US views India as a counterbalancing factor in the geopolitics of the region. In the energy sphere, the US looks to Kazakhstan as an alternative source to diversify its energy requirements. American company Chevron Corporation is already involved in Kazakhstan in the development of the Caspian basin. The USA leads the world in oil consumption with 17 million barrels a day in 1991²². The USA wants to diversify its energy requirements to reduce the dependence on a single supplier or group of suppliers (OPEC – Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries).

US securing its interest on the pretext of war on

19. Ibid.

20. Dianne L. Smith, Central Asia: A New Great Game?, Asian Affairs, Vol. 23., No. 3, Fall 1996, p. 151.

21. Sander Hasan, "Pipeline Politics; Struggle for Control of the Eurasian Energy Resources", The Clingendael Institute, The Hague, April 2003, p. 46, URL: http://clingendael.info/publications/2003/20030400_ciep_paper_hansen.pdf.

22. Constantine Arvanitopoulos, "Geopolitics of Oil in Central Asia", *Institute of International Relations*, Athens, March 2002, URL: groups.uni-paderborn.de/kowag/geoeconomics/pdf/tgooica.pdf.

terrorism, promoting democracy, economic aid, check nuclear proliferation in the region. The main aim of the US in the region is to check the Russian and Chinese influence in the region. Other than that it wants to containment of Iran and Reinforcement of Turkey's role in the region.

Turkey's Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

Turkey has historical, cultural, and linguistic resemblance with the region. Turkey also wants to influence the region. To achieve this purpose Turkey represents a role model itself to these states. On the grounds of secularism, democracy, and a free market economy Turkey wants to attract these newly independent Central Asian states. The creation of the Cooperation Council of Turkic-speaking States (CCST) in 2009 is evidence of Turkey's desire to influence the region²³. Turkey was the first country to recognize the CARs and sponsored their membership in international organizations²⁴.

In the initial years, Turkey presented itself as a mediator or bridge between West and Newly independent Central Asian states but now it seems that Ankara is shifting its position. Turkey's Foreign Minister has dropped the 'bridge' concept and replaced it with the idea of Turkey as a 'central power'²⁵. Turkey is helping these states in realizing their economic potential such as its natural resources, giving scholarships for the students of CARs establishing bank and technological assistance. So Turkey since the independence of Central Asian states has been very enthusiastic to attract these countries towards it but it has its difficulties. It has lost much of its initial enthusiasm due to complex regional rivalries pro-western attitude and fear of pan-Turkish²⁶.

Pakistan's Interest in the Geopolitics of the Central Asian Region:

Pakistan's policy towards Central Asia is to get

access to natural resources and to make mutual economic relations. Pakistan is establishing economic and cultural ties with these republics through regional organizations like the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) which was established by Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan of which Central Asian states are also members. Pakistan's policy has been largely influenced by anti – Indian and pro-Islamic psyche. From the beginning Pakistan has been in the patronage of the US but after the disintegration of the USSR importance of Pakistan in us policy had degraded. With the sudden appearance of five Islamic neighbors in 1991, Pakistan policymakers initially envisioned a Muslim security belt stretching from Turkey to Pakistan, with Central Asia "buckle", to provide "strategic depth"²⁷. Pakistan also seeks support on the Kashmir issue of these newly independent states. Fortunately for India, Islamabad failed to obtain unilateral support from any Central Asian state for its position regarding Kashmir the litmus test for Pakistan (and India) for potential allies²⁸.

Pipeline Politics :

The Central Asian States have a huge amount of untapped energy resources. Too many countries are struggling to develop pipeline routes at their convenience. Five main proposed and expected trade routes can be chalked out after viewing the different strategies. These routes are Northern Route, Western Route, Eastern Route, Southern Route, and South-eastern Route.

The Western Route, this route will be a multiple pipeline route. It will carry oil to the west through Turkey; Europe and Mediterranean. This route has concerns like security, transportation, inadequacy and excessive cost.

The Eastern Route, this route is proposed by China which will be the longest and costliest of all. This pipeline would transport oil from Kazakhstan to China. It will be the costliest pipeline (covering 2,000 km in Kazakhstan alone) but the Chinese consider it as a strategic decision and are willing to go through with it²⁹.

23. Thomas Wheeler, "Turkey's Role and Interests in Central Asia", Saferworld, London, October 2013, p.4.

24. Attri, India and Central Asian Republics, p. 44.

25. Wheeler, "Turkey's Role and Interests in Central Asia", p.7.

26. Attri, India and Central Asian Republics, p.45.

27. L. Smith, Central Asia: A New Great Game ?, p. 154.

28. Ibid., p. 155.

29. Arvanitopoulos, "The Geopolitics of Oil in Central Asia".

The Northern Route, this route is favored by Russia because it has already started working on the Pipeline Route. This route will make the Central Asian States dependent on Russia as it will create a monopoly of Russian oil and gas transit, so the USA, EU, and Turkey are opposing this route

The Southern Route, this route is the most convenient of all the routes that end in the Persian Gulf passing through Iran. Iran already has an extensive pipeline network so, it will be cheap and safe but the USA and its allies are opposing it on the grounds of its alleged Nuclear weapons program and support for international terrorism.

South Eastern Route, this route has been proposed by American Oil Company Unocal. It will carry gas from Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan to India. The proposed Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan India (TAPI) pipeline is a 7.6 billion US \$ project and the Asian Development Bank is ready to fund the construction of the pipeline.

This route has its problems like excessive cost, and security because this pipeline will pass through the unstable region of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Materialization of TAPI is not looking possible shortly and there is a need for a security guarantee from transiting countries of any kind of damage to the pipeline.

So there is an excessive struggle to bring energy resources from CARs to their interested areas through pipelines so every country is supporting a route by their convenience. Every country wants to secure its energy requirements.

So the Central Asian region is very important in many ways. The collapse of the Soviet Union created a power vacuum Central Asian region and the region is rich in hydrocarbon reserves, especially oil and gas. The geographic location in the middle of the old Silk Route makes it geopolitically important these all factors contributed to the attraction of many countries to influence the region. This scramble for influence started a new great game in the region in which every country wanted to gain a foothold in the region for this they applied different tools. For Central Asian Republics, This struggle is both positive and negative. On the one hand, this unfolded new great game can be a danger to the stability of the region on the other hand these republics can benefit from foreign investment which would help to consolidate their economies. All this depends on how the Central Asian Republic handles the situation and the approach of Russia as its legacy, proximity and long historical and cultural ties give it extra weightage over other players.
