

Relations between Pakistan and Central Asian Republics: An analysis

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ABSTRACT

Since independence Central Asian states have acquired the attention of regional and global powers. Geographically, this region is landlocked but very rich in natural resources. Pakistan, on the other hand, lacks energy resources and therefore has remained willing to obtain benefits from these states. Importantly, Pakistan and Central Asian states have common history, religion and culture. From geostrategic point of view, Pakistan provides these regional states the shortest route to global sea trade. They have signed several agreements, treaties and memorandum of understandings (MoUs), but due to political instability and fragile security situation of Afghanistan and lack of attention from the side of policy makers in Pakistan, these agreements have been ineffective so far. This study is an attempt to identify the fluctuating relationships between Pakistan and Central Asian states. Moreover, it focuses on Pakistan's interests in Central Asian states and its strategic importance. The purpose of this study is to identify the obstacles and opportunities in relations between Pakistan and the Central Asian states.

Keywords: Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Central Asian region, Interests, Relations.

INTRODUCTION

After the downfall of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), the energy rich and landlocked Central Asian states gained immense prominence in Pakistan's foreign policy making quarters. The Central Asian states' proximity to Pakistan has fortified Islamabad's enthusiasm for building closer political and economic ties with these states. After 1991, these countries received autonomy; Pakistan developed over-enthusiasm for making closer relations with these republics without completely understanding the multifaceted nature and differences of the CARs, where every state had divergent national interests and rather conflicting perspectives.¹

Relations between Pakistan and Central Asian states (CASs) are focused around mutual history, religion, topographical vicinity, customs, culture and fate. Notwithstanding, Pakistan's longing for close financial and political relations with CASs have been tormented by its ineffective foreign policy. Moreover, absence of a common border with any Central Asian state was one of the principle obstacles to approaching this area. Topographically, Tajikistan is the most closely located state to Pakistan, the distance being just only 14-kilometers.

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The catastrophic incident of 9/11 proved to be a watershed event which instigated and encouraged Pakistan to develop closer relationships with the Central Asian states. Unluckily, Pakistan's foreign policy circles did not craft prudent strategies to befriend and capitalize on the CAS. They needed to plan prudently a thorough strategy on the CASs so as to transform the region into potential economic opportunities. Nevertheless, Pakistan established great political associations with these countries and created economic relations by encouraging them into trade and pipeline routes.²

STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE OF PAKISTAN FOR CASS

Geo-strategic position of Pakistan compels the Central Asian states to take it into account whenever they ponder over the region. Pakistan is the shortest and most helpful trade passage to the sea for landlocked Central Asian states.³ Pakistan is a perfect way for Central Asian states' worldwide trade via sea. Nonetheless, this trade route has remained worthless and ineffectual for long owing to insecurity and conflicts in Afghanistan. Still, Karachi and Gwadar ports of Pakistan can provide valuable seaport and shipment accommodations to CASs to commence their trade and join the international market for considerable profits.⁴The closest port city for CASs is Karachi, which is 2,720 km away. Conversely, the Iranian port of Bandar Abbas is 3,400 km and the Russian ports, Vladivostok and Rostov on the Don are 9,500 km and 4,200 km away, respectively.⁵ If Pakistan and CASs come closer, it will be a win win situation for both because they are vital to each other. For Pakistan hydrocarbon assets of CASs are great sources of energy that can adequately fulfill its increasing energy needs and mitigate its power requirements that are proving to be stumbling blocks in upward economic trajectory.

PAKISTAN'S INTERESTS IN CENTRAL ASIA

Pakistan has enormous interests in Central Asia such as strategic and economic interests. The economic interests have been and will continue to be the prime reasons behind the establishment of bilateral relationships between Pakistan and Central Asian states.⁶ The advancement and enhancement of harmonious economic relations was and is the primary objective amongst the most essential strategic interests of Pakistan in Central Asian states. The greatest issue confronting the world is energy and each nation is in the battle to satisfy its energy requirements. Pakistan does not possess adequate energy resources, and is searching for the inexpensive energy resources⁷ and CARs can quench its energy thirst.

Strategic interest of Pakistan in Central Asia is also a vital element of its outside arrangement. Central Asia can be more vitally important for Pakistan in face of extraordinary antagonistic Indian attitude towards Pakistan.⁸ In this regard, Pakistan is striving relentlessly to create, maintain and foster security in Afghanistan aimed at reaching to Central Asia for the objective of reinvigorating relations of all sorts with them.

PAK-KYRGYZSTAN TIES

On December 20, 1991, Pakistan stretched out diplomatic recognition to the Kyrgyz Republic. A Protocol for the foundation of strategic relations between Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan was signed on 10th May, 1992. Pakistan established its diplomatic mission of ambassadorial level at Bishkek in August 1995, thus continuing the further attainment of amicable relations.¹¹

The state officials from both sides have been exchanged visits in the last two decades. Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan collaborate in different fields for the advancement of trade relations. In the wake of Kyrgyzstan getting autonomy, Islamabad promptly conceded it a credit of \$10 million for the foundation of pharmaceutical manufacturing plant at Bishkek, and when the republic was incapable to pay back this credit on time due to its extremely severe economic situation, Pakistan postponed twice, in 1994 and 2000, the due time limit for six years under a mutual agreement.⁹ In Kyrgyzstan, the both countries signed numerous treaties setting up cultural and economic relations. Pakistan also offered to support Kyrgyzstan in its efforts to increase representation in International Organizations.¹⁰

The President of Kyrgyzstan, Askar Akaev, visited Pakistan on 17th January, 2005, which was his third visit prior being in 1994 and 1995. They marked a memorandum of understanding on collaboration between two states on distinctive local and worldwide issues. Two treaties were marked on collaboration and common help in traditions related issues and shirking of twofold levy. Kyrgyz President also offered to give electricity to Pakistan.¹¹ Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan have been parties to the Four-sided Treaty alongside Kazakhstan and China, continuing since May 2004, which is meant to advance regional trade through Pakistan's Karakoram Highway up to Kashgar in China to Bishkek and on to Kazakhstan.¹²

During his 4-day state visit to Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on 5-8 March, 2005, the President of Pakistan, Pervez Musharraf, further enhanced collaboration and friendship with Kyrgyzstan, and accepted that it would give the key area to Pakistan, and it could turn into the corridor for economic collaboration for the regional states.¹³ The two sides likewise framed a joint working group that would investigate the possibility of electricity transportation from Kyrgyzstan to Pakistan.¹⁴ The Kyrgyz President upheld the idea of enlightened moderation and applauded Pakistan's essential part in the battle against terrorism. He acknowledged Pakistan for offering access to its seaports.

Both states agreed to restore the four-nation transit trade settlement and making it successful in an offer to reinforce territorial economic collaboration on 15 March, 2011. Pakistani Prime Minister, Yousuf Raza Gilani, who met his Kyrgyz partner, Almazbek Atambayev, consented to uproot all obstructions for a smooth and successful working of the Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA)

marked by Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan in 2004.¹⁵ The Mutual Statement avowed exhaustive participation in financial relations, investment and trade. They communicated interest for participation in the structure of Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM) to permit electricity transportation from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan and Afghanistan. They consented to a treaty on military training and a MoU on improving the volume of mutual trade.¹⁶

The determination was marked by the four nations including Pakistan, Afghanistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyz Republic in the two-day gathering of the intergovernmental council of Central Asia-South Asia (CASA) transmission and trade venture on 16-17 September, 2013. World Bank (WB), Gulf Coordination Group (GCG) and Islamic Development Bank (IDB) would help the CASA-1000.¹⁷ They marked on 19th February, 2014, the CASA-1000 Project treaty. Under the treaty Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan will transport 700MW electricity to Pakistan through Afghanistan. This plan will help construction of high voltage power transmission line to link powerhouse of Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan with Afghanistan and Pakistan. According to initial approximations, electricity export was supposed to start in 2016-2017, and around 5.5 billion KWH of electricity will be exported. The CASA-1000 Project lines will make some 750 km length. The plan cost was valued at \$1 billion and implementation of the project was planned to start in 2014.¹⁸

Moreover, Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan are a part of Economic Cooperation Organization also; this gives a decent chance to the Heads of State and Governments to meet. Pakistan anticipates that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) will encourage the movement of goods. Pakistan has been playing an effective role in SCO as an observer and now it has received full membership in 2015. Kyrgyzstan backed up Pakistan's bid to join SCO. Additionally, the Kashgar-Gwadar Economic passageway of Pakistan will play key role in uplifting the bilateral trade with Kyrgyzstan. There are 330 Pakistani companies listed in Kyrgyzstan and doing fruitful business.¹⁹

PAK-KAZAKHSTAN RELATIONS

Kazakhstan declared independence on 16 December, 1991, shortly after which Pakistan recognized it as an independent state on 20 December, 1991. They established bilateral and diplomatic relations on 24 February, 1992. The relations became formal after opening of the embassy of Kazakhstan in Pakistan on November 27, 1994.²⁰ Both Pakistan and Kazakhstan established a Joint Ministerial Commission in 1992 aimed at exchanging trade and financial, scientific, technical, and social collaboration.

Kazakhstan is the biggest landlocked state in the world and is very rich in natural resources like gas, oil, coal, uranium, lead, gold and others. Furthermore, being a dynamic part of various organizations like OSCE, OIC, ECO, SCO, CSTO,

EBRD, Kazakhstan provides Pakistan with an extraordinary chance to become a trade and energy passage via Gwadar Port. An imperative component of Pakistan's vital objectives in Central Asia is the advancement of regional financial integration.²¹

From that point forward, all previous heads of government and heads of state from Pakistan and Kazakhstan have visited one another. More than thirty interstate, intergovernmental and interdepartmental bilateral treaties, encompassing all circles of life including trade and financial, legislative, social and educational, scientific and security issues, have been marked.²² Pakistan has formalized an organized plan to advance participation in the business and financial fields. Besides, Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) have been established with all the countries of Central Asia.²³

They have concurred on military cooperation. Pakistan and Kazakhstan's governments consented to counter regular difficulties of terrorism and radicalism by strengthening reciprocal participation to guarantee regional prosperity and stability.²⁴ The memo of participation was marked at the meeting of the Defense Minister of Kazakhstan, Adilbek Dzhakysbekov, and Pakistani Ambassador to Kazakhstan, Mohammad Akhtar Tufail. In the words of the Defense Minister of Kazakhstan, marking of this document was an affirmation of the two nations to establish bilateral collaboration to upgrade security both at national and regional levels, have cooperation in military teaching and personnel training.²⁵ Both nations are effectively cooperating in monetary, trade, security improvement, and also in social-humanitarian areas.

The quadrilateral trade and travel treaty was at first marked by Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, China and Pakistan in 1995, concurring on a set of rules and regulations and making a significant achievement for transit trade between the four nations.²⁶ It has been in force since 2004. It can be stretched out to Uzbekistan and Tajikistan also.²⁷ China has given economic support to update Karakoram Highway which will improve the adequacy of quadrilateral transit trade treaty.²⁸ This treaty can support Pakistan to cross Russian outskirt with Kazakhstan for trade with less cargo cost. Kazakhstan having easily accessible crude material along with the basic infrastructure like roads, railways and telecom, present appealing opportunities. There are around 69 Pakistani corporations that are registered in Kazakhstan. Presently Pak-Kazakh trade has reached to a level of \$15 million. Throughout the last six years Pakistan has had an unfavorable trade offset with the Central Asian states including Kazakhstan.²⁹

PAK-UZBEKISTAN RELATIONS

Pakistan was among the initial couple of nations which accepted Uzbekistan, and the third to have established an embassy in Tashkent. A Protocol was marked on foundation of Diplomatic relationships between Pakistan and Uzbekistan on 10th May, 1992.³⁰ From the beginning, Pakistan showed enthusiasm in its relations

with Uzbekistan by sending a twenty three member delegation in December 1991 and providing a US \$30 million credit facility.³¹ From that point forward economic relationships have been enhanced between the two nations.

Since 1991, the governments of Pakistan and Uzbekistan have consented to nearly fifty six bilateral treaties and MoU's, to give an official structure to growing cooperation in various areas. These areas include trade and finance, medical services, traditions, science and technology, agriculture, sports, media, tourism, communications, banking, travel, transportation, shirking of twofold tax, anti-terrorism, deportation, legal support, education and military-specialization.³²

Shortest passage to seaport offices, at Gwadar and Karachi. Pakistan sought supplies and cotton from the region and offered credit and goods in return.³³ The President of Pakistan, General Pervez Musharraf's 'journey of friendship and cooperation' in March 2005 to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, spotlighted Pakistan's imperative geo- strategic location for the Central Asian countries as, since long, these countries have asserted a keen longing for a trade passage to worldwide markets through South Asian ports.³⁴

Uzbekistan and Pakistan see one another as profitable neighbors and are attempting to establish good bilateral social, business and trade relations. Uzbekistan sees Pakistan as an important South Asian country, which holds immense political, financial, and military potential. Pakistan is not only interested in construction of a pipeline or a trade route with Central Asian countries but also in creating trade, monetary, political and also security association. Hence Pakistan is seeking after a two-fold approach towards Uzbekistan. It is producing economic collaboration first by enhancing bilateral relations and second through the regular platform of different associations, for example ECO, SCO and others.³⁵

On 2 May, 2006, President of Uzbekistan visited Islamabad and both sides consented to extend financial and trade relations and to organize against terrorism. In March 2005, President of Pakistan visited Uzbekistan and assured the Uzbek leader of his aim to eliminate terrorists, including significant number of Uzbek nationals from the tribal areas of Pakistan.³⁶ Karimov was looking forward to Pervez Musharraf for further funding in equipment and arms, and also for initiating the military cooperation in mutual relations.³⁷ They have officially marked an extradition agreement on 25 January, 2001.³⁸ Pakistan even agreed upon intelligence sharing to Uzbekistan to curb the budgetary linkages of terrorists. The agreement between Uzbekistan and Pakistan included special reference to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan, which Karimov viewed as a significant danger to Uzbekistan's safety. Several warriors from the IMU were found to have settled in Pakistan's district of Waziristan. Pakistani military is chasing Taliban and Al-Qaeda contenders and it has since executed or caught a modest number of IMU militants, and some IMU supporters have been expelled

from Uzbekistan. However, IMU pioneer Tahir Yuldosh, one of Uzbekistan's most-wanted outlaws was supposed to be active from the vicinity of Pakistan.³⁹

Both states' economies are balancing. Uzbekistan can supply electricity, cotton, gas, and such minerals as gold, copper, iron, lead, and chromium to Pakistan, while in exchange Pakistan is able to supply cement, textiles, shoes, medicines, garments, machinery, telecom and military gear. Uzbekistan has the fifth biggest gold stores on the planet and positions seventh in gold possession.⁴⁰ Both nations crossed 40 million USD trade level and are looking to expand it in coming years.⁴¹

PAK-TAJIKISTAN RELATIONS

Pakistan commenced to establish political, economic and strategic relations with Tajikistan on 6 June, 1992.⁴² Pakistan was one of the first nations that recognized the autonomy of Tajikistan and made diplomatic relations with it, and opened its embassy in Dushanbe in 1993. Tajikistan established its diplomatic mission in Islamabad after four years in 1997.⁴³ Tajikistan is the closest nation from Pakistan. Wakhan Corridor, a range in far northeastern Afghanistan that unites Afghanistan and China and can be the most helpful interface area between Pakistan and Tajikistan, is just 14 kilometers wide.⁴⁴

Pakistan and Tajikistan's relations are a regular union of friendship, brotherhood and of shared admiration by both governments for regional integrity and sovereignty.⁴⁵ Accordingly, bilateral relations between the two charitable nations began to establish in diverse fields. Both Head of States and Governments met a few times and affirmed to venture up the endeavors to improve respective relations. Both sides deal with illegal medicine trafficking, regional terrorism, religious radicalism, security and stability in the area. The governments of Pakistan and Tajikistan consented on more than 30 treaties, conventions and MoU's to amplify participation in the fields of insurance, communications, financial, energy, and investments, banking, air transport, and industry, transport, food industry and agricultural, science and technology, constructions of roads, education, tourism, health and culture, and expanded the level of trade.⁴⁶

Tajikistan is enthusiastic to be a large producer of hydroelectric power.⁴⁷ Pakistan is interested in buying electricity from Tajikistan and is prepared to make investments in Tajik hydro energy ventures. Tajikistan needs access to Pakistani ports via the Mughob-Kulma road that links Tajikistan with the trans-Asian Karakoram Highway.⁴⁸ Pakistan has offered the shortest conceivable route to Tajikistan and other states of the region to reach its ports.⁴⁹ The consummation of Murghab-Kulma highway from Tajikistan to China connecting the Karakoram interstate to Pakistan is an improvement. Once operationalized, it will support the transit trade in the middle of Pakistan and the Central Asia.⁵⁰ The Tajik side communicated enthusiasm to join the quadrilateral understanding between Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and China on transit transportation signed in

1995.⁵¹ In this regard, the preparation of trilateral trade and transit agreement between Tajikistan and Pakistan through Afghanistan and accession of Tajikistan to quadrilateral agreement between Pakistan-China-Kazakhstan-Kyrgyzstan was considered very significant.⁵²

Pakistan and Tajikistan need to improve in reciprocal monetary and trade relations. They have a rich potential to expand them. Afghanistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, and Tajikistan have been seeking after the advancement of electricity transaction plans and the foundation of a Central Asia-South Asia Regional Electricity Market (CASAREM). The starting arrangement was to transfer 1,000 to 1,300 MW from Kyrgyz Republic and Tajikistan to Pakistan and Afghanistan. The major part of the transfer, 1000 MW, will be utilized by Pakistan, and roughly 300 MW will be transported to Afghanistan.⁵³ Pakistan-Tajikistan trade has expanded from 15 million US dollars in 2011, to more than 72 million in 2012.⁵⁴

PAK-TURKMENISTAN RELATIONS

In December 1991, Pakistan was one of the first nations to recognize Turkmenistan as an independent nation. It made formal relations with Turkmenistan on 10 May, 1992. The two nations appreciate close relations which have already been established by mutual history, traditions and culture.⁵⁵

Interchange of reciprocal visits of Head of States and Governments laid down strong foundation of Pak-Turkmen relationship focused around kinship, shared understanding and social affinities and customs. Amid visits, both nations marked numerous administrative interstate agreements and MoUs to improve participation in the fields of energy, oil, trade, gas, livestock, agriculture science and technology, health, education, tourism, and sports. These agreements will further concrete Pak-Turkmen relations and in turn will support the economy of both.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, economy is not the only part of Pak-Turkmen relations, also the efforts for establishing parliamentary, political, cultural and social connections have been taking place.

Bilateral cooperation between Pakistan and Turkmenistan has increased meaningfully in the area of defense. Pakistan is giving free training to air, naval and land armed forces' officers of Turkmen Armed Forces. It is equally important to quote that Pakistan is arranging banking training, free diplomatic and English language courses for Turkmen nationals in Pakistan.⁵⁷

The economic part of Pakistan-Turkmenistan relations is focused primarily around construction of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline. Turkmenistan has the fourth biggest gas reserves on the planet.⁵⁸ Under the proposed undertaking, the 1,680 kilometer-long gas pipeline, sponsored by the Asian Development Bank, will transport 90 million standard cubic meters (MSCMD) of natural gas every day from Turkmenistan's Dauletabad gas fields

through Afghanistan to Multan and as far as the northwestern Indian town of Fazilka.⁵⁹ Afghanistan's offer will be 14 MSCMD; Pakistan and India will be providing 38 MSCMD every day similarly.⁶⁰ The TAPI venture was at first planned in May 2002, to give Turkmen gas to Pakistan through Afghanistan in a treaty marked in Islamabad and was known as the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan pipeline venture (TAP). India was welcomed to join in April 2008.⁶¹ In December 2010, intergovernmental treaty on the development of the gas pipeline was closed and in May 2012, transit fees, pricing and gas related issues were decided.⁶² The introductory gas pipeline arrangement was to run nearby the Herat-Kandahar Highway in Afghanistan and pass through Chaman, Zhob, DG Khan and Multan in Pakistan.⁶³ In any case, a real obstacle to the venture remains the unstable situation in Afghanistan.

PAKISTAN AND CENTRAL ASIA AFTER US INTERVENTION IN THE REGION

The terrorist attacks of 9/11 on the twin towers transformed the geopolitical scene with fresh alliances and regional arrangements. Central Asia turned into a region of extraordinary strategic importance for the United States and Pakistan. Islamabad joined Washington in its global war on terror. The U.S. supported Pakistan to reach Central Asia and also helped it in energy projects such as TAPI and CASA-1000 etc.

After Sep. 11, Pakistan attempted to mark advances into Central Asian region. It put forward ways to supply products of Central Asian states to the remaining world. Pakistan thought this project could solve partially its growing economic and financial crisis and underline the country's geostrategic importance. The U.S. and Saudi Arabia supported this project on account of their regional geo-political motives rather than economic ones; Pakistan's major competitor in this region is Iran for controlling the transit trade traffic from the Central Asian states. US and Saudi Arabia worry about Iran's possible geo economic role regarding the five Central Asian states and about its strategic significance over the whole region, and this was the most important, though not the only reason, for supporting Pakistan.⁶⁴

Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI) marked a treaty in December 2010 on the gas pipeline. The United States has continuously supported the TAPI so as to derail the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline by trying to wean India away from the IPI.⁶⁵ The TAPI pipeline, which American authorities regularly tout, stays in the arrangement stages while its future remains subject to political advancements that will influence investment decisions.⁶⁶

CONCLUSION

This study has tried to present a clear image of Pakistan's relations with the landlocked Central Asian states. Pakistan has been seeking close cooperation with Central Asian states in nearly every field. The Central Asian states also

consider Pakistan beneficial for mutual trade. Pakistan has several bilateral agreements with each of the five republics in the region. They are aiming to revive the historical, cultural and commercial relations between Pakistan and the regional states. The exchange visits of officials have had significant impact on the relations and these high-level visits should continue. The main barriers for strong relationship between Pakistan and CASs are absence of mutual border, instability in Afghanistan and after the 9/11, US war against terrorism. Central Asian states can not ignore Pakistan due to its geo-strategic importance in the region. Pakistan is interested in exploring transit routes to Central Asia. The shortest and cheapest route for this region to access the international markets is, via Afghanistan, Pakistan's Gwadar and Karachi ports. China has assumed the responsibility of developing Gwadar port; it has intention to develop an energy and trade route for CASs and rest of the region. After the US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Pakistan's policy makers will have to design carefully Pakistan's regional policy for the maintenance of peace and stability in Afghanistan and to safe its political and economic interests in the Central Asia.

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