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The “New Great Game” of Central Asia: The Role of India on the Prospective of Energy and Security Strategy

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ABSTRACT: The significance of Central Asia to India has also grown as India has sought to diversify its energy sources by including such imports from the Central Asian region. Despite all Central Asian Republics having a higher per capita income than India, a central focus of India’s relations with these countries has been through its development cooperation and energy strategy. Though Indian aid to this region constitutes less than one percent of the total volume of grants and Lines of Credit extended by India overseas, the number of Central Asian bureaucrats who have received training through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) training program is significant. In the Prospective of New Great Game strategy in the 21st Century is the vital factor for India’s foreign policy towards Central Asia. However, the Indian prospective India is the emerging global powers in the great game politics. This brief analysis the scope and potential of closer ties between India and the Central Asian region, with a special focus on India’s development partnerships through the Geostrategic significance and Security Prospective in their Broader region. This paper is an unpretentious attempt to focus on the strategic and diplomatic objectives of India in the Central Asian region in the light of the activities of major powers in the Central Asianregion.

KEYWORDS: NEW GREAT GAME, ITEC, OBOR, INSTC

I. INTRODUCTION

The “Great Game” refers to the historical rivalry between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire in Indian-subcontinent and Central Asia. During 19th and 20th years the Central Asia and Indian-subcontinent was a territory of the power diversion between the historically known as the empires of British and Tsarist Russia. In the 19th century Russia got control of whole Central Asia till the end of 1990s, by this, the old Great game comes into an end. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, all countries of the world to conventional the diplomatic relations with the Republics of Central Asian Countries, but it was only after the US intervention in Afghanistan that all countries of the world show their interest in making good relations with these Republics. Therefore, after the 9/11 event new great game started between provincial and world powers in the Central Asian region. The foremost objectives of this study are to analyze the role of India in Central Asia after the US intervention in Afghanistan after 9/11 attack and subsequent withdrawal in 2021. After the 9/11 attacks and the succeeding United States (US) war on terror changed the international security picture. Dominance of security issues and its linkages with economics and politics became its major attribution.

As the significance of the various regions throughout the sphere unspecified the new geopolitical magnitude, Central Asian Region (CAR) received direct and highest attention on the Great Game politics. The geopolitical importance of the Central Asian states has been highlighted by the fact hat the same has been labeled as Russia’s intentional backyard“, Washington’s Greater Middle East“, the new,, Far West“of China and so forward. The vital resources of uranium, hydrocarbons and oil of the region and its physical convenience to South Asian region, made the region vital for every country, particularly for Europe and South Asia. The region’s completely geopolitical location-between Russia and China (historically aggressive powers) invited the presence of provincial and trans-regional players since its beginning after the disintegration of the Soviet Union. As US decided to shift its focus to the Central Asian region (CAR) through the Great Game Politics, it devised an approach towards “Greater Central Asia” aiming to marginalize between Russia and China. The „New Great Game“ was developed in Central Asia involving Russia, America, Europe, China and India as key players as well as Iran, Turkey and Pakistan as regional players in the present Scenario. America sees India as a corresponding power between Russia and China.

The role of different international and regional organizations such as the UN, NATO, and SCO attached with the



wellbeing that each individual country has in this region, have given a intentional push to the “New Great Game” in central Asian region. The existence of western powers in Afghanistan, which serves as a gateway between Central and South Asia, has added to the geostrategic and geopolitical implication of the region. The world at present looks towards the potential developments in the region in the possibility of US exit from Afghanistan in 2022. Each country thus has its own vested interests in the Central Asian region, and, any major political and military expansion in this region has the capability to manipulate internal security of Russia, China (Xinjiang) and India (Kashmir). Following the issue of Afghanistan in 2021 the India and Afghanistan relation is dormant situation because of Taliban capture the whole Afghanistan republics. The purpose of this convention was to revive India’s sluggish relations with the five CAR’s through the India central Asia talks on 2022. Thus, the real face up to that emerges for India is to locate the new ways and earnings to improve its attendance in the two reasons much beyond the other major players in this region.

But the power of Russia remains constantly growing in Central Asia because the economies of these Republics are still connected with Russia. The experience of US intervention in Afghanistan changed the whole geopolitical scenario of the region. Central Asian states get the full-fledged attention of the whole world. The new regional and intercontinental players started playing their roles in the region. Central Asia is positioned in the immediate neighborhood of India. From the past centuries the developments in the region of Central Asia have direct implications on the safety measures for India. Therefore, India cannot effort to pay no attention to the region to any further extent. The bulky scale of contribution of India in Afghanistan after US involvement makes the region more important for India to safe and sound their interests. In addition, this, Central Asia and India has huge scope to gain reimbursement. But behind the schedule entry of India in the Region had brought her in an inconvenient position. China as a intentional revival of India is in a better position as compared to India and is investing on a huge scale in the region so that it can keep other countries at bay. Putting things in this context, the revision analyzes the role of India in Central Asia after the US involvement in Afghanistan after 9/11 and its succeeding withdrawal from Afghanistan. This paper also makes a humble effort to examine the role of world powers other than Russia in Central Asia, in changing the geopolitics of the region.

Geo-Strategic Consequence of Central Asia

Central Asia is one of the pivot regions of the world. It is located in the center of the Eurasian continental space and is a central link between several healthy and dynamic economies such as China, the European Union, India, Japan, and Russia. According to Khwaja, “Central Asia owes its importance to turning into a world economic center. In new energy atlas of the world, Central Asia is located in a strategic region, with strong ties to neighboring regions”. The expansion of Central Asia depends upon its admission to the rest of the world. Central Asia is an important part of the political and economic world system, being “delimited by some of the most energetic economies in the world, including three of the BRIC countries Russia, India, and China. Because of these extraordinary features of the region, it becomes a preferred location for great and regional powers of the world, where they are paying attention to increase their influence. Further, the new Central Asian states replicate their economic and demographic prospective, geographic location, the temperament of their relations with other states, primarily with neighboring ones, as well as their role in regional and global international organizations. Overall, around 75 million peoples live in this region, which is quite rich in natural possessions and in economic, scientific and technologically prospective¹. With the achievement of Trans-Asian railway projects and the development of road and air connections, the trade and economic implication of Central Asia will increase further as it will serve as a route for substantial cargo flows to Asia and the Pacific region to Europe and West Asia, as well as from west to east. Most of the CARs have vast oil and gas reserves; it also has inexpensive hydro energy reserves, especially in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. This has involved the attention of various countries, as well as India. A number of companies from Russia, the United States, Turkey, Iran, and others are challenging for the right to take out and ship the Kazak oil and Turkmen natural gas to international markets. In fact today Central Asia has become a decisive area in the foreign policy of the West, South and East Asian countries². The US has provided a new path to cementing a new affiliation with some of these former Soviet Republics. Russia itself is trying to build a new cooperative structure and China is no prohibiting to this movement. India is making a serious proposal to build new equations with the countries of Central Asia. Some other Countries like Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan, and Pakistan are also making efforts to create a position of manipulate in this region. Japan and South Korea are also establishing economic ties with these Republics. India, as an up-and-coming regional power in South Asia, is obviously interested in any changes taking place within or close to the region, which may have implications for its security sphere.



Great Game in Central Asia

A great game was a political and sensitive confrontation between the British Empire and the Russian Empire over Afghanistan and neighboring Central Asia during the 19th century. Russia was apprehensive of British intentions over commercial and militarily in roads in the region and uniformly British was apprehensive of Russia adding to “The Jewel in the Crown” India, to the infinite empire that Russia was building in Asia. This resulted in the ambiance of suspect and the threat of war between these two empires. Britain made it main concerns to protect India by applying all approaches and a great game is all about how the British protect India from Russia during that period. The great game began on 12 Jan 1830 when Lord Ellen borough, the President of Board of Control of India, tasked Lord William Bentinck, “the Governor General, to establish a new trade route to the Emirate of Bukhara. Britain intended to gain control over Emirate of Afghanistan and make it a protectorate and to use the Ottoman Empire, the Persian Empire, the Khanate of Khiva and the Emirate of Bukhara as a buffer state between both the empires. This would look after India and key sea trade routes from Russia. On the other hand, Russia proposed Afghanistan as a Neutral Zone”³. This results that Khiva, Bukhara, and Kokand was occupied by Russia. Many Historians considered the end of the Great Game to be 10 September 1895 with the signing of Pamir Boundary commission protocols when the border between Afghanistan and the Russian empire was distinct. The 1901 novel Kim by Rudyard Kipling made the term popular and introduced the new implications of great power rivalry.

India’s Geo-Strategic Benefit from Central Asia

The materialization condition of the predominantly Muslim but, in fact, multiethnic and multi- religious CARs have added a new strategic dimension to the geopolitics of the whole of Asia and Europe so, for the countries located in its instant neighborhood. Central Asia fabrication at the strategic junction between the two nuclear powers, Russia and China, and at the crossing point between Russia and the Islamic world. It shares borders with Afghanistan, which is a major cause of spreading religious extremism in the region. India has a vital interest in the security and political stability of this region. Obviously given the Kashmir angle, India cannot be walled off from the political developments which take place in the Central Asian region. Any advance by Islamic extremist groups in the CARs could revitalize similar elements actively in Kashmir. For these reasons dictated by geography, India’s strategic concerns are made up with the regions bordering its north and northwest region⁴. Pakistan in its northwest continues to be aggressive towards India. Pakistan is by now sponsoring cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. For India, the Kashmir issue pertains not to four million Muslims living in Kashmir Valley alone, but to the peace and security around 130 million Muslims elsewhere in India. Therefore, for India the geostrategic significance of CARs is huge natural resources and hydrocarbons. Under no incident can India close the eyes to connecting this region. On the other hand, unsteadiness situation in Afghanistan has also unfavorably subjective peace and security in this region. Most countries in the neighborhood are influenced that extremists consolidated in Afghanistan under the Taliban will undermine Central and South Asian region. India also apprehends that the Taliban’s extension will boost the pressure on Kashmir and enlarge the Pakistan’s strategic achievement to the gate way of Central Asian region. After Afghanistan and Pakistan maintain to be the key actors creating the undermining situation in the CARs as well as in India. Taliban should be the destabilizing blueprint of local conflicts as manifested in Afghanistan and some of the Central Asian states, especially in Tajikistan continue to unavoidable situation in the security situation on the environment prospective in Southern Asian region. In the light of the above mentioned that, India’s long term intentional benefit forging the closer collaboration with the Central Asian states should be understandable.

Another point is that it needs to be highlighted here is that today the Central Asian region has become an area of enormous significance to Europe, US, China, and Iran. The US is trying to weaken the Russian and Iranian gains; China has dedicated and to invest the billions of dollars for the expansion of Central Asian oilfields to accomplish its future energy demands, and another factor is that Europe wants to enlarge its control by means of NATO’s spreading out eastwards throughout the Partnership for Peace (PFP) programme. All this is likely to bring in high-stakes Great Game politics in the Central Asian region. This perceptibly implications of China and Russia, India is obliged to consider these developments are attractive or not. The question is that India’s concerns to expand its external influence in CARs will have severe implications, directly or indirectly for the Central Asian countries through the Great Game politics.⁵ India’s connected to the geostrategic significance of CAR’s are the problem of religious extremism, terrorism or what Central Asian states call political Islam and the problem of drugs and arms trafficking and cross border terrorism in the border area. Another factor is that the financial achievement of other countries of Central Asia is a significance of their investment area which is India has not yet well thought-out sincerely. In the year 2000 onwards India interested to setup, a few pilot projects in Central Asian countries in every year. Right now, only a tool-room axis in Turkmenistan established by HMT has been set up and also technical cooperation programmes have begun.



The idea behind this project India will be setting up a center of excellence there. They have a polytechnic where academic education is imparted. But the tool-room straight away adds a convenient boundary to the whole things in this region. Not only can the students but also to promising entrepreneurs, people who want to set up their own industry also benefited from the Indian tool-room axis. Similarly, in every year, one project in one Central Asian country will be gearuptheCAR"sdevelopmentprojectonthetimeline. Thisisgoingtobeanon-goingseriesinthe Great Game politicsrivalry.

The Position of India in New Great Game

Central Asian regions come under the "Extended Neighborhood Policy". The region features very high in India's foreign policy particularly after US involvement in Afghanistan. India shared historical, Cultural relations with Central Asia from the past 200 years. From the Kushana Empire in ancient India to the medieval period, the connectivity among the two was very high. During the Cold War period, India and USSR have strong and healthy relations with each other; therefore, India was the only country who has a consulate in Tashkent the capital of Uzbekistan. After the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, followed by the appearance of five new self-governing nation-states namely, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, India recognized the diplomatic relations with each of these countries. India did not take much attention in the region in the 1990s. However, the then-Indian Prime Minister PV Narasimha Rao visited Kyrgyzstan and Turkmenistan in 1996 to establish deep ties with these previous Soviet states With ITEC (International Technical and Economic Cooperation) programme, which used to be India's largest trading partners before 1991⁶. The victory of Taliban in Afghanistan in the mid-1990s changed the geopolitical situation in Central Asia. The security of Central Asia and that of India got closely associated. The five newly emerged states were troubled of any destabilizing situation to control from Afghanistan, while India's concerns about Pakistan's search for „strategic depth“, forced Delhi to change its non-serious attitude towards Central Asian Region.

Central Asia is a significant region for all powers of the world, while the USA has been concerned above all to suit its Business, economic and financial interests, for Russia, the region is its intentional plot and sphere of influence Likewise, the Central Asian Region is important for China this region is located in its neighbor hood and has the potential to play a crucial role in its ambitious project "One Belt Road Initiative". Besides this, the region is rich in minerals, natural gas, Oil, hydrocarbon, which have the ability to meet the energy needs of China.

One Belt one Road Initiative (OBOR)

In the "New Great Game" strategy in the 21st century in the Central Asian region, the OBOR proposal is the great strategic significance for other South Asian countries and also to play a vital role for other powers also. Beijing is seeking to play create a positive-sum game in which China and India will mutually benefit through enlarged trade capabilities, stronger financial institutions, and multilateral economic corridors, India wants to joining the OBOR projects from a liberal perspective and strategic interest. The main reason for the dispute of India cooperating with the OBOR initiative stems from the Indian initiative in Central Asia for geostrategic importance, which has been done waiting to counter the BRI projects. India has been slow in identifying initiating and implementing a fast come within reach to connectivity in the region to countering China. This projects commitments on building a port in Chabahar and rail-line from the port city towards Afghanistan have been moving at a snail space to provide connectivity to the north-eastern region through an India built a Sittwe port in Myanmar is half-done, as the final road link into Mizoram of India still needs to be done and the partnership of excellence infrastructure project inventiveness by Japanese government. Another forthcoming proposal of India and Japanese application on which India joined to contradict China still needs to achieve its targets. India needs world-class contemporary ports, capable of receiving the largest vessel which can draw intercontinental shipping lines and it is necessary to speed up "Make in India" initiative of India⁷.

In the future China will craft a structure for trade and structural design between the BRI countries which will not be constructive to India. India would lose planned space to China whose control in the BRI nation would enlarge with a rise and stronger economic cooperation with CAR"s region, and also China is the most important actor of the "New Great Game" politics to Countering USA, UK, and other powers rivalry towards Central Asia. Now the fact is that China will in any case increase its attendance in the Indian borders with India being a part or not, then why not join it and change the plans as positive to Indian prospective. If BRI is built, China will become a favored destination for countries seeking investment and trade gets abstracted from India. Thus, India's relation with neighbours will depreciate and India will lose its bargaining power as a major power.⁸



International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

Firstly, the International North-South Transport Corridor (or INSTC) is a joint proposal of India, Iran and Russia, which signed a concurrence to this effect in 2000 and ratified it in 2002, with Azerbaijan joining the agreement in 2005. The four countries recline along the route of the corridor geographically and are building it to secure widespread economic interests with the free flow of goods and passengers. The INSTC is up-and-coming at a time when the Chinese-backed Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a grand scheme of an international transportation corridor with a leg on each side of a total of 68 countries in Europe, Asia and even Africa, has started reshaping the global rules of trade in favor of China. The INSTC is dwarfed by the BRI, however, it still remains significant as it reflects the strong-minded for the founding member countries to walk in a direction that is characteristically from the one prescribed form by China⁹.

On the prospective of 21st century all major powers expanding its foreign policy towards north to south, and south to west and west to east. In the Geopolitical scenario every country's strategic location towards CAR's region through the "New Great Game" Politics, all great powers rivalry to each other on the prospective of energy strategic because all Central Asian countries rich in minerals, oil, hydrocarbon and natural resources. The INSTC is a land and sea-based multi-modal transport set of connections that will connect the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf with the Caspian Sea and then onwards to Russia and even northern Europe. Given this compensation not only for India and Russia but also the countries enrooted, the corridor is attracting the interest of a growing number of countries across Europe and Asian continents. At present, it has 10 member countries additional to the four (India, Iran, Russia and Azerbaijan) mentioned the above, namely Belarus, Ukraine, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Armenia, Syrian Arab Republic and Oman; Bulgaria is an observer member. Furthermore, many countries from approximately the world, such as Finland, Estonia, Latvia and Pakistan, have articulated their interest to join the Great Game politics in Central Asia. The "New Great Game" is a misnomer, because rather than two empires paying attention on the region as in the past, there are now many global and regional powers actively with the rise of China and India as through the Chabahar Port of Iran and India's transport route plan for northern connectivity towards European Continents. Central Asian states have diversified their political, economic, and security relationship with other European and South Asian countries.

II. CONCLUSION

In post-US involvement in Afghanistan in 2001, India showed a keen interest in Afghanistan and plays a major role in being peace and development in the country. As Afghanistan is a highly explosive country and the interests of India is deeply involved in the country through the development project. Central Asia is located in the neighborhood of Afghanistan emerged as a major player in Central Asia. The connection in Central Asia on the part of India is predictable to enlarge even more in the coming years because the region has prospective to destruction its security and to manipulate of any country in the region can be damaging to the security at the Western Border of India. India has a well distinct and well-articulated foreign policy towards the Afghanistan and Central Asian Region. Consequently, the CARs did not figure prominently in the Indian Foreign Policy.

After the incident of Afghanistan in 2021 the India's policy towards Afghanistan is stagnated because only for Taliban regime and Security prospective. In this issues India searching another way to connectivity towards Central Asian region though his Connecting policy towards CAR regions in 2022 on India-Central Asia Dialogue. However, the "New Great Game" strategy had played a major role to metamorphose India's engagement with Central Asia in the future. Realizing its omissions, it launched various official frameworks such as India's "Extended Neighbourhood", policy and "Immediate and Strategic Neighbourhood" and the "Look North Policy" and the latest "Connect Central Asia" policy towards India more than benefited for future and making its wider space in this region. From the past to present India is increasing its presence in all counties of Central Asia through the bilateral to multilateral forum. The movement will get impetus once private players will join in the region and the Chabahar port gets fully operational in the upcoming future. Then, India will play a much bigger role in the region and try to win with the other super powers especially China in the prospective on "New Great Game" and "OBOR" project. But due to USA sanctions on Iran and Afghanistan in recent times, the situation can go turn around in Central Asia. Then it becomes a very important for India's foreign policy towards Central Asia, it is the alternative ways to connect with the region



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