

## **Pakistan-Central Asia Relations: Challenges and Interests (2010-2020)**

**Javeria Jahangir**

*Assistant Professor, Department of Politics and International Relations, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan.*

*Email: [javeria@leads.edu.pk](mailto:javeria@leads.edu.pk)*

**Asmat Shabbir**

*M.Phil. Research Scholar, Department of Politics and International Relations, Lahore Leads University, Lahore, Pakistan.*

### **ABSTRACT**

Pakistan has very close historical, religious and cultural relation with CARs but unfortunately could not develop political, economic and military relations with CARs. Pakistan can facilitate CARs in connecting with global trade by providing direct access to warm waters through the sea ports of Karachi and Gwadar and can benefit from CARs huge potential in natural resources in return and both states can revolutionize business and trade with mutual support and cooperation. The hurdles for Pakistan include political instability in Afghanistan, Indian conspiracies, US involvement, Russian and Chinese influence, Iran's role, authoritarian regimes in CARs and weak foreign policy of Pakistan. The geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economic significance and its richness in natural oil and gas reserves is attracting Russia, China, US, EU, Japan, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India. Pakistan needs to be very vigilant for policy making for relations with CARs to have sound and permanent deep trade, business, political and military agreements for a stable political and economic development.

**Key Words:** Pakistan, Central Asia, Soviet Rule, Afghan Crisis, Global Interests, Regional Issues.

### **Introduction**

Central Asian Regional States (CARs) with majority of Muslim population have always been a focus of attention due to its geographical location, cultural and ethnic diversity and sources of conflicts. A great game was played by British and Russian Empires in this Region for a whole of 19th Century and ultimately the great game was won by the Russian Empire. The disintegration of Soviet Union, independence of CARs and discovery of great reserves of natural resources started a new great game between regional and international powers. American involvement in Central Asia and particularly in Afghanistan has serious implications on Central Asian Region and its neighboring countries and USA is going to face a very strong reaction from South Asia, Central Asia and Far East

Asia. Soviet Union has had enormous powers in the past, but the role of present Russia in the region and its former states of CARs is not going to be less important in anyway in future as well. China has also been able to make a place for itself in the CARs and is going to play a very important role in CARs in future. CARs is joining hands with China to fight against ethnic divisions and intolerance and Talibanization i.e. religious extremism and terrorism (Jaffry, 2016). CARs are very important in the eyes of the international community due to its richness in natural and oil and gas resources and it has become especially extremely important for countries like Pakistan which do not have energy resources and needs these resources for its industries etc.

The geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economic status of the region is very important for the whole of Asia and Europe and rest of the world. The region is going to be a very important focal point for internal business and trade in the near future. In addition to the great reserves of energy resources, the region is also going to be a great tourist attraction for the whole world. Pakistan needs to be very vigilant for policy making for developing relations with CARs to have sound and permanent deep trade, business, political and military connections. The region of CARs is going to be a great battle field for competitions, conflicts and possible wars to gain supremacy, to gain political, military and economic hegemony and to grab natural resources of the CARs. The region can be provider of cheap energy resources to the Asia and other regions of the world.

Although Pakistan has very close historical and religious and to some extent cultural relation with CARs but especially after the independence of the CARs from the Soviet Communist Rule has not been able to make much progress in developing political, economic and military relations with CARs. Pakistan can be very beneficial and useful for CARs because CARs is a landlocked region, it does not have any access to the sea ports for conducting business and trade with rest of the world and Pakistan can provide shortest route through Karachi and Gwadar Port. Pakistan's relations with CARs are not progressing mainly due to unrest in Afghanistan. Pakistan cannot hope for a trade link with Central Asia when the most feasible and economically viable route passes through Afghanistan is blocked. The new great game between major world powers going on in CARs is also creating problems for Pakistan in improving relations with CARs. There is also a lack of vigilance on the part of Pakistani Policy makers in this regard. So due to these factors, Pakistan is not able to benefit from the energy resources of the CARs. The landlocked Central Asia is in terrible need to get an access to the world. Pakistan can be one of the finest options due to its specific geographic location, located at the junction of South Asia and Middle East, with a substantial exit to the Arabian Sea (Bano, & Sohail, 2014).

Independence after over 80 years of direct rule by Moscow has created a strategic power vacuum in the CARs that has unleashed rivalries among neighbors and superpowers. A multitude of countries has shown interest in the CARs including Russia, China, US, EU, Japan, Israel, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and India. With the end of Cold War, geostrategic environment had undergone major twists

and turns. The impact of these changes influenced the interstate relations of all the countries of the world in general and Central Asian Region in particular. Eastern European countries broke their alliance with Soviet Union which was itself dissolved once CARs gained independence in 1991. US has been recognized as the only superpower in post-cold war scenario. Historians, who warned once about America's decline, now gush about an age of unrivalled dominance (Jaffry, 2016) The competing powers in the CARs are pressurized and have increased their military presence in the CARs. Imperialism increased in the Region for grabbing geographical territories between 17th and 19th centuries. A similar geo-politics and rivalries have reemerged between the international powers. After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and American invasion of Afghanistan, the American attention diverted from Russian Communism to the militant Islam in Afghanistan, Pakistan and CARs. The industrialized West with highly sophisticated technology has to deal with militant Islam in South and Central Asia. The CARs were quite worried with the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan and about Pakistan who played the role of frontline state in the American war on terror. Central Asian States provide air and military bases to the American forces for carrying out air strikes against Taliban forces. This time the competitors and players in the new great game are more as compared to the past.

### **Geostrategic Importance of Central Asia**

Central Asian Region is located at the junction of three great civilizations i.e. Islamic, Christian and Buddhist. It is also a junction for Europe, Middle East, Asia and Far East Asia. Central Asia occupies a very important geopolitical position in the world which makes Central Asia a region of attraction for major powers. Central Asia's utmost significance is not likely to end in the future as the requirements of world energy are growing every day. Today the region has become an arena of the 'big power small power' syndrome comprising of Europe, US, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and India. Central Asia can be vital trade links between Europe and Asia. Given the amount of oil and gas reserves, the region would play a very important role in fulfilling the energy demands of various countries (Blank, 2008)

### **Religious and Cultural Ties between South Asia and Central Asia**

Central Asia and South Asia have a long history of historical, cultural and religious relations with each other. Particularly Pakistan, India and Afghanistan have had very deep socio-cultural and politico-economic relations. Poor economies of the Central Asia are a major problem of this region which is due to its being located away from the Sea, it cannot take part in world trade and make any earnings from its natural energy resources like oil and gas. On the other hand South Asia is blessed with excellent coastal ports and oceans. If both Central and South Asian regions join hands, they can make fast economic progress, solve their

financial crisis and liberate their societies from poverty. These regions were part of a great economic and trade network during 1500 BC. Trade was being carried out from Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Uzbekistan via China, Kashgar, Khotan, Yarkand, Muram and Qara Shehar. The first Islamic invader to Central Asia was Mahmud of Ghazni who invaded Afghanistan in 7<sup>th</sup> Century A.D. Sultan Mahmud was very fond of exploring Indian cultures and wrote an extraordinary document on his adventures. His narrations were confirmed by AlBeruni in his famous book *Tarikhe Hind* (1910) which he wrote in 1017 A.D. after visiting India. Then Muslims came to Sub-Continent in 12<sup>th</sup> Century and settled in the Subcontinent for several centuries till the arrival of the British (Naseem, & Younas, 2017).

CARs and Pakistan share many commonalities which include religion and to some extent culture as well. South Asia and Central Asia have centuries old common historical legacy that includes cultural, religious and economic ties and both India and Pakistan, the most momentous countries of South Asia are highly conscious of their common heritage with Central Asia (Reetz, 1993: 212). Caucasus, the mountain, had been a legendary abode of fairies in Urdu and Hindi literature of India and Pakistan. The ancient nature of links between Central Asia and South Asia had probably been more cultural than political. However, along with cultural relations, the trade interchange also strengthened owing to old Silk Route with Indian merchant out posts in Kashgar, Yarkand, Kholan Maran and Qara-Shahr in Central Asia (Mekenkamp, Tongeren, & de Veen, 2002). Generally the history of Central Asia is seen as full of political, economic, scientific, and educational backwardness. The neighbors of Central Asia have not been able to forget the cruel, barbarian and destructive terrorism of Genghis Khan and Tamerlane. Writers, drama writers, filmmakers, analysts and historians from Middle East, Europe and China have all presented these nomads of Central Asia as the most cruel and beastly killers and terrorists of human history who destroyed human civilizations. The history of the region is full of divisions, clashes, conflicts, battles and wars, political enmities and rivalries and also of differential claims of nomadic groups and tribes. CARs has a history full of political, social, cultural and economic problems which were not easy to be handled and resolved even by Soviets and the national government which came to power after the collapse of the Soviet Union. The Soviet rule over Central Asia for several decades has also had many impacts and implications for the societies of Central Asia and the things which were imposed by the Communist rule cannot be easily scratched out of these societies. Russians introduced many reforms and rapid industrialization and technological advancements in these countries and it will not be possible to revert back these societies to primitive and pre-industrialized phase of life (K. Warikoo, 2016). The history of cultural and religious relations between Pakistan and Central Asia dates back to 15<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> century. There have always been close cultural ties between the larger area of India, or, more specifically, the north of South Asia and Central Asia. Babur, the last Timuride from Central Asia, founded the Moghul dynasty that ruled over large parts of India from 1526 until the last Moghul Emperor Bahadur Shah. The Britain and Russia were not only

fighting to take control of Central Asia, but The British saw Russian adventures in Central as a first threat towards its plans to take over Indian Sub-Continent via Central Asia via Afghanistan through Khyber Pass. Russians tried to enter Central Asia many times in 18<sup>th</sup> Century, but failed due to weather conditions. Russians wanted to capture Central Asia to find markets for Russian goods. Russians also believed that they have to civilize the savages of Central Asia so entry into CARs was important. In the past Central Asian barbarians had been kidnapping Russians and sold them as slaves in Central Asia. The British used this as an excuse of expansion into the Central Asia that they were invading Central Asia for getting the Russians slaves liberated (Cooley, 2008). For most of the time the nature of links between the two regions had probably been more cultural than political.

### **Future Prospects for Pakistan and Central Asia**

Central Asia is blessed with natural resources like oil and gas and developed economies like US, Russia, China, Europe, and developing economies like India, Pakistan and South Asian countries need the energy resources from Central Asia badly. The geo-political location is not suitable for Pakistan only but it is also ideal for Japan, India and Iran. Many countries of the world are competing for getting hold of the resources of the Central Asian States. Power game is being played in Afghanistan and Pakistan to have better and easy access to the Central Asia. World community can benefit a lot from the Central Asia and its human and natural energy resources. Pakistan can benefit a lot from the natural energy resources of the Central Asian States and can boast its own economy and facilitate boost up in the economies of the countries of CARs (Reetz, 1993).

Pakistan's geostrategic location makes it very important to play a role to facilitate the whole region for have bilateral business and trade relations. Pakistan and China have constructed CPEC and are also upgrading Karakoram Highway. Both the countries have decided to construct more highways through Khunjerab pass. The four states i.e. Pakistan Kazakhstan, China and Kyrgyzstan are going to launch a bus service to promote business and trade in the region and also going to promote tourism and cultural, political, economic and religious collaboration and cooperation between people of Pakistan and CARs (Adnan & Fatima, 2015:194) Pakistan can earn a lot of revenue by providing overland routes and linkages to all the countries of the CARs. Pakistan's participation in development projects like roads, highways, dry-ports, airports, electricity and power projects, tourist spots and oil and gas pipelines will promote enormous financial, business, trade and socio-cultural, politico-economic, military and anti-terrorist activities in the region of CARs and the whole of region. The road and infrastructural links will also promote historic links between people of Pakistan and CARs. These projects and connectivity between Pakistan will also help alleviate poverty from Afghanistan, promote peace therein, and help in eliminating terrorism and drug production in Afghanistan.

## **Economic Interests of Pakistan in CARs**

Pakistan has the advantage of having a relationship of Islamic brotherhood with the CARs. Pakistan has a wonderful geostrategic location and it will make its best efforts to facilitate CARs access to sea routes through Karachi and Gwadar Ports to conduct international trade. Pakistan has been a victim of terrorism, Uzbek tribes are part of terrorist activities and Pakistan wants to curb terrorism with the help of the CARs. 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 (Fatima, & Zaffar, 2014). Pakistan needs to have a stronger position militarily to keep India away from the region. Pakistan interests in CARs include strategic, economic, religious, political and military. But the main interests of Pakistan are strategic because it can boost its trade and business and provide it economic, political and military depth to it in CARs (Blank, 2007).

Pakistan is facing serious energy crises but unfortunately, not able to benefit from the energy resources of CARs and is seeking help from countries which are located thousands of miles away to help us build up our economy. Pakistan is buying very costly energy resources from other states but if Pakistan buys electricity from Tajikistan then it will be available at a very low price. The landlocked CARs are also in need to have access to sea routes to conduct business and trade with Middle East, Europe, Far East and rest of the world because Pakistan is a junction of all these world economic regions.

## **Challenges to Pakistan Instability in Afghanistan**

Afghanistan and Pakistan have a long history of relation spanned over centuries with many historical, religious, cultural, language, trade and ethnic commonalities. The major issues involved in Afghanistan and Pakistan which created hostilities are the Durand Line, the issue of Pakhtunistan, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, takeover of Afghanistan by Taliban, American attack on Afghanistan, Indian involvement in Afghanistan, American withdrawal from Afghanistan and the perceived dangers to Afghanistan from Pakistani side. In 1979, Afghanistan launched an Afghan Jihad against Soviet Union with the military support of Pakistan (Khan & Durrani, 2009). Collaboration between Soviet Union and India was seen by Pakistan with hostile eyes. US and Saudi Arabia funded this Jihad and supported Pakistan because Soviet Union and its Communist political-economic system was seen by all the three countries as a common enemy. Pakistan had to bear the brunt of tolerating the biggest migration of refugees from Afghanistan into Pakistan. The refugees from Afghanistan had negative implications for poor economy of Pakistan and created problems of population security for Pakistan. Even after the Soviet withdrawal, US attack on Afghanistan, Pakistan supported Taliban and it had also helped Taliban to take over Afghanistan after the Soviet

expulsion. But after 9/11, Pakistan supported international community against Taliban (Malik, & Zhilong, 2018).

Pakistan cannot reach CARs unless there is peace in Afghanistan. Pakistan's security in the region is interlinked with Afghanistan because both the countries share a border which is 2430 kilometers long. This common border had very serious negative implications for Pakistan and militancy, extremism and terrorism increased in Pakistan. This border is very unstable and movement of people from one side to the other is very easy. Pakistan's weak economy, instable political conditions and uncertain foreign policy did not allow Pakistan to be proactive in advancing its relations with CARs whereas other actors like Russian, China, Iran, India, Turkey and USA have acted more vigilantly in this regard.

Taliban Takeover of Afghanistan changed the situation in the region. Afghan people initially welcomed Taliban because they controlled armed groups and brought some peace to the war torn Afghanistan. Pakistan and Saudi Arabia recognized Taliban government and supported it. Taliban never participated in the democratic process, they never contested elections and always believed that they will take over Afghanistan by force and they have done so on 15<sup>th</sup> of August, 2021. US has been blaming Pakistan for providing financial support, weapons and manpower to Afghan Taliban for carrying out operations in Afghanistan (Maizland, 2021). On the other hand, Pakistan has been blaming Afghan government for carrying out terrorist activities in Pakistani territory with the support of Indian agents. Afghanistan and Pakistan have serious trust deficit and a blame game is going on between both the countries of carrying out terrorist activities on their respective territories. The hostilities between the both countries pushed Afghanistan towards India and both India and Afghanistan have become very close friends and are working against Pakistani solidarity (Husain, & Elahi, 2015). Since all the stake holders involved in Afghanistan are not working honestly for peace. The circumstance in Afghanistan needs stern and honest approach for restoration of peace, there should be transit facilities, and the pipelines to flow down the oil and gas of the Central Asia to the warm water, and convince the Afghans that these actions would be beneficial to all of them. Pakistan is handicapped because of geography and the instable situation in Afghanistan as the lack of its direct access to any Central Asian country creates a difficult situation. The narrow Wakhan Corridor, which is part of Afghanistan, denies Pakistan direct geographical linkage with Tajikistan. Otherwise, had Pakistan been in control of that corridor, its geographical predicament in Central Asia wouldn't have existed. The question of gas and oil pipeline from Central Asia to Pakistan or electricity from Kyrgyzstan would have become a practical possibility had the situation in Afghanistan remained normal. Pakistan cannot live in peace due to Afghan situation and it also cannot cross over Afghanistan to have access to Central Asian States for carrying out business, trade and import energy resources which are badly needed.

## **Unrest in Baluchistan and FATA**

Poor law and order situation in Baluchistan and Federally Administered Tribal Areas is also a major obstacles to bring oil and gas pipelines to Pakistan. Baluchistan has been a troubled province of Pakistan for the past many decades. There have been many militant insurgencies by different governments during the past decades on the issues of negligence and ignorance of Federal Government to the rights of the provinces. Most of the development funds were spent by almost every government in big cities like Karachi, Lahore, Islamabad, Multan, Faisalabad and like. Rural areas of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and Khaibar Pakhtun Khawa formerly known as North Western Frontier Province were totally ignored by the central and the provincial governments. A feeling was also promoted by the anti-Pakistan forces among Sindhis, Baluchis and Pakhtoons that Punjab was utilizing all the resources of these provinces and not giving the due share to the ethnic communities like Pathans, Sindhis and Baluchis. Tribal leaders wanted to have total control over their province of Baluchistan and they launched their separatist movements with support from external and internal enemies of Pakistan (Rahman, Mohmand & Wazir, 2013). The separatist movements of making Greater Baluchistan by including portions of Baluchistan under the control of Iran and Afghanistan kept the province in a constant anarchy and caused problems for Pakistan to have good relations with Afghanistan, Iran and CARs.

Pakistan must pay attention to the issue of development projects for the Baluchi common people so that their hearts can be won and they do not feel like strangers. Some work was done in this regard by the General Pervez Musharraf government. He inducted thousands of Baluchi youth in the army, police and other departments and he also set up military academies in the province of Baluchistan. But a lot more needs to be done in this regard (Rahman, Mohmand & Wazir, 2013). Government must distribute vacant lands of the province among Baluchi youth so that poverty and unemployment could be alleviated from the province and a feeling of ownership among Baluchi youth could be developed. Same situation was repeated in FATA commonly known as tribal areas of Pakistan. These areas were also ignored with regard to their development and main focus of development was the big cities of Pakistan. Tribal areas were ignored and remained backward so the people of those areas relied on smuggling, poppy cultivations, joining terrorist groups etc. These areas were close to Afghan border so they easily became home of smugglers and terrorists. These areas are a heaven for terrorists and smugglers and all kinds of criminals who commit crimes in Pakistan and run to these tribal areas to take refuge.

## **Indian Agenda**

India is not happy with growing influence of Pakistan in CARs. India needs Pakistani territory to have access to CARs. India developed close relations with Afghanistan to access CARs and both collaborated to fight against extremist



Taliban and other terrorist groups and drug trafficking as their common enemies. India has done this very smartly and by taking advantages of its presence in Afghanistan. India is also working on the plan of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan through China to India. A project of a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan Afghanistan, Pakistan to India is already under process, but progress is rather slow due to hostile relations between India and Pakistan (Roy, March, 2001). India and Pakistan and whole of the region can benefit from natural and energy resources of CARs if relations can be smoothed between Islamabad and New Delhi.

Indian claim of Non-alignment policy is the fundamental principle in her relations with other countries therefore, Indian diplomacy has found it relatively easy to build good all round relations with the newly emerging nation-states of Central Asia. Therefore, India has established very close relations with the region since Soviet era. India had enjoyed close political links with the region for decades and still retains much of its prestige as an old friend of the Soviet era. For India it was natural to deal with the Central Asian region in the first place as part of the former Soviet Union. It was still tied to the post-Soviet states by many links. India hoped to recoup whatever it could from the old relationship, looking for new opportunities. India still desires for increase in Russian influence in Central Asia and if so happens Russia's agenda of economic and political reform would be welcomed by Indian businessmen, because the newly emerging political class in Russia is taking a strong interest in India's economic management experience of what they call a mixed economy which includes both private and public enterprise (Roy, March, 2001). However India is in difficult position of not having direct access to Central Asia. Her Central Asian policy also suffered from incoherence, neglect and ignorance (Bano, Shagufta and Sohail, Muhammed, 2014).

### **Russian Role**

A vacuum was created in Afghanistan after the Russian withdrawal in 1989 and this gave an opportunity to Pakistan to take a stronger position in Afghanistan. Afghan Civil War made Afghanistan a center of drugs production and its exports and smuggling of consumer goods to Central Asian States and Pakistan. The support of neighboring countries to opposing factions in Afghanistan further aggravated the situation. Iran, Pakistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizstan and Russia began supporting different factions. This external support and interference cutoff CARs from the other countries in the region. Pakistan was mainly supporting Pashtun Taliban and Iran, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kirghizstan and Russia were supporting Northern Alliance because they did not want supremacy and dominant position of Pakistani supported Pashtun Taliban. Russia was supporting anti-Taliban forces because it want to take a revenge on Pakistan for playing an active role in Afghan Jihad with American dollars (Roy, June, 2001). Russia has been the main funder and donor of the Central Asian States even after their independence from the Soviet Union because the economies of these states

have been very weak and they were not able to manage their governments and run their state institutions with their own revenues. Therefore, they had to depend on the Russian financial support to pay for the expenses of their state expenditures and to meet their annual deficits. (Oliphant, 2013:9-10). Russian influence will never go away or vanish from the Central Asian politics. Most of the Central Asian rulers still continue to have their authoritarian style of administration and rule. They think that Russian style of authoritarian rule is the best way to deal with the local militant Islamist extremist organizations. They have a lot of trust in Russia that she will continue to provide them financial support and will protect them from foreign aggression and militancy by the Islamist groups and a threat from Afghan Taliban. In return, Russia is benefitting from the natural and human resources of the Central Asian States for its growing industry and economy.

### **US Interference**

Presence of NATO and USA in the region and collaboration between several states for getting rid of extremist groups like Taliban, Al-Qaeda and ISSI have also created problems for Pakistan. US policies in CARs are working against the interests of not only Pakistan but also against the interests of CARs by supporting terrorist organizations in the region. There is a possibility of positive impact of American involvement in the CARs that it will bring technological progress in the region, but if authoritarian regimes in the region refuse to bring reforms in their societies then social upheavals and anarchy could rise within those societies. This will continue instability in the region and harm the interests of not only all the regional and international powers and also of the US in the areas of business, trade, military supremacy and greater political involvement in the region.

Anti-terrorists cooperation has dominated US security activities in CARs since 9/11 but interstate rivalries have created much bigger threat to the peace of the region. US must tackle sources of instability, conflict and terrorism in the region of CARs to promote stability, peace, political stability and economic, social, technological, cultural development, business, trade and tourist activities in CARs (Bureau of South and Central Asian States, 2020). It should also pay attention to the issues like management of water resources in the region, border disputes, influx of refugee into neighboring countries, issues related to environmental problems, and drug trafficking from Afghanistan via Pakistan and India. US is giving more attention to Uzbekistan which is a key partner in anti-terrorism coalition and is ignoring other regional countries like Kazakhstan and is not providing any security aid and assistance to other countries of the region. This has promoted rivalry between the two countries i.e. Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Uzbekistan has been encroaching on the borders of Kyrgyzstan in the name of anti-terrorist activities. US must make a choice of working for multilateral collaboration to fight against terrorist groups instead of working for self-defense and proactive attacks which will be seen as a selfish move on the part of the US (Aliyev, May, 27, 2020). This will also deprive US of support from Russian,

Chinese and other countries in the region and rest of the international community as well. This will promote unity among militaries and political governments of CARs to fight against militant and terrorist groups present in the region. US also must work for intelligence sharing and providing training to the military forces of CARs. USA is also vulnerable keeping in view the 9/11 experience, therefore, USA must keep in mind that it cannot fight terrorism without support of the CARs and rest of the international community. US will have to redefine nature of regional security interests and related political, economic and security problems in the CARs. But the US interference in the Central Asian States is not unwanted or uninvited at all. This interference is need, requirement and desire of the Central Asian States as well. Central Asian States are facing a threat from their local militant extremist Islamic groups which are being promoted by some foreign countries with Saudi money and the major threat to these countries is from Afghan Taliban. Therefore, when USA attacked Afghanistan and overthrew Taliban regime in 2001, all the five Muslim countries of Central Asian Region which include Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan provided their air bases, military bases and logistic support to US to facilitate its war on terror against Taliban, who are their own Muslim brother because they see Taliban and Talibanization as a major threat for their countries.

### **Extremist Groups in the Region**

In Central Asian Region, many Muslim groups are turning to militancy to take over the control of their societies. Such groups do not believe in participation in the democratic takeover of government through political participation because they know that they will never win democratic elections. Islam continues to be the most powerful mobilizing force despite of Soviet rule for more than 70 years. Some Central Asian States have more militant groups than others. As the extent and level of extremist militancy among Islamist movements differs in these societies, so does the level and style of authoritarianism. Islamic militancy in Central Asia is a reaction to the globalization of Western Culture and the local leadership of Central Asian States says that the Islamic militancy has been exported by countries of Middle East, Iran, North Africa, Western countries and Pakistan and other countries of South Asia. Three factors have played important role in spread of militant Islam which are: invasion of foreign Western cultures; foreign missionaries, and foreign financial support from countries which want to spread Islam by force through Talibanization (McGlinchey, 2005). If the West continues to support the national autocratic and authoritarian leadership of CARs, the Islamic militancy is going to be very popular among masses of the CARs. People of CARs are divided in ethnic, sectarian and regional groups. The richness in economic resources and geostrategic location of these countries attracted many countries to this region. But this region was not much anti-Soviet Union even until the late 80s. That is because the populations of these societies had been loyal to the kings and sultans and did not have the courage to launch or join any anti-state

uprising or movement. The national leadership of these countries took some measures to stop politicization of religion and control religious institutions. But import of militants and funding from countries like Saudi Arabia, Iran, Afghanistan and Pakistan have played a serious threat to promoting Talibanization in the Central Asian States (Reetz 1993). Since the states of this region were not able to provide educated moderate and enlightened religious leadership and Islamic Scholars, therefore, this vacuum was filled by the fundamentalist Islamists imported from neighboring Iran, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Saudi Arabia. The increase in number of mosques and madrass in the region has increased fear of Talibanization, Islamic militancy and terrorist activities in all the republics of the CARs.

## **Conclusion**

Pakistan and Central Asian Regional States share a common historical, cultural and religious background. CARs are landlocked region and Pakistan can provide access to sea ports to CARs for international trade and business via Karachi port and Gwadar port. Pakistan needs energy resources i.e. gas and oil and CARs can fulfill Pakistani energy needs because CARs are blessed with plenty of Oil and Gas. Pakistan and CARs can revolutionize business and trade in whole of Asia. Since Pakistan does not have any common borders with CARs and can reach CARs only via Afghanistan so war in Afghanistan is a major hurdle in the way of Pakistan to reach CARs. International powers and regional countries are competing to supersede their rivals in building up their relations with CARs and none are working for promoting peace in Afghanistan and in the region.

If peace can be brought to Afghanistan then trade, finance and export between Pakistan, Afghanistan and Central Asian States can be promoted. For this purpose the relations between Afghanistan and Pakistan have to be normalized.

Anti-Pakistan Indian policies and conspiracies are also a major hurdle in progress of Pakistan's relations with CARs. Conflicts and tensions and a kind of cold war between India and Pakistan is harming the interests the business and trade interests of these two countries and of the rest of the South Asia as well. Poor economy, political instability, poor foreign policy and lethargy on the part of Pakistani policy makers has slowed the progress in the promotion of relations.

The US involvement in CARs may support extremist and terrorist organizations in the region and financial aid may be misused by the authoritarian regimes of CARs to perpetuate their regimes and may not be utilized to uplift their societies and alleviate poverty from their societies. There is a real confusion in the Central Asian Regional States and a very unhealthy competition is going on among international actors for gaining supremacy and hegemony in the Central Asia to grab natural energy resources, markets of Central Asia, and to gain military and political supremacy in the region.

Pakistan must balance its support for Taliban and must work for bringing a moderate government with representation from all sectors of Afghan population

i.e. Uzbek, Tajik, Kyrgyz, Turks, etc. because a power sharing and combined government can guarantee for peace and progress of Afghanistan and the whole region. Pakistan's support for Afghan Taliban which are mainly Pashtun will not be acceptable to Northern Alliance and will also jeopardize the rights of non-Pashtun population i.e. Uzbek, Tajik, Turks and other religious minorities.

International community must join hands to bring peace in Afghanistan to benefit the whole region in promoting business and trade. India and Pakistan must come to terms to live peacefully so that both can benefit from the natural energy resources of CARs and promote business and trade in the region and alleviate poverty from their countries.

The positive involvement of US would provide border security to CARs to block drug trafficking and export of terrorist elements and make sure that CARs do not misuse foreign support to perpetuate their authoritarian regimes to suppress their masses. International community should make joint efforts to make local state institutions democratic so that they can watch the interests and security matters of their countries on their own by being self-reliant and self-sufficient.

International community must allocate resources to help CARs in their social, economic, political, cultural and infrastructural development to help local communities to become economically prosperous and developed. CARs have not been able to develop their market economies even after 30 years of their independence from the Soviet Union and Pakistan can facilitate these countries in this regard. These countries need to develop their markets, manufacturing, exports, and increase in foreign remittance, social, economic, cultural and political reforms. Major weaknesses in the CARs are weak political and legal institutions and authoritarian style of governance and management in national institutions. These countries must revolutionize their management, governance and administrative styles and liberalise their economies on the lines of modern political and capitalistic lines. The natural resources of CARs are a blessing and at the same time a curse for the CARs –it can bring in enormous income to the region and a curse because it may promote dangerous competition between the regional and global powers.

Absence of political legacy, modern political institutions and democracy has kept CARs from developing into modern economies as the authoritarian communist rule did not allow political and economic development in CARs.

As far as the policy making and serious efforts for making progressing in the development of relations with Central Asian States is concerned, there is no serious effort on the part of consecutive Pakistani governments. Pakistan has enormous prospects and will be gaining fantastic benefits if it is able to establish its good relations with Central Asian States.

Due to the fact of non-existence of a common border the both parties cannot have a land link without Afghanistan, which is may not have peace for quite some time in the future. Therefore, the prospect of having a passage through Afghanistan to Central Asia does not seem bright in the near future, especially

after the re-takeover of Taliban and departure of the NATO forces. The situation has become so terrible that even Afghan nationals want to run away from their and many have lost their lives in such efforts to leave the country.

The international community is supporting different sectarian and ethnic groups. Iran is more interested in support Shia community of Afghanistan. Russia is anti-Taliban and is supporting Northern Alliance of Ahmed Shah Masood. These CARs do not want Talibanization of their societies and political systems that is why Russia, China and US are more reliable and trustworthy friends as compared to Afghanistan, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan.

Pakistan needs to win trust of the Central Asia States that it will never support any kind of militancy in Central Asian States. Central Asia covers a vital location on the world map. Geo-strategically and geo-economically, its importance isn't going to end in the far off future as the prerequisites of world energy are increasing each day. It possesses a one of a kind area on the planet map by being at the junction of Europe and Asia. It is situated in an extremely vital position that associates east with the west and West Asia with Europe. Today the region has turned into a field of the 'large force little force' disorder involving Europe, US, Russia, China, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and India. Given the measure of oil and gas holds, the region will assume an energetic part in satisfying the energy requests of different countries. Pakistan itself has been a major target and victim of terrorism so it can play a very crucial and important role in stopping and containing religious extremism and militancy in Central Asia States.

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