

Pakistan's Strategies in Central Asia

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Abstract

Pakistan's policy and interactions with Central Asia are significantly shaped by its competition and concerns about India's role. India's ties in the Central Asian region remains an important factor in the formulation of Pakistan's strategies and it has made consistent efforts to counterbalance or neutralise India's influence in the region. However, two factors make it difficult for Central Asian regimes to ignore Pakistan: first, its geo-strategic location; and second, its ties with the extremist groups such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan. For Pakistan the Central Asian region presents considerable diplomatic challenge as it has to strike a balance between its support for extremist groups and its efforts to seek closer economic and political relations with existing regimes in the Central Asian Republics. This could further get complicated if fundamentalist Islamic groups enhance their influence in the Pakistani establishment. The effectiveness of Pakistan's balancing diplomacy as well as the political situation in Afghanistan will determine, to a large extent, its inroad into Central Asia in the coming days.

"Pakistan provides the natural link between the SCO states to connect the Eurasian heartland with the Arabian Sea and South Asia ...

We offer the critical overland routes and connectivity for mutually beneficial trade and energy transactions intra- regionally and inter-regionally"

President Gen. Pervez Musharraf

June 15, 2006

Pakistan took due notice of the geo-strategic importance of Central Asian states in the changed security paradigm after the end of the Cold War. Initial efforts by Pakistan to make some inroad into Central Asia may not have succeeded because of its unclear foreign policy objectives, but Pakistan remains an important player in the region. In fact, its geo-strategic location makes it difficult for Central Asian regimes to ignore Pakistan. In

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recent years, Pakistan's relations with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) have improved. In the unfolding geo-political situation, the current Central Asian regimes are trying to build new equations with Islamabad.

Analysis of Pakistan's strategies in the Central Asian region constitutes the principal focus of this paper. It argues that various economic and geo-strategic factors have shaped Pakistan's policy towards Central Asia, but fear of India's influence in this region remains a predominant factor in the formulation of its strategies. In fact, Pakistan's foreign policy, since its very inception, has been conditioned by two interrelated factors, i.e., the fear of India and an urge to seek a strategic balance with India. Another important element of its foreign policy has been its self-proclaimed strong attachment to Islamic ideology.¹ These strands determine Islamabad's policy towards Central Asia as well. Therefore, Pakistan's relation with the CARs needs to be examined in the context of its overall foreign and military policies.

Pakistan's adversarial relations with neighbouring India play a vital role in the formation of its national security plans.² Time and again this has been articulated within Pakistan.³ Its policy towards the United States (US) has always been premised on the consideration that military assistance from the US would help Pakistan attain parity with India.⁴ Its strong politico-military ties with China also seek to counterbalance India's influence in the region. At another level, its desire to be the leader of the Islamic bloc is premised on the consideration that this would enhance Pakistan's influence in the Islamic bloc, which, in turn, can be used against India. Pakistan has always tried to project itself as the only country that can stand up to India in the region. This has been the cornerstone of Islamabad's strategic thinking.⁵

Pakistan's foreign policy-making is highly personalised and centralised, but the army plays a big role in setting the parameters within which Islamabad conducts its relations with the outside world. The military has a significant influence that even elected governments cannot ignore. The role of the intelligence agencies, particularly the Inter-Services Intelligence (ISI), is equally significant. Also, the religious orientation of the state accords a special legitimacy to the role of religion in the training of the military personnel. There is, hence, a curious blend of loyalties of the armed forces to the state of Pakistan and the religion of Islam that serves as the ideological glue. Some scholars believe that "religion is very-very central to the Pakistan's military strategic thinking."⁶

A few scholars have argued that Pakistan's foreign policy-making process is influenced by three contending schools of thought but that are united in their hostility towards India. They differ on the strategy to be pursued by them to counter India. The first school of thought lays emphasis on 'surrender' and believes in a uni-polar world. It maintains that Pakistan has little choice but to rely on and surrender its policy options to the US as a balancer. The second school of thought advocates 'independence' and has a multipolar worldview. While acknowledging the importance of the US, it wants Pakistan to reach out to and benefit from its relationship with other major powers like Japan, China and Russia. This school argues that such a relationship would offer Islamabad considerable flexibility. The third school of thought emphasises on 'Islam' and the Islamic nature of the Pakistani state. It also subscribes to the unipolar worldview and argues for alliances based on Pakistan's ideological and religious interests.⁷

It is also often argued that within the Pakistani establishment there are either "hawks or liberal pacifists, but no realists".⁸ These varied nuances demand serious consideration. It is important to note that Pakistani rulers and the military in particular, at some point of time, have been influenced by these three schools of thought while formulating Pakistan's policy towards the CARs. Before examining Pakistan's present-day strategies in the CARs, it is important to understand its involvement in Central Asia and Afghanistan prior to the emergence of the independent Central Asian states in 1991.

Background

Pakistan's quest for security led to its involvement in Central Asia much before the CARs emerged as independent states in 1991. The military regime under President Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq encouraged the Afghan mujahideen to spread out to the erstwhile Central Asian republics within the then Soviet Union and the CIA supplied arms to the mujahideen through the ISI to conduct these forays. The fear of expanding Soviet influence in Afghanistan and beyond led to Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁹

The Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1979 added a new dimension to Pakistan's existing threat perception. It was of the view that after consolidating its position within Afghanistan, Moscow would try to access

the 'warm waters' of the Arabian Sea through Pakistan.¹⁰ Islamabad was able to sell this idea to Washington and after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, it became a 'frontline' state for the US. This threat perception was crafted by the Pakistani leadership to cement its ties with Washington, which otherwise was at an all-time low since the military takeover in 1977. It also helped Pakistan achieve its larger strategic goal of acquiring more military and economic aid from the US so as to attain parity with India.¹¹ To counter India's influence in Afghanistan, because of its earlier ties in Kabul, Pakistan always wanted to see a friendly Pashtun government in Kabul since the 1950s. And since the 1980s, Pakistan projected Afghanistan as a source of its "strategic depth" in the event of war with India.

As part of a strategy to destabilise the Soviet Union, a conscious policy was adopted by Pakistan to encourage Islamic influence in and infiltrate Islamist mujahideen into the Central Asian states. In 1984, Afghan groups trained by Pakistani intelligence sent 5,000 copies of the Koran across the border. This group had drawn in people living in northern Afghanistan—mainly Uzbeks. Moreover, the base camps of groups entering Soviet territory were located north of Peshawar in Chitral district on the border with Afghanistan. In fact, the policy of exporting jihad to Central Asia had an impact there during the Soviet era, which was visible in the immediate aftermath of the Geneva Agreements of April 1988 and the withdrawal of Soviet forces from Afghanistan. The Tajik civil war broke out immediately after the Central Asian republics gained independence in 1991.

In the late 1970s, dissident Islamic underground parties had begun to form in Tajikistan, and the Tajik nationalists were seen to be gaining in popularity and influence by the end of the 1980s. However, real disturbances did not occur until the early 1990s. The Soviet Union collapsed in 1991, and Tajikistan declared its independence in 1991. The Tajik civil war started in 1992 and continued till 1997.

Islamabad did not make any change in its military-political strategy during Benazir Bhutto's period. Reports of the Pakistani intelligence services and their role in promoting Islamic radicalism in Central Asia appeared in the writings of General A.A. Liakhovskii, a participant in the Afghan war. According to him, the organisation "Islamic Union of the Northern Peoples of Afghanistan" (*Islamskiisoiuz severnykh narodov Afghanistan*), created in 1988, launched subversive activities in areas of Central Asia contiguous

with Afghanistan, with the goal of liberating Soviet Muslims and creating a “free Turkestan”. Azad Beg headed this organisation, which had its headquarters in Peshawar. According to Liakhovskii, the field commanders of this organisation shipped narcotics, weapons, and subversive (mainly Islamic) literature to the USSR.¹²

However, the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan and the end of Cold War considerably altered the geo-strategic scenario in the region. Pakistan lost its role as a ‘frontline state’ thus losing its strategic relevance to the US. The Gulf War further dented Pakistan’s geo-strategic advantage with Washington reinforcing its links with the Persian Gulf region. This period also witnessed improved relations between India-US and India-China. Therefore, the 1990s offered a very different geo-strategic configuration. Another important development during this period was the emergence of the Taliban and its strong ties with Pakistan. The Taliban connection was used by Islamabad to sponsor cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Pakistan and Afghanistan became the hub of terrorist activities. These developments had serious implications for the newly independent countries of Central Asia. Jihadi elements from Afghanistan and Pakistan started infiltrating into the neighbouring Central Asian states of Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan.

The events of 9/11 once again changed the geo-political landscape with new alignments and realignments taking shape in Central Asia. For the US and Pakistan, Central Asia became an area of great strategic significance. Islamabad, while forced to cooperate with Washington in its global war against terrorism, could manage much-needed economic and military aid for its services in Afghanistan and its sudden reversal of policy towards that country. Post-9/11, Pakistan tried to make inroads into Central Asia with an improved image. It offered shorter routes for Central Asian goods and connectivity with the rest of the world.

Pakistan’s Objectives in Central Asia

Pakistan’s objectives in Central Asia are determined by its political and security imperatives; its economic and commercial gains; countering India’s influence and its desire to be an energy transit-corridor¹³ in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region.¹⁴ Pakistan has always desired to expand its influence in Afghanistan and beyond.¹⁵ Central Asia is seen as an area of

natural expansion for Pakistan. Hafeez Malik believes that Central Asia presents Pakistan with a new security environment "...freed from the nutcracker squeeze the Soviet Union had created through an alliance between Afghanistan and India."¹⁶

Related to Pakistan's ambition to expand its influence is the desire to be the leader of the Islamic bloc. Albeit this idea has not crystallised, but it has always dominated the thinking of the Pakistani leadership, including Prime Minister Bhutto in the 1970s and Gen. Zia in the 1980s. The debate still remains pertinent to Pakistan's geo-strategic formulations. The Islamic groups and parties viewed Central Asia as paving the way for an Islamic bloc thus providing an opportunity to unite Muslims in the CARs, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It was felt that such a strategic bloc would acquire a central role in securing strategic interests vis-à-vis India or even the Christian-Jewish threat. The emergence of the CARs were perceived as an opportunity to form a large regional grouping stretching from the Arabian Sea in the south to the Black Sea in the west based on the common religious identity of Islam. Importantly, it was seen to offer a huge political and economic benefit to Pakistan.¹⁷

In fact, Central Asia does provide Pakistan with numerous opportunities in terms of trade in raw material and manufactured goods, contracting for regular power supply and opening up communications. The resource-rich Central Asia¹⁸ is seen as a future source of energy for Pakistan.

Pakistan's Strategies

Geo-Political

After the emergence of the CARs, Pakistan moved actively into Central Asia,¹⁹ but policy makers were clearly divided as to what Pakistan would gain out of Central Asia. While some wanted an Islamic revolution in Central Asia, others wanted open trade links through Afghanistan. The dichotomy of views revealed the limits of Pakistan's Central Asia Policy. Moreover, during this period, the Central Asian leaders were extremely wary of Pakistan because of its involvement in the Afghan war and its support to the mujahideen.²⁰ During the Pakistan-backed Taliban era in Afghanistan, bilateral relations between Pakistan and the Central Asian states touched rock bottom.

After Pakistan joined the global war against terrorism as a frontline state, bilateral relations began to be revisited. During the past few years, frequent visits by Central Asian and Pakistani officials (See Appendix I for Pakistani officials' visits to CARs) to each other's states reflect the changing nature of their bilateral relations. A number of agreements have been signed covering such areas as trade and tourism, cultural and economic cooperation during these visits. Pakistan has developed institutionalised arrangements for this purpose. Joint Economic Commissions (JECs) have been established with all the Central Asian states. Under a Special Technical Assistance Programme (STAP) initiated in 1992-93, Pakistan provides training facilities, which are fully funded by Islamabad. The programme includes courses ranging from English language, banking and accountancy to diplomacy.²¹

In this context President General Pervez Musharraf's visit to Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan in March 2005 was significant.²² Earlier, the two-day official visit of President Nursultan Nazarbayev of Kazakhstan in December 2003 to Islamabad was a step towards strengthening bilateral ties between the two countries. During this visit, both the leaders decided to hold annual foreign ministerial consultations. While speaking at the Pakistan-Kazakhstan Business Forum, President Nazarbayev identified three zones of technological parks of information and biotechnology where Pakistani companies could invest significantly.²³

It is important to note that during the Tajik Foreign Minister's visit to Islamabad in January 2004, he assured President Musharraf that Tajikistan would not allow Indian military bases on its soil.²⁴ This was followed by the visit of Tajik President Emomali Rahmanov to Islamabad in May 2004. During this visit, eight agreements were inked covering abolition of visas for holders of diplomatic passports, avoidance of double taxation, cooperation between the education ministers and justice ministers, combating drug trafficking, and cooperation between official news agencies and promotion and protection of investment.²⁵

Pakistan-Uzbekistan relations have also been improving over the past few years given the changed security paradigm.²⁶ During Uzbek President Karimov's recent visit to Islamabad in May 2006, both sides agreed to expand trade and economic ties and coordinate anti-terrorism activities. It was also planned to extend road and rail links that would enable the CARs,

particularly Uzbekistan, to make use of Pakistan's seaports to develop commerce with other regions. A joint fight against extremism and terrorism has, of late, been on top of the list for both the countries. During his March 2005 visit President Musharraf assured the Uzbek leader of his determination to wipe out terrorists, including a substantial number of Uzbek nationals, from the tribal areas.²⁷ How far these promises will be fulfilled is yet to be seen.

In an attempt to build strong ties with Central Asia, Pakistan has sought to use its cultural links with this region. It is perceived that Pakistan is the cultural extension of the Central Asian region that in turn is seen to be in fusion with the South Asian social milieu. In this context, a Pakistani scholar opined, "Pakistan's political existence and emergence on the world map would not have materialised but for the primordial relationship that glues us together. The roots of our faith, undoubtedly, lie in the Arabian soil but our cultural linkages are with Central Asian civilisation, which in itself is an amalgam of diverse influence and cross-cultural fertilisation"²⁸

Cooperation in the fields of education and culture is an important aspect of Pakistan-Central Asia relations. There are number of Central Asian students studying in Pakistan and similarly Pakistani students in the CARs. The lack of information makes it difficult to provide the total number of Pakistani students studying in all CARs. However, the example of Kyrgyzstan can be cited. Kyrgyz students have been pursuing studies in Pakistani educational institutions in various fields such as engineering, business administration, information technology and the English language. Kyrgyz civil servants also attend training programmes in Pakistan. Conversely, over 350 Pakistani students are currently pursuing studies, mainly in medical colleges, in Kyrgyzstan.²⁹

Quest for "Strategic Depth"

The emergence of Central Asia was viewed as an opportunity for Pakistan to spread its sphere of influence beyond Afghanistan thus providing "strategic depth" against India. As mentioned earlier, Pakistan's desire to expand its influence in Afghanistan has been very central to Islamabad's strategic thinking. In the view of Gen. Mirza Aslam Beg, "...Afghanistan will be a great source of strength to Pakistan to face any crisis and danger that it may encounter. In fact, the security of Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan is interlinked and is indivisible..."³⁰

While examining Pakistan's Afghan policy, it has been argued that its defence planning has been handicapped by the lack of territorial depth to absorb an attack by India and then to retaliate. This elusive quest for strategic depth has guided Pakistan in its ambitious involvement in Afghanistan in spite of the multiple implications for its social fabric and political culture. Thus, Pakistan's Afghan policy was constructed with an objective to create a subservient government in Afghanistan that would be friendly to Pakistan, militarily too weak to question the Durand line and unstable to raise the Pushtunistan issue. In addition to this, the military strategists argued that a friendly Afghanistan would give Kashmiri militants a base from where they could be trained, funded and armed.³¹ The Central Asian region was seen as an extension of Pakistan's strategic space.

The end of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has not brought any fundamental change in Pakistan's Afghan policy. Afghanistan is still very central to Pakistan's strategic thinking, and is akin to being Pakistan's backwaters. Wary about how the current situation would unfold in Afghanistan, Islamabad is trying to cement its ties with the current regime in Kabul while supporting Taliban elements and has not given up its grand strategy of establishing a friendly government in Kabul. It is believed that Pakistan's new proxy war in Afghanistan is slowly unravelling itself. There is the resurgence of Taliban in Afghanistan. The Taliban are supported by the Pakistani establishment itself – from low-level military officers and some ministers to religious parties and their jihadi infrastructure. The ISI too has been proactively working to bring the Taliban back to its life.³²

There has been constant accusation by Afghanistan of Pakistan's interference and its support to the Taliban and Al Qaida elements to create trouble for Kabul.³³ Afghan President Hamid Karzai during his visit in February 2006 provided evidence to President Musharraf implicating Pakistan in the recruitment, training and equipping of Islamic radical suicide bombers. The senior Afghan official who accompanied President Karzai said, "In places like Karachi, Pakistani extremist groups working on behalf of the Taliban for a fee, carry out the recruitment and then bring them to safe houses in Balochistan for training and equipping with vests."³⁴ In a recent visit to Islamabad, Gen. Johan Abizaid, the head of the US Central Command reportedly showed the Pakistanis, intelligence photographs of Taliban training camps at an undisclosed location and asked for them to be shut down.³⁵

Three years ago, Dr. Timothy D. Hoyt, Associate Professor of Strategy and policy at the US Naval War College, in a hearing before the House Committee on International relations in October 2003 accused Pakistan of providing sanctuary to terrorist groups, that enjoy strong support among active and retired Army officers and intelligence officials. He said: "So long as Pakistan relies on terrorism to achieve its political objectives, it will be impossible to eliminate terrorism and the Al Qaeda presence in the region."³⁶

Islam as a Tool

Religion is seen as an important factor in developing relations between Pakistan and the Central Asian states. It is felt that since the majority of the Muslim people living in most of the CARs were Sunnis, they would naturally gravitate towards Pakistan. Sardar Assef Ali, Minister of State for Economic Affairs, who led the Pakistani delegation to Central Asia in December 1991 said: "They (Central Asians) have problems with Iran. Besides bitter legacies of the past, a majority of people living in Central Asia are Turks. Also 95 per cent of them are Sunni Muslim of Naqashbandi order. So they are uneasy with Iran because of these factors".³⁷ Leaders of the Jamaat-e-Islami expressed similar views. In a press statement on September 2, 1991, Jamaat-e-Islami Chief Senator Qazi Hussain Ahmed stated: "Independence of the three Muslim states of the Soviet Union—Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan—is the realisation of the dream of the Muslim Ummah at a critical juncture of history". He also said that the CARs were "looking up to Pakistan as their ideal owing to its ideological foundations. Besides, due to its role in Jihad-e-Afghanistan, these states also regard Pakistan as their benefactor and have pinned many hopes on it."³⁸

The Jamaat-e-Islami supported the Tajik fundamentalists in 1992 and 1993. According to Gen Liaskhovskii, one attempt to intervene in the civil war in Tajikistan was undertaken at the end of January 1993. In Peshawar, a conference of representatives of Muslim countries reviewed the measures to provide assistance to "Tajik brothers" in the "holy war" and resolved to place, at the head of the Tajik armed units, Afghans who had acquired combat experience in the war against the Soviet army. In addition, substantial material funds were allocated for Tajik Islamists.³⁹ Pakistan supplied assistance to 60,000-80,000 Tajik refugees stranded in northern Afghanistan. When Tajik opposition leader Himatzadeh visited Pakistan

in 1993, not only were his associates given access to the Foreign Office but also his criticism of the Tajik government was ignored. Meanwhile, the ex-Director General of the ISI, General Hameed Gul, even issued a statement in favour of the Tajik opposition.

The Uzbek government has referred to the activities of the Jamaat-e-Islami as a part of the grand Islamic alliance against the Tajik government and its support to the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) at various intervals.⁴⁰ It is believed that the ISI's discreet support to IMU has remained fairly consistent. It also reportedly gave refuge to IMU leader Yuldeshev in 1990s and arranged Namangani's frequent clandestine visits to Pakistan. It is also believed that unlike the Taliban, ISI does not trust the IMU but at the same time it wants to keep the IMU on its payroll for tactical reasons. It wishes to use the IMU as leverage within Central Asia.⁴¹ The post-Taliban period has not seen any major reversal in Pakistan's support to these jihadi elements. As mentioned earlier, there are still strong elements within the Pakistani establishment wanting to install a weak and friendly government in Afghanistan. Such a government will also provide Islamabad easy access and influence in the CARs.

After 9/11, Pakistan followed a dual policy towards the Central Asian states. On the one hand, it adhered to a state policy of friendly relations with the CARs but on the other, it continued to back dissident groups to get more leverage over the régimes. In March 2004, Uzbek President Islam Karimov asked Pakistan to extradite a number of Al Qaida fighters of Uzbek origin captured during operations in Wana.⁴²

In addition to ISI's support, one also sees the involvement of other non-state actors such as extremist Islamic parties; Al Qaida; the truck and transport smuggling mafias; and drug traffickers who have close links with IMU and Taliban. This has resulted in an explosion of self-interest groups in Pakistan who have benefited from the Afghan civil war and the Islamic insurgency in the CARs. Therefore, these groups are interested in weakening the state authority, which in turn enables their business interests and Islamic agenda to flourish.⁴³

Pakistan's desire to use Islam as a tool to win over these states however received a major setback because of its support to extremist groups in the Tajik civil war. After this, a wave of extremist activities engulfed the region especially Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan and these states began to

view Pakistan with great suspicion. Therefore, the much desired goal of the Pakistani policy makers to have a security belt stretching from Turkey to Pakistan with Central Asia as the 'Islamic heartland', providing it "strategic depth" and much-needed allies, in its policy struggle over Afghanistan and Kashmir, did not materialise. On the contrary, the secular Central Asian regimes looked towards Russia, China and the West for their security cooperation rather than Pakistan. The CARs signed the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) Security Treaty in May 1992 and in 1996 joined Shanghai Five Forum, which later became the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in 2001. They also joined NATO's partnership of peace programme.

Regional Organisations

Apart from using its Islamic card to tie the CARs in its strategic fold against India, Islamabad also sought to use multilateral bodies in the region.⁴⁴ Its desire to balance India through regional organisations got manifested in their wooing neighbouring Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan, and the CARs into the Economic Co-operation Organisation (ECO). Under this forum, states are expected to develop closer economic interaction.⁴⁵

In November 1992, Pakistan, Iran, Turkey, Afghanistan and the five former Soviet republics of Kazakhstan, Azerbaijan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan created an extended Muslim economic bloc linking Asia and Europe. Former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif noted in a speech marking the occasion that the ECO "now corresponds to the boundaries of the ancient area, which brought prosperity and civilisation through fruitful exchanges along the historic silk route. The people of these lands have a shared history and common spiritual and cultural values." Nawaz Sharif added his belief that extensive investment in infrastructure and encouragement of the private sector were the most important immediate objectives. He noted that Pakistan was building a major highway network to link Central Asia to the Arabian Sea and that its railroads were "poised to link not only member-states but also ECO with Europe, Russia, and South Asia." He added: "peace in Afghanistan is essential for political harmony and fruitful cooperation in our entire region."⁴⁶

Speaking about the achievements of ECO, Pakistani foreign minister Khursheed Mahmood Kasuri stated that it had made considerable progress in the trade, transport and energy sectors. The second ECO Commerce

Ministers' Meeting held in Islamabad in July 2003 approved the ECO Trade Agreement (ECOTA). The agreement envisages reduction of tariffs up to 15 per cent over a period of eight years (15 years in case of Afghanistan) on at least 80 per cent of goods on tariff lines. Para-tariff and non-tariff barriers would be eliminated within a period of two years. He further stated that the implementation of ECOTA would pave the way for economic integration of the region. New strategies and plans are expected to be adopted to make the organisation more effective.⁴⁷

Despite claims made by Pakistan's ministers about ECO's progress, it has so far been a non-starter. The establishment of a free trade zone is difficult when basic infrastructure necessary in this regard is lacking. Moreover, the competing interests of Iran, Pakistan and Turkey limit the role ECO can play in the region. Instability in Afghanistan remains a major obstruction for expanding the area of cooperation.

Islamabad also sponsored the membership of the newly independent Central Asian countries in the Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). This was yet another drive to bring the CARs into the Ummah.⁴⁸ Pakistan has also been keen to join the SCO.⁴⁹ In early 2001, Pakistan applied for observer status but the Central Asian members of the organisation blocked its entry. A major stumbling block was Pakistan's support for the Taliban government in Afghanistan. Though China supported Pakistan's membership, Russia wanted India to simultaneously join SCO. It was only in June 2005 that the applications of Pakistan, Iran and India were simultaneously considered and approved with consensus for granting observer status in the SCO at the Council of Heads of States Meeting in Astana on July 5, 2005. Pakistan is also a member of Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia (CICA). Much to the chagrin of Pakistan, India is included in both these organisations.

Geo-Economic

Transport Corridors and Access to Warm Waters: Many Pakistani leaders refer to their country as the gateway to Central Asia and strongly believe that good relations with the region would not only enhance its security but also provide enormous economic opportunities. In the post-Cold War period, Islamabad tried to revive its fortunes with the West by selling its new geo-strategic importance. This brings us to the question, is Pakistan the gateway to Central Asia? Geographically, Pakistan provides a gateway

to Central Asia from south/southeast; but it is not the only gateway to the seas of the south. This is the impression that Pakistani leaders⁵⁰ have tried to create in an attempt to identify themselves with Central Asia, further their co-operation with the region and make Pakistan more relevant not only to the CARs and its neighbouring states but also to the West. In fact, Iran provides another gateway to Central Asia and has done a great deal to develop good communication systems with the region. Yet another gateway is via Turkey in the southwest.⁵¹

Pakistan has been trying to make itself more relevant to Central Asia by offering the states several proposals for creating trade and transport corridors and access to ports. President General Pervez Musharraf has emphasised this time and again. He said, "...our geo-strategic significance can't be reduced. We need to realise that we have understood that and therefore we have constructed a new port at Gwadar which is at the mouth of the Gulf almost."⁵² In March 2005, he stated again: "we are fully focused on making use of our central location and constructing ports and putting in place a network of infrastructure."⁵³ Recently, he has approved a railways reconstruction programme, which would link Gwadar with the other countries via rail. It is believed that this could make Pakistan the economic and trade hub for the CARs, Gulf, Western China and South Asia.⁵⁴

Pakistan's geo-strategic location admittedly makes it difficult for Central Asia to ignore it. For Turkmenistan and southern Uzbekistan, the shortest route to the sea lies through Iran, but for all other states, the shortest route is through Afghanistan and Pakistan. Karachi is the nearest port city for Central Asia and by air Islamabad is closer to Tashkent than it is to Karachi. Dushanbe is only an hour's flight from Islamabad, and by road through Afghanistan the distance from Dushanbe to Karachi is 2,720 km. In contrast, the port of Bandar Abbas is 3,400 km, Vladivostok 9,500 km and Rostov on the Don 4,200 km away.⁵⁵ This makes Pakistan important for the CARs. Despite little success so far, Pakistan is trying to improve its connectivity to the CARs through Afghanistan and China.

In this respect, the ADB has offered \$2 billion to the Pakistan railway network, which will enable Pakistan to become one of the most attractive international trade routes to the CARs, Iran and China. Pakistan and Afghanistan have already agreed to lay a 103-km railway track between Chaman and Kandahar, which would be extended to Turkmenistan and

other CARs. The feasibility study of the Quetta-Kandahar railway track has been completed and Pakistan would construct the 10-12 km railway track to the Afghan border. The track from the Afghan border to Kandahar would be the responsibility of the Afghan government.⁵⁶ The World Bank has agreed to provide \$1.8 billion to Pakistan for its \$6 billion National Trade Corridor (NTC) improvement programme to meet domestic transportation requirements and provide transit facilities to Central Asia, Western China, Afghanistan and Iran.⁵⁷

Pakistan has also proposed to construct a \$90-million road through the Boroghil Pass in the Yarkhun valley to link it with the CARs. Of the 13 passes, which lead to Afghanistan from Chitral district, the Boroghil Pass is the easiest and lowest in altitude. This pass remains closed for a very short period late in winter. The road will extend to Wakhan, 13-65 km wide strategic strip in northeast Afghanistan. The area links Afghanistan with Pakistan in the south, Tajikistan in the north and China in the east. The Wakhan-Boroghil route has been preferred against the one passing through the central parts of Afghanistan due to the security situation. This road will connect the 12,484-foot-high Boroghil pass at the northwest of the Yarkhun valley in Chitral with Sarhad-i-Langar in Wakhan at a distance of about 95 km and move on to Iskashim in Tajikistan leading to the Tajik capital Dushanbe via the Korung-Kalai Chumb and Kulob areas. From the Boroghil Pass, the road will traverse over 300 km long valley and reach Peshawar. The distance from Tajikistan to Peshawar via the Wakhan-Chitral route is estimated to be 700 km. This road will also branch off to the northern areas via the 10,500-foot-high Shandur Pass and merge into the Karakoram Highway. The Pakistan government has already sanctioned a number of road projects to interlink the northern areas and Chitral.⁵⁸

The quadrilateral agreement signed by Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan is expected to give a boost to trading activities among member-nations through the Karakoram Highway.⁵⁹ On October 10, 2006 a road connection along the Karakorum route, Islamabad-Kashgar-Bishkek-Almaty, was opened by Pakistan.⁶⁰ Pakistan has also offered use of the Gwadar deep-sea port to the CARs.⁶¹ This port would serve as a mother port at the strategic location opposite to the Strait of Hormuz and at the mouth of the Persian Gulf.⁶² The first phase of this project is already over. The completion of the Gwadar Port would be a milestone for Pakistan in this context. When it comes online alongside Karachi, it will provide the

shortest access to the Arabian Sea for large parts of Central Asia.⁶³ On December 31, 2005, a meeting of Pakistan-Uzbekistan Joint Ministerial Commission was held in Tashkent, where the two sides agreed to enter into a trilateral transit trade agreement with Afghanistan to benefit from land routes and the Gwadar port facility.⁶⁴

During Kyrgyz President Askar Akaev's two-day visit to Pakistan on January 17-18, 2005, it was agreed that Pakistan would import electricity from Kyrgyzstan and both countries would build roads to improve trade. It was decided to strengthen links through Kashgar in China and on to Bishkek and also through the Karakoram Highway. The road being constructed on the Karakoram Highway to link the two countries would be completed by 2006, promoting Pak-Kyrgyz trade.⁶⁵ Establishment of a railway link from Gwadar to Taftan in Iran via Saindak is also being planned. A road from Gwadar to Sandak, running parallel to the Iran-Pakistan border, will make it the shortest route to reach Central Asia from the warm waters of the Arabian Sea. Another 515-km long highway connecting Gwadar via Pangur, Khaan, Chaghi and Rabat up to the heart of Western Afghanistan is being planned. This would link Pakistan by road directly with the CARs.⁶⁶

Pakistan is also giving priority to road and rail links and related facilities for more effective and mutually beneficial access to Central Asia. Air services to Tashkent and Almaty have already been resumed.⁶⁷ Similar services to other parts of the region are under active consideration. The laying of railway tracks from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan is an important part of this programme. Pakistan's Ministry of Railways has completed a feasibility study for a Chaman-Kandahar rail project. Its report will be discussed at the next meeting of the Pakistan-Afghanistan Joint Economic Commission. The quadrilateral agreement is also gradually being implemented. The completion of the Murghab-Kulma road from Tajikistan to China linking the Karakoram Highway to Pakistan is also a significant development. Once operational, it will boost transit trade between Pakistan and Central Asia.⁶⁸

Energy and Pipeline Politics: Pakistan is also looking at the huge energy resources of Central Asia. It wants to make Pakistan the energy-transit corridor in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific region, which will bring huge economic gains for the country. Pakistan is most likely to face a energy

crisis in natural gas, power and oil in the next 3-4 that could choke its economic growth for many years to come.⁶⁹ It is estimated that Pakistan's total energy requirement would increase by about 48 per cent to 80 million tonnes of oil equivalent (MTOE) in 2010 from about 54 MTOE currently. According to official energy demand forecast, the demand for natural gas, having about 50 per cent share in the country's energy consumption would increase by 44 per cent to the 39 MTOE currently. The power shortage is expected to be little over 5,250 MW by 2010. Oil demand would also increase by over 23 per cent to about 21 million tonnes in 2010 from the current demand of 16.8 million tonnes.⁷⁰ Therefore, Central Asia could be a future source of energy for Pakistan. (See Appendix II for Pakistan's Proposed Regional Gas Pipeline Routes.)

Pakistan's importance for Central Asian countries needs to be viewed in the context of the entire pipeline politics in the region. As a transit country, Pakistan provides these states with an outlet of their energy resources. In view of the instability in Afghanistan and Balochistan, the success of these pipelines from Central Asia however remains a big question mark. Despite these uncertainties Pakistan wants to keep the Central Asian states engaged with the hope of providing a transit route for their energy resources.

In pursuit of its strategy to control the pipelines and gain greater influence, it is trying to sign various agreements with these Republics. Pakistan has signed 21 agreements and MoUs in oil, gas, energy, trade, science and culture with Turkmenistan. In the energy sector, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan (TAP) signed an agreement in December 2002 for a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan via Afghanistan to Pakistan, whose estimated cost is \$2.5 billion.⁷¹ The ADB is the lead coordinating partner. It has, in addition to financial and technical assistance, played an important role in integrating efforts to realise the project. Several sessions of the Steering Committee on the TAP Gas Pipeline Project have been held so far. During a ministerial level TAP meeting on February 16, 2006, in Ashkabad, Turkmenistan agreed to provide sovereign guarantees to Pakistan to supply 3.2 billion cubic feet gas per day for 30 years.⁷² This assurance was restated during Pakistan Foreign Minister Khursheed Kasuri's visit to Turkmenistan in May 2006.⁷³ However, a major hurdle to the project remains the volatile situation in Afghanistan.

While Turkmenistan can provide gas to Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have the potential to be substantial producers of hydroelectric

power. Being geographically closest to Tajikistan, Pakistan stands to benefit from its hydroelectric potential.⁷⁴ An inter-governmental agreement to that effect has already been signed. Pakistan's Water and Power Minister Liaquat Ali Jatoi has recently said, "the government is considering importing electricity from CARs via Afghanistan as an option to meet its demand and has signed an MoU with Tajikistan to import 1000 MW as well as initiated transmission routing assessment to bring such power to Pakistan."⁷⁵ An advisor to Kyrgyz Prime Minister Omarov said that his government was also considering a transmission line from China to Pakistan with an estimated cost of \$1.4 billion.⁷⁶ Pakistan has also signed an agreement to import electricity from Kyrgyzstan through Tajikistan and Afghanistan. Indubitably, terrain and weather conditions are clear impediments to this project, yet both states appear determined to pursue it.⁷⁷

Trade

With the emergence of the newly independent Central Asian States, the business elite group in Pakistan viewed this region as offering immense economic opportunities. Central Asia was seen not only as a source of needed raw materials but also as a potential export market. Some estimates even suggested that the region had a potential market of \$80 billion and if Pakistan secures even 5 per cent of this market, it could earn up to \$4 billion a year.⁷⁸ In December 1991, a 23-member delegation was sent to Central Asia headed by the then Minister of Commerce Sardar Asif Ahmed Ali. A \$30-million credit facility was given to Uzbekistan and \$10 million to all other Central Asian Republics. These credit lines were not utilised by the Central Asian countries and Pakistan was unable to keep its commitment to provide the credit lines in future. The effort to open a full-fledged National Bank of Pakistan (NBP) met with complete failure. The NBP representative office was set up in Tashkent but it could not facilitate the opening of a branch till 2002.⁷⁹

Despite high hopes, the trade between Pakistan and Central Asia remains limited. During 1992-93 Pakistani exports to the region amounted to \$5.6 m and imports were \$0.51 m.⁸⁰ The figures for 1993-1995 (Table 1) indicate an increase as compared to 1992-93.⁸¹ During 1997-98 Pakistan's total trade with Kazakhstan accounted for \$19.9 m.; for Kyrgyzstan 07.91m; Tajikistan \$10.29m; Turkmenistan \$07.75m; and Uzbekistan

\$35.34m.⁸² However, in subsequent years the trade figures (Tables 2 and 3) do not indicate any major increase.

**Table 1: Pakistan's Imports and Exports to CARs
1993-1995 (in US\$ million)**

	Import	Export	Import	Export
	1993-94	1993-94	1994-95	1994-95
Kazakhstan	0.07	8.958	2.177	7.873
Kyrgyzstan	0.129	0.308	0.011	0.994
Tajikistan	0.002	1.156	1.297	1.564
Uzbekistan	0.056	17.917	4.084	22.907
Turkmenistan	-	1.661	0.383	9.813
Total	0.257	30	7.952	43.151

Source: Musa Khan Jalazai, *Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan and the United States*, Bookbiz, Lahore, 2003, pp. 2007-2008.

**Table 2: Geographical Distribution of Merchandise Exports,
Pakistan-CARs 1999-2004 (In US\$ million)**

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Kazakhstan	2.1	1.5	0.5	0.4	0.7	0.8
Kyrgyzstan	0.4	0.1	0.1	-	-	-
Tajikistan	0.1	0.1	0.2	-	0.1	0.1
Uzbekistan	1.6	3.1	1.6	1.7	3.4	1.8
Total	4.2	4.8	2.4	1.7	3.5	1.9

Table 3: Geographical Distribution of Merchandise Imports, Pakistan-CARs 1999-2004 (in US\$ million)

	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003	2004
Kazakhstan	1.5	2.1	1.0	1.2	2.0	2.2
Kyrgyzstan	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.3	0.5	0.4
Tajikistan	0.2	1.0	0.1	0.1	-	0.3
Uzbekistan	5.7	3.7	1.8	3.8	5.5	6.2
Total	7.6	7	3.1	5.4	5.5	9.1

Source: "Central Asia: Increasing Gains from Trade through Regional Cooperation in Trade Policy, Transport, and Customs Transit", July, 2006, at <http://www.adb.org/Documents/Report/ca-trade-policy/>

Note: Trade figures for Turkmenistan could not be included due to unavailability of data.

Pakistan's recent initiatives in Central Asia involve strengthening economic ties with the CARs. As mentioned earlier, Pakistan has established JECs with all the CARs. In its trade policy for 2006-07, Pakistan seeks to focus on export growth in regional Muslim countries, particularly Iran, Afghanistan and the CARs. It has been decided to establish export centres and warehouses at Peshawar and Quetta and an export centre in Islamabad.⁸³

In this context the visit of Kyrgyzstan President Askar Akaev on January 17, 2005 is of significance. Both countries signed a MoU on cooperation between the foreign ministries of the two countries on different regional and international issues. Two agreements were signed on cooperation and mutual assistance in customs related matters and avoidance of double taxation. President Akaev also offered to provide electricity to Pakistan.⁸⁴ This was his third visit, earlier ones being in 1994 and 1995. Kyrgyzstan and Pakistan are signatories to the Quadrilateral Agreement along with China and Kazakhstan, effective since May 2004, which aims at promoting regional trade through Pakistan's Karakoram Highway. During the first meeting of the Pakistan-Kyrgyz Joint Ministerial Commission (JMC) in Islamabad, both sides negotiated on issues of taxation, culture, and visa restrictions for enhancing the volume of bilateral ties.⁸⁵ Pakistan is also

exploring the possibility of investing in the pharmaceutical sector in Turkmenistan.⁸⁶

As mentioned earlier the ECO provides another common platform to generate economic activity in the region. Within the framework of the ECO the volume of trade has not increased significantly. In fact, the ECO has failed to bring about great economic or commercial results. Competition among the member-states has been the major limitation for the success of this organisation. As Pakistan's Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz recently emphasised, the organisation needs to be used for making result-oriented policies instead of offering mere lip service. ECO can be an effective organisation if the ECO Trade Agreement, Transit Transport Agreement and the Trade and Development Bank become operational.⁸⁷ So far, Pakistan has not been able to achieve much in terms of building economic and trade ties with the CARs. Their efforts to set up banks and hotels have received severe setbacks in Central Asia.

Pakistan's Limitations in Central Asia

Pakistan faces a number of obstacles in its relations with Central Asia. First, these secular Central Asian states are wary about Islamabad's intentions and involvement with the jihadi elements active in these republics. Links of IMU and Hizb-ut-Tahrir (HT) with Pakistan and Afghanistan are of great concern to the Central Asian states. Central Asian leaders believe that the ISI has until recently been supporting the IMU and other radical Islamic groups in their countries. Pakistan's support for Taliban and the Pashtuns, and Gen Musharraf's rejection in the summer of 2001 of non-Pashtun ethnic groups in Afghanistan as irrelevant to Pakistan's interests has antagonised the leaders of Central Asia.⁸⁸ Despite successive Pakistani governments promising to curb the support given by the ISI to extremist groups in Central Asia, Islamabad has failed to implement these measures. In fact the IMU, the HT, and Chechen rebels have been sending their young men to study in Pakistani madarassaa, where these men are turned into ideologically committed Islamic radicals for future fighting in Central Asia. Clearly, Pakistan's Central Asian policy is operating at two levels. While at the official level, it has tried to follow the friendly policy, at the other level, the ISI has been supporting dissident groups in Central Asia to win more leverage over these Central Asian regimes.⁸⁹ In sum, Pakistan's strategies in Central Asia clearly indicate that Islamabad wants to use its

geo-strategic location to make itself more relevant to Central Asia, without completely severing its links and support to the extremist groups in Afghanistan and Central Asia.⁹⁰ But this is a risky game and may not work for Islamabad at all.

Second, Pakistan faces tough competition from India, Iran and Turkey in the region as they enjoy certain advantages. However, it is also important to mention that despite competition with Iran, there are areas of convergence as well, particularly in the sector of energy. Third, stability in Afghanistan is crucial for Pakistan's involvement in Central Asia. Any effort on Pakistan's part to bring pipelines or electricity from this region would neither be cost effective nor possible until Afghanistan stabilises.⁹¹ Indubitably, increasing violence and resurgence of the Taliban has left Afghanistan more destabilised and vulnerable to the spread of Islamic extremist groups.⁹² In such a situation, foreign entrepreneurs would be reluctant to invest in any project.

Fourth, despite sharing a common history and religion, Islamabad cannot overplay the Islamic card in Central Asia for strengthening its economic relations. Their ties need to have an economic basis. Some of the recent writings in Pakistan reflect this idea. They argue that instead of selling the idea of Pakistan as a gateway to Central Asia, there is a need to acknowledge the other routes via Iran, Turkey, Russia and China. Pakistan needs to work in collaboration with them. In fact, Central Asia wants to be a part of a much broader world than what Pakistan is envisioning for the region.⁹³

Finally, even if the Gwadar Port comes up, law and order has to improve a great deal to make this port a hub of commercial activities. The situation within Balochistan remains volatile. In the past five years, there have been around 500 attacks on the Sui gas pipelines and installations.⁹⁴ Related to the instability in Balochistan is the US interest in this region. Former National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, believed that the Soviet Union might be tempted to cross into Balochistan and occupy either the Gulf oilfields or the fishing harbours of Gwadar and Pansni. According to him such a situation may create serious problems for the freedom of navigation. The US naval chief had suggested over two decades ago building an American naval base at Gwadar and Gen. Zia reportedly offered it to the Pentagon.⁹⁵ A similar viewpoint cannot be ruled out within US Administration vis-a-vis China getting the facility of Gwadar Port.

Ramifications for India

Pakistan's policy towards the CARs does reflect its desire to gain influence beyond Afghanistan so as to counter-balance India in this region. Nevertheless, the significance of this region for India's security is immense.⁹⁶ It may be useful to highlight some of the realities that India needs to take into consideration given the recent developments.

So far, Pakistan has failed to obtain any kind of support from the Central Asian states for its perceived strategic goals against India. After 9/11, the emerging security alignment and changing parameters in the geo-strategic balance in the region have greatly thwarted Pakistan's ambition of obtaining the "strategic depth" in Afghanistan and Central Asia. New Delhi's increasing presence and improving ties with Kabul make Islamabad extremely nervous and insecure. The Pakistani establishment sees with great suspicion the opening of Indian consulates in Kandahar, Mazar-i-Sharif, Jalalabad, and Herat and its presence at Ayni in Tajikistan.

Though Pakistan cannot compete with India in Afghanistan, it would constantly seek to deny India a foothold in Afghanistan. It is important to note that the security situation in Afghanistan is fluid; the Taliban is still a force to reckon with; and Pakistan's ethnic linkages provide ample opportunity to ISI to counter any Indian plans in Afghanistan. While Pakistan is in no position to neutralise India's influence in Afghanistan and Central Asia, it can restrict the pace of India's infrastructural projects in Afghanistan.

Central Asia with its geo-strategic location provides India a security belt of friendly and cooperative states. Unlike the past, India is now entering this region with a pragmatic and focused policy. It is in the process of implementing new economic and strategic initiatives to achieve its short term and long-term goals in the region. Though India is not a key player in Central Asia, it is an important player. As an emerging power India cannot be boxed in South Asia. In Central Asia, India has to leverage its relations (apart from bilateral ties with the CARs) through Russia and US as well.

Close cooperation with Afghanistan is crucial for India's security. This is the best way to keep Pakistan in check. India's greater presence and engagement with Afghanistan will allow it to keep a tab on Pakistani activities in the area. India cannot afford to let Afghanistan become a pawn

in the Pakistani plan to export jihad into India. Moreover, Afghanistan is keen to establish a strategic partnership with India based on “common values and goals”⁹⁷ mainly because it sees Pakistan as exporting terrorism to Afghanistan at the moment. Recently, the Foreign Minister of Afghanistan was quoted as saying that Afghanistan is facing “the expansionist foreign policy of some countries that try to use terrorism as an instrument of foreign policy.”⁹⁸

The other important factor, which needs attention, is Sino-Pakistan collaboration in Central Asia. As mentioned earlier, one school of thought within Pakistan believes that China is the only external ‘patron’ that has supported Pakistan politically, militarily and economically since the 1960s.⁹⁹ Their military and nuclear linkages are no secret.¹⁰⁰ It has also been argued that China’s arms sales policies have greater strategic rather than commercial rationale. The strategic alliance between China and Pakistan¹⁰¹ has serious security implications for India. The geo-political necessity and a complementarity of interests between China and Islamabad are visible in their policies towards the CARs. China has always supported Pakistan’s case in the SCO. An important question here that needs closer scrutiny is what does it mean for Pakistan to get this observer status in SCO and how it will use this forum to further its interests in the region? Before we analyse this aspect, it is also important to note that so far the role, responsibilities, obligations and right of a state with observer status are not very clear.¹⁰² Nevertheless, Islamabad’s design to use this forum in its favour on the Kashmir issue needs consideration.

Pakistan is hoping to become a full-fledged member of the SCO. In this context Kazakh President Nursultan Nazarbayev has also acknowledged that: “the day when Pakistan becomes a full-fledged member is not far off.”¹⁰³ Within Pakistan, some analysts are of the opinion that Pakistan will have to play a pro-active role in the SCO framework in order to meet the new challenges and benefit from the new opportunities. They also believe that since the SCO has extensive experience in resolving boundary disputes, India and Pakistan as member-states can utilise this framework for settling bilateral border issues. Besides, SCO membership is also viewed as providing Pakistan an opportunity to expand its defence and security relations with Russia, as well as expanding the operational area of Pakistan’s security and economic considerations.¹⁰⁴ These perceptions on SCO and its utility for Pakistan should be seen in the light of Islamabad’s anti-India rhetoric and its effort to balance India.

Both Pakistan and China are working on providing connectivity to Central Asia. Pakistan has offered to lay pipelines to enable China to procure gas and oil through Iran and the CARs. Both will soon undertake upgradation of the Karakoram highway to convert it into an all-weather corridor to facilitate bilateral trade.¹⁰⁵ The importance of Gwadar and its use in times of any major conflict cannot be ruled out in future. It is also argued by strategists in Pakistan that the Gwadar Port may ultimately help the CARs to actively participate as ECO members and help open trade channels through Pakistan and can also go a long way in strengthening Pakistan's position in the region vis-à-vis India.¹⁰⁶

To improve politico-economic ties with the Central Asian region, the creation of new organisation comprising Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Iran and the five Central Asian states has been articulated in some Pakistani writings. It is believed that such an arrangement will effectively foreclose the possibility of "Indian design to isolate and encircle Pakistan in the region".¹⁰⁷ Nonetheless, Pakistan's designs in Central Asia are conditioned by numerous strategic uncertainties: issue of stability in Afghanistan and Pakistan's involvement in internal affairs of Afghanistan; 'new great game' in Central Asia and its security implications; Pakistan's relations with US in the light of increasing Indo-US ties; and, finally, the future of MMA as a strong political force in Pakistan.

As compared to Pakistan, India has more advantage in this region. From a Central Asian perspective, India is a friendly partner. It enjoys goodwill within the regional states and has over a period of time established a coherent policy towards this region.¹⁰⁸ None of the Central Asian states has any apprehensions or suspicions about India's changing profile in the region. They see India as a country with technology and experiences, which are more suited to their needs. While terrorism remains the major issue of cooperation between the two, the CARs are also looking for Indian involvement in the IT sector in a major way and for sharing India's experience in setting up various industrial units related to agriculture and defence, providing training in the financial and banking sectors, and helping build their economies through scientific and technological cooperation. It has also been argued that India could be an organic driver in establishing the system of cooperation among these states.¹⁰⁹ Central Asians view India as a beacon of hope and a route to progress in what they perceive as their "southern arc of instability" involving Afghanistan and Pakistan.¹¹⁰

India's only limitation in the region is its geographic connectivity with Central Asia over land. India, therefore, is trying to improve this connectivity through Iran and Afghanistan. It is important to note that Turkey can be the other gateway to Central Asia for India. New Delhi needs to further strengthen its ties with Turkey to explore the possibility of accessing energy resources of the Caspian region.

Conclusion

Recent initiatives taken by Pakistan in cementing its ties with Central Asia indicate that there has been improvement in its relations with the CARs. Visits by Central Asian heads of state also indicate that these regimes are trying to develop new equations with Pakistan. This shift can be attributed to the new security situation, which is unfolding in the region, with US influence in relative decline and Chinese and Russian influence on the rise. Countries such as Uzbekistan are looking for new allies. Moreover, two factors make it difficult for Central Asian regimes to ignore Pakistan. First, its geo-strategic location, and second, its links with and influence on the extremist groups such as IMU which Pakistan has used as leverage over the Central Asian régimes.

However, Central Asia continues to present considerable diplomatic challenges for Pakistan. Consequently, Islamabad will have to find a balance between its support for Taliban and efforts to seek closer economic and political relations with Central Asia. This could further get complicated if Islamist parties and groups become the dominant force in the Pakistani establishment. Therefore, the effectiveness of Pakistan's balancing diplomacy as well as stability in Afghanistan will determine to a large extent its inroad into Central Asia.

In future, despite its good relations with the CARs, India will have to manage its relations under the complexity of the situation, where at one end it will have to engage Pakistan and at other level increase its involvement in Afghanistan and Central Asia without getting into direct confrontation with any power, regional or extra regional, in the region. Today, confrontation is not the buzzword; rather engagement and cooperation are the drivers for foreign policymakers. Would India and Pakistan see themselves cooperating in the Central Asian region in this changing security paradigm? So far, India-Pakistan relations have evolved in an atmosphere where misperceptions, suspicions and misunderstandings have been the

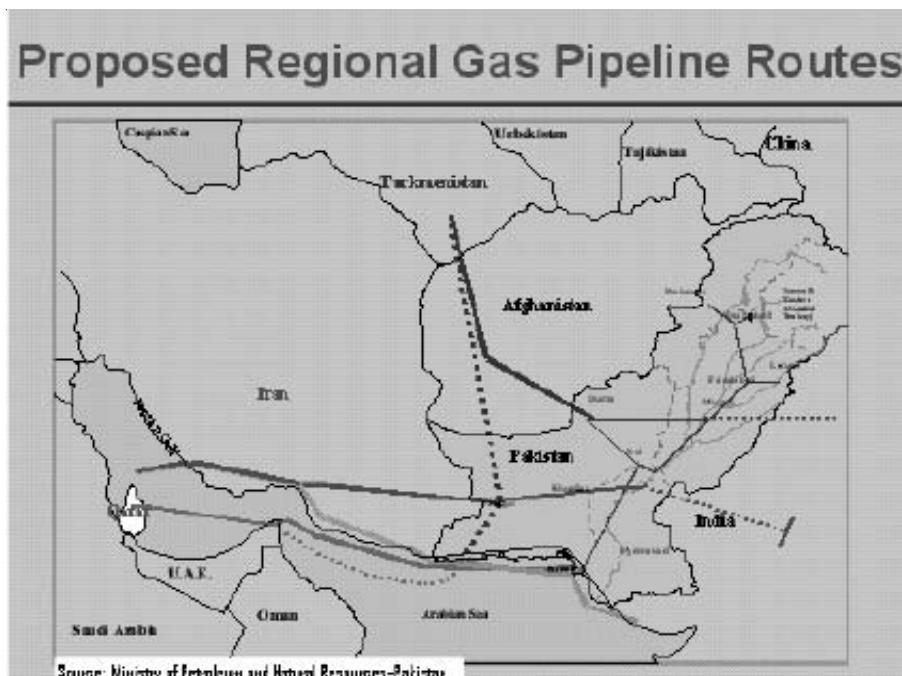
dominant factors.¹¹¹ However, today some mechanism can be formulated, where geo-economics finds an appropriate place for managing these relations. Such a mechanism would provide a win-win situation for India, Pakistan, and Central Asia.

Appendix-I

Important Visits by Pakistan's President, Ministers and Senior Officials to CARs (2001-2006)

06 November 2001	General Pervez Musharraf visited Turkmenistan
07 November 2001	General Pervez Musharraf visited Kazakhstan
02 June 2002	General Pervez Musharraf met Tajikistan President at Dushanbe
03 June 2002	General Pervez Musharraf met Kazakh President at Almaty
June 2002	General Pervez Musharraf visited Turkmenistan
27 December 2002	Prime Minister Jamali visited Ashgabat (Turkmenistan)
13 September 2004	Prime Minister Aziz met Prime Minister of Kazakhstan and President of Tajikistan at Dushanbe
05 March 2005	President Musharraf visited Uzbekistan
07 March 2005	President Musharraf paid a two-day official visit to Kyrgyzstan
04-05 July 2005	Prime Minister Aziz visited Kazakhstan
16 February 2006	Ministerial level meeting was held between Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan in Ashgabat
03 May 2006	Foreign Minister Khurshid Kasuri visited Ashgabat

Source: Chronology in Pakistan Horizon (2001-2006); POT Pakistan, May 2006



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- ² Islamabad has even tried to attract foreign forces into the region in order to balance India.
- ³ One such view was articulated by Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, a former Ambassador, in his recent writing where he says, "Having been created in the teeth of India's opposition, whose Hindu majority considered the division of "Bharat Mata" (Mother India) a sacrilege, Pakistan has had to contend with India's hostility from its very birth. Imperatives of national survival have largely determined our defence and foreign policy, impelled our entry into western

- pects and shaped our strategic partnership with China as well as our nuclear policies that have been aimed at safeguarding our sovereignty and independence." See Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti, "Challenge of co-existence with India", *Dawn*, Karachi, April 30, 2006, at <http://www.dawn.com/2006/04/30/ed.htm>
- ⁴ Shaid M. Amin, no.1, pp. 39-50 ;Prakash Nanda, "Between the US and China: Pakistan's Uncertain Strategic Manoeuvres Since 9/11", in Ajay Darshan Behera, C. Mathew Joseph (eds), *Pakistan in a Changing Strategic Context*, Knowledge World, New Delhi, 2004, p. 107.
 - ⁵ Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha, *Pakistan's Arms Procurement and Buildup,1979-99*, Palgrave, New York, 2001, pp. 13-19; Mehnaz Isphani, *Pakistan: Dimensions of Insecurity*, Adelphi Paper, 246, IISS, Winter 1998-90, p. 30. According to General Mirza Aslam Beg, "There is an element of power prosperity which induces India to behave typically as a military "Frankenstein" to intimidate its neighbours and mount tension in the region" He goes on to say that "The security of Pakistan is adequately established to counter India's hegemonic aspirations in the region." For details see Mirza Aslam Beg, *National Security Diplomacy and Defence*, Foundation for Research on International Environment, National Development and Security, Rawalpindi, 1999, p. 18.
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- ¹⁸ Turkmenistan possesses the world's fifth largest reserves of natural gas. According to the country's programme for economic development until 2010, Turkmenistan should reach oil output of 48 million tonnes a year. See "Turkmenistan ready to meet gas requirements of Pakistan", at <http://pakistanimes.net/2005/01/12/top8.htm>
- ¹⁹ Pakistan was quick to send a 23-member delegation to these states, which had industrialists, businessmen and subject experts, in November 1991. This was followed by many more such visits by important political leaders, technical experts and government officials. The heads of government and administration from both sides have visited each other and more than 55 protocols, agreements and memoranda have been signed. Pakistan extended a credit of \$10 million to each of the Central Asian States with \$20 million additional to Kazakhstan. See Tahmina Mahmood, "Pakistan and Central Asia" *Eurasian Studies*, Ankara, 3 (4), Winter 1996-97, pp. 79-92; Mohammad Anwar Khan, "Perspective on the Relationship and Central Asia after the Break up of the Former Soviet Union", in Musa Khan Jalalzai (ed.) *Afghanistan, Central Asia, Pakistan and the United States*, Book Biz, Lahore, 2003. p. 202.
- ²⁰ Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia Islam or Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, Karachi 1994, p. 215; also see Ahmad Rashid, no. 9, pp. 212-213.
- ²¹ "Pakistan Focused on Energy, Transport, Economic Integration with Central Asia", interview with Khursheed Mahmood Kasuri, Foreign Minister of Pakistan, August 26, 2004, at <http://www.newscentralasia.com/modules.php?name=News&file=print&sid=858>
- ²² Deirdre Tynan, "Mussharraf closes successful Central Asian Visit", *The Times of Central Asia*, Bishkek, 7(19), (313), March 10, 2005, p. 2; Chronology, *Pakistan Horizon*, 58 (2) April 2005, pp. 117-119, 135.
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- ²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 119.
- ²⁵ Chronology, *Pakistan Horizon*, 57 (3), July 2004, p. 148.
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- ³⁰ Mirza Aslam Beg, no. 5, pp. 74-75.
- ³¹ Ahmed Rashid, *Taliban, Islam, Oil and New Great Game in Central Asia*, I.B.Tauris, London, 2000, p. 186; Smruti S. Pattanaik, "In Pursuit of Strategic Depth: The Changing Dynamics of Pakistan's Afghan Policy", 2006, Forthcoming Paper.

- ³² K. Alan Kronstadt, "International Terrorism in South Asia", CSR Report for US Congress, November 3, 2003, at <http://www.fas.org/irp/crs/RS21658.pdf> ; Talk by Zalmay Khalilzad at the Centre for Strategic and International Studies, Washington, April 4, 2004, at http://www.csis.org/events/afghanistan_Transcript.pdf; "Taliban planning Spring strikes against US forces", *The Times of India*, New Delhi, February 13, 2004.
- ³³ During his three-day visit to Pakistan in February 2006, President Karzai said that, " We have provided Musharraf with a lot of very detailed information on acts of terrorism being carried out in Afghanistan, and we have discussed in great details what actions Pakistan could take," in Ahmed Rashid, "Afghan President confronts Pakistani Counterpart Over Suicide Bombers", at http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav022106_pr.shtml; There was a large catch of arms caught in the Afghan-Pakistan border. This is a clear indication of Pakistan's involvement in Afghanistan. The arms and ammunition seized included 100 RPG-7 rockets, 437 current ignition missiles (small), 7 current ignition missiles (large), 229 mortar bombs, 193 mortar bombs 60mm, 12 rockets 107mm, 54 RR rounds 75mm , 42 boxes of 20mm gun rounds, 331 anti- personnel mines, 4 anti-tank mines, 145 fuses (long), 129 bombs, 918 premier, 1,487 fuses, 45 pressure switches, 40 mine triggers, 3 batteries, 2 missiles with fins, 1 artillery round, 210 ammunition 20mm gun, 4 magazine 20mm gun, 7 hand grenades, 2 mortars (3 inch), 2 guns 12.7mm, 1 mortar 82mm, 1 mortar 60mm and other ammunition. See Zulfiqar Ali, "Six Stinger Missiles Seized" *Dawn* , September 27, 2005.
- ³⁴ Ahmed Rashid, "Afghan President Confronts Pakistani Counterpart over Suicide Bombers", at http://www.eurasia .org/departments/insight/articles/eva022106_pr.shtml; Ahmed Rashid, "US-Pakistan Relations in Downward Spiral", at http://www.eurasia .org/departments/insight/articles/eva051706_pr.shtml
- ³⁵ Ibid.
- ³⁶ Dr. Timothy D. Hoyt, "US Counterterrorism Policy Towards Asia and the Pacific", October 29, 2003, at http://www.house.gov/international_relations/108/hoyt1029htm.
- ³⁷ *The News*, Islamabad, January 9, 1991.
- ³⁸ "Quazi welcomes independence of Soviet Muslim states," *The News*, September 3, 1991.
- ³⁹ Vyacheslav Belokrenitsky, "Islamic Radicalism in Central Asia: The Influence of Pakistan and Afghanistan", no. 12 , pp. 186-187.
- ⁴⁰ I.A. Rahman, "Pakistan Must Work for Tajik Peace", *Frontier Post*, August 12, 1993; Ahmed Rashid, no. 20, pp. 214-215; K. Warikoo, "Afghanistan and Central Asian Republics 1991-1996", in K. Warikoo and Mahavir Singh (eds), *Central Asia Since Independence*, Shipra Publications, New Delhi, 2004, pp. 140-171; for details, see Eshan Ahrari, *Jihadi Groups, Nuclear Pakistan, and the New Great Game*, Strategic Studies Institute, Carlisle, PA, 2001.

- ⁴¹ Ahmed Rashid, no. 9, p. 116.
- ⁴² Chronology, *Pakistan Horizon*, 57 (1), January 2004, p. 141.
- ⁴³ Ibid, p. 217.
- ⁴⁴ Aabha Dixit, "Islamabad's Central Asian Strategy Runs into Rough Weather", *Strategic Analysis*, 15 (3), June 1992, pp. 169-181.
- ⁴⁵ H. Askari Rizvi, "Central Asia: Domestic Politics, External Linkages, and Security", at http://www.acdis.uiuc.edu/Research/S&Ps/1996-1997/S&P_X/Rizvi.htm
- ⁴⁶ Asma Shakir Khwaja, "Reactivating the ECO: Amyth?", at http://www.cacianalyst.org/view_article.php?articleid=2799; Also see <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-9886.html>
- ⁴⁷ Interview with Khursheed Mahmood Kasuri, no. 21.
- ⁴⁸ *Pakistan Times*, Islamabad, October 29, 1991.
- ⁴⁹ "Musharraf seeks full SCO membership", *POT Pakistan*, 34 (140), June 17, 2006, pp. 2-4.
- ⁵⁰ Leaders like Benazir Bhutto spoke of Pakistan as the gate way to Central Asia in the early 1990s, the Chief Executive Gen. Pervez Musharraf spoke in the same vein in 2004-05.
- ⁵¹ Sultan Ahmad, "If Pakistan is the Gateway to Central Asia", at <http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/july/gateway-asia.htm>; Ahmed Rashid, *The Resurgence of Central Asia: Islam or Nationalism*, Oxford University Press, Karachi 1994, p. 214.
- ⁵² "People, Governments want peace in Sub-Continent: Musharraf", at <http://pakistanimes.net/2005/04/24/top1.htm>; In recently held SCO Summit in Shanghai President Musharraf articulated the idea of Gwadar Port providing the shortest route for oil producing Central Asia to the Arabian Sea. See Nirupama Subramanian, no. 13.
- ⁵³ Deirdre Tynan, no. 22, p. 2.
- ⁵⁴ "Musharraf for taking advantage from Pak Geo-Strategic Importance", *POT Pakistan*, 34 (177), July 31, 2006, pp. 22-23; "Comments: Gwadar's Strategic Value", *POT Pakistan*, 34 (188), August 12, 2006, pp. 25-26. More details on this can be seen at <http://www.pakistanlink.com/Headlines/July06/30/07.htm>
- ⁵⁵ Ahmed Rashid, no. 20, pp. 214.
- ⁵⁶ <http://paktribune.com/news/index.php?id=76900>
- ⁵⁷ "World Bank to offer 1.8bln USD for Pakistan's NTC plan", at http://english.people.com.cn/200607/16/eng20060716_283567.html
- ⁵⁸ <http://www.chitralnews.com/Latest%20new512.htm>
- ⁵⁹ "Pakistan-Kyrgyzstan Agree to enhance trade ties", at <http://paktribune.com/news/index.php?id=64865>

- ⁶⁰ On October 8, 2006, the first lorry carrying a 40-tonne container left the Pakistani capital for Almaty. The Pakistani Pak Caspian Trade Link Transport Company will operate this route. "Kazakh-Pakistani Road link Inaugrated in Islamabad", *CEF Weekly Newsletter*, (32), October 9-17, 2006, at <http://www.silkroadstudies.org>
- ⁶¹ The Port provides Central Asian Republics direct access to the warm waters through Afghanistan and Balochistan, as an alternative both to the routes through Iran, and trade routes to Europe. The port facility has also the potential to be possible alternative to Dubai, which is lately becoming a hub for major economic activities in the region. For details see "Comments: Gwadar's Strategic Value", *POT Pakistan*, 34 (188), August 12, 2006, pp. 25-27.
- ⁶² "Gwadar port to be ready by Sept 2005", at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_17-10-2004_pg5_6
- ⁶³ "Kazakhstan Seeking Access to Pakistan Ports," at <http://www.eurasianet.org/resource/Kazakhstan/hypermail/news/0012.shtml>
- ⁶⁴ Chronology in *Pakistan Horizon*, 59 (1), January 2006, p. 121.
- ⁶⁵ "Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan agree to improve road links", at http://www.dailytimes.com.pk/default.asp?page=story_18-1-2005_pg7_1; Ahmed Hassan, "Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan vow to activate ECO: Visa rules to be eased", at <http://www.dawn.com/2005/01/19/top6.htm>; "Pakistan, Kyrgyzstan vow joint anti-terror efforts", at <http://paktribune.com/news/index.php?id=91068>
- ⁶⁶ "The Afghan Corridor: Prospects for Pakistan-Central Asia Relations in Post-Taliban Afghanistan?" *Spotlight on Regional Affairs*, Institute for Regional Studies, Islamabad, September 2002, p. 14.
- ⁶⁷ "Pakistan and Kyrgyzstan agree to improve road links", no. 65.
- ⁶⁸ Asma Shakir Khwaja, no. 29.
- ⁶⁹ It is estimated that it will be facing a shortfall of 33 million cubic metres by 2020; see also no. 18.
- ⁷⁰ *POT Pakistan*, 34 (177), July 31, 2006, pp. 29-30.
- ⁷¹ Chronology in *Pakistan Horizon*, 56 (1) January 2003, pp. 138-139.
- ⁷² *Ibid*, 59 (2) April 2006, p. 133.
- ⁷³ *POT Pakistan*, 34 (103), May 5, 2006, p. 7.
- ⁷⁴ During the OIC Summit in December 2005 President Musharraf and Tajik President Emomali Rakhmonov discussed expediting talks on the electricity transmission project between the two countries.
- ⁷⁵ "Central Asian Republics Keen to Export Electricity", *POT Pakistan*, 34 (107), May 13, 2006, p. 6.
- ⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 7.
- ⁷⁷ *Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, July 6, 2005; no. 33.
- ⁷⁸ *News*, August 19, 1992; Anwer Hussein Sindhu, "Unfulfilled Promises to Central

- Asian States: Pak Credibility at Stake". *News*, June 23, 1992, cited in Samina Yasmeen, no. 1.
- ⁷⁹ Shabir Ahmad, "Pakistan-Uzbekistan Relations: Hopes and Hurdles", *Journal of Turkish Weekly*, 2005 at <http://www.turkishweekly.net/comments.php?id=396>
- ⁸⁰ Uzbekistan was the biggest buyer for the Pakistani goods worth Rs 1.32 million in 1991-92 and Rs 84.41 million in 1992-93. Samina Yasmeen, n. 1, p. 129.
- ⁸¹ Shabir Ahmad, n. 79.
- ⁸² Azmat Hayat Khan, n. 14, p. 85.
- ⁸³ Mubarak Zeb Khan, "Export target \$18.6bn, trade deficit \$9.4bn: Trade Policy 2006-07", at <http://dawn.com/2006/07/18/top3.htm>
- ⁸⁴ Chronology, *Pakistan Horizon*, 58 (2) April 2005, p. 117.
- ⁸⁵ Chronology, *Pakistan Horizon*, 56 (4) October 2003, p. 111.
- ⁸⁶ no. 18.
- ⁸⁷ Asma Shakir Khwaja, no. 46.
- ⁸⁸ Ahmed Rashid, no. 20, pp. 212-213.
- ⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 213, 215.
- ⁹⁰ At a press conference in Islamabad on May 25, 2000 Pakistan's Chief Executive (later president), General Pervez Musharraf, gave the clearest articulation to date of the reasons for Pakistan's continued backing of the Taliban. He explained that in view of the demographic and geographic pattern, Afghanistan's majority ethnic Pashtuns "have to be on our side. This is our national interest. Pashtuns are represented by the Taliban at the moment, and Taliban cannot be alienated by Pakistan." He added that "we have a national security interest there", in Ahmed Rashid, no. 9, p. 260.
- ⁹¹ Prime Minister Shaukat Aziz said recently that "Afghanistan is key to the energy, trade and transport corridor Pakistan wants to establish with the countries of Central Asia and a stable Pakistan is critical to these links" see "Afghanistan Key to Trade Energy, Says Shaukat", *POT Pakistan*, 34 (148), June 27, 2006, p. 9.
- ⁹² Ahmed Rashid, "Karzai Embraces Risky Plan to end Afghanistan-Pakistani Antagonism", at http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav101206_pr.shtml; "NATO Commanders Demand Pakistan Close Taliban Sanctury", at http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/eav100606a_pr.shtml.
- ⁹³ Sultan Ahmad, no. 2.
- ⁹⁴ *The Nation*, Lahore, April 11, 2005; for details see, Imtiaz Ali, "The Balochistan Problem" *Pakistan Horizon*, 58 (2) April 2005, pp. 41-62.
- ⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 59.
- ⁹⁶ Meena Singh Roy, "India's Interests in Central Asia" *Strategic Analysis*, 24 (12), March 2001; Meena Singh Roy, "India-Uzbekistan: Emerging Partnership for

Peace and Development”, *Himalayan and Central Asian Studies*, 9 (1-2), Jan-Jun 2005, pp. 93-123.

- ⁹⁷ RFE/RL Newline, Central Asia Report, 10 (152), Part III, August 18, 2006.
- ⁹⁸ Ibid; See Amin Tarzi, “Islamabad Anxious as Kabul gets Chummy with New Delhi”, at http://www.eurasianet.org/departments/insight/articles/pp041606_pr.shtml
- ⁹⁹ Samina Yasmeen, no. 1, pp. 120-128.
- ¹⁰⁰ Recently Pakistan has clinched a \$600-million defence deal with China, which includes construction of four F-22P frigates for the Pakistani Navy, upgrading of the Karachi dockyard and transfer of technology for indigenous production of modern surface fleet. In “Pak, China finalise defence deal”, *The Tribune* Chandigarh, May 24, 2006.
- ¹⁰¹ Jasjit Singh, “China and the Shifting Balance of Military Power”, *Security and Society*, 1 (1), Winter 2004, pp. 56-71.
- ¹⁰² SCO Secretary General Zhang Deguang said, “the role of an observer lies not only observing ,there should be cooperation among observer and member-states; it should take part in the process of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation...currently we are focusing our basic attention on developing cooperation within Organisation, we did not have enough time to study carefully the questions concerning establishing a cooperation between the SCO and its Observer. We will thoroughly consider this issue after the summit.” See Press Conference by SCO Secretary General Zhang Deguang on July 1, 2005, www.sectSCO.org
- ¹⁰³ *Kazakhstan Weekly News Bulletin*, July 7, 2005, at www.kazakhembus.com
- ¹⁰⁴ Fazal-ur-Rahman, “Pakistan Embraces the ‘Shanghai Spirit’”, *Strategic Studies*, Islamabad, 25(3), Autumn 2005, pp. 47-50. “Comments: Pakistan’s Quest for Full SCO Membership” *POT Pakistan*, 34 (148), June 27, 2006, pp. 12-13.
- ¹⁰⁵ K.J.M. Varma, “Pak Offers Oil Pipeline to China”, *The Tribune*, May 24, 2006.
- ¹⁰⁶ Amina Afzal, “India’s growing Influence in Central Asia: Implications for Pakistan”, at http://www.issi.org.pk/strategic_studies_hm/2003/no_3/article/7a.htm
- ¹⁰⁷ Azmat Hayat Khan, no. 14, pp. 84-85.
- ¹⁰⁸ From India’s point of view, former External Affairs Minister, Natwar Singh announced that India would be seeking a proactive role in Central Asia. After the SCO summit in July 2005, he said, “....It’s our backyard. Now we plan to strengthen missions in Central Asian countries so that we can enhance our role in the region.” *Hindustan Times*, July 6, 2005.
- ¹⁰⁹ Views based on discussion during the Conference on “3rd India Central Asia Regional Conference”, November 6-8, 2003, Tashkent; Interaction with the scholars, officials and other experts in Tashkent.

- ¹¹⁰ P. Stobdan, K. Santhanam, "Central Asia is Central to India", *Indian Express*, New Delhi, November 28, 2003.
- ¹¹¹ For example, former Ambassador Maqbool Ahmad Bhatti is of the view that, "We have important assets in a campaign to counter India's sheer power through economic, cultural and ideological activism. We have regional linkages with South and Central Asia and historical and cultural links with the Islamic world. We should also maintain and reinforce our close and time-tested relations with China;" see *Dawn*, April 30, 2006. Some Pakistani writings have highlighted that while managing its relations with Pakistan, India has to come out of its traditional perception that it "is an irritant that must be taught a lesson or disciplined", see Ayesha Siddiqa-Agha, no. 5, p. 18; whereas others are of the perception that "Islamabad would like to negotiate peace with India as an equal partner, and therefore, will have to invest more in building its military capability. A military superior neighbour with a long history of rivalry can never be trusted unless it makes the right moves to show its sincerity in durable peace", see "Quest for Supremacy", at <http://jang.com.pk/thenews/dec2005-daily/05-12-2005/oped/editorial.htm>

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For Pakistan, Central Asia assumes great significance for many reasons. Pakistan's geographical location vis a vis Central Asia's landlocked nature and its geo-political and geo-economic importance naturally induce Pakistan to reach out to the region. Since the breakup of the former Soviet Union, Pakistan has been struggling to forge closer political and economic relations with Central Asian Republics (CARs) and always sustained hope to become a gateway to Central Asia. Instead of providing strategic depth, Pakistan viewed Afghanistan as part of a larger Indian strategy to encircle Pakistan. Unable to alter the diplomatic situation with Kabul, Pakistan worked closely with militant groups through the 1980s and 1990s to replace the Afghan government with a pro-Pakistan regime. The question of the Central Asian strategy remains a domestic controversy in the U.S. This controversy came into existence as early as the time before the 9/11 attack happening in 2001. Giving priority to the promotion of democracy in Central Asia or to the maintenance of regional security and the enhancement of antiterrorism cooperation has remained an unsolved problem concerning the U.S. government's Central Asian strategy: "The United States thus faces two contradictory imperatives: on the one hand, the fight against terror tempts Washington to put aside its democratic scruples and seek.