



The GREAT GAME redux: Economic and political development options for Pakistan

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Abstract

A new GREAT GAME is being played out between regional and world powers over resources of the Central Asian region, being reminiscent of the classic “Great Game” of the nineteenth century between the British Empire and Tsarist Russia. The Central Asian States, becoming independent after disintegration of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), found themselves owning vast resources, including large oil and gas reserves, minerals and other raw materials and access to attractive land-locked markets. This triggered a rush between the regional and international powers to access and control these resources. Connectivity – whether through roads, pipelines or other routes – is the most crucial factor to determine success. In contrast to the classic Great Game between the British and Russian empires, there are multiple protagonists in the present Game – Russia, China, USA, India, Turkey, Iran, Pakistan and the Central Asian States. Each of these has its own objectives and strategies, leading to a complex, ever-changing and high-stakes Game. While Russia is trying to regain its control in Central Asia and China is attempting to expand its sphere of influence; the USA is trying to contain both. “The New Silk Road”, “One-Belt-One-Road”, “String of Pearls” and the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) are some of the strategies being implemented. The smaller powers are maneuvering to leverage their geo-strategic situation and relations to further their own interests. This New Great Game has created opportunities for Pakistan to alleviate some of its chronic problems such as energy shortage, trade deficit and low GDP. However, to reap the maximum benefits from the situation, it must carefully weigh its options and review its relations with the other protagonists. This study finds that following a balanced, moderate and pro-active strategy may yield the best dividends for Pakistan. However, in order for this to succeed, Pakistan also needs to put its internal affairs in order, especially focusing on reducing extremism and Baloch separatism.

Keywords

Pakistan, Great game, Oil, Central Asian states, Geostrategy, Geopolitics, Economic development, Political development, China Pakistan Economic Corridor, Connectivity

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1. Introduction

The term "Great Game" has been used in different contexts to describe geo-strategic struggles between various powers at different times. Originally, it was coined to refer to the rivalry between the British and Russian Empires for domination over Central Asia, Afghanistan, Tibet and Persia in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The phrase was revived after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, which was resisted by the United States through its proxies. In 2003, Lutz Kleveman re-popularized the term in his book *The New Great Game: Blood and Oil in Central Asia*, where he described the struggle for control over the mineral wealth and oil pipeline routes of Central Asia by different players (1). After 2012, US foreign policy progressively 'pivoted towards Asia', and some think-tanks argued that this re-alignment initiated a "New Great Game" where the main antagonists, America and China, competed for influence and power.

Economic progress and security have now become major goals of states. Countries seek control over economic resources -- oil, gas, minerals, raw materials, and access to markets for finished goods. They also try to control the means to access and the routes to transport such resources -- pipelines, roads and ports, among others. Connectivity thus plays a key role in securing national and economic security. The countries in Pakistan's neighborhood, especially China, India and Russia are making strategic moves to secure economic resources. China has embarked on initiatives such as 'One Belt, One Road' and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. India is trying to get a foothold in Afghanistan, procure oil and gas from the Central Asian States, as well as gain

access to Iran's Chabahar port by investing financially in these countries. Russia is also trying to control the resources of the Central Asian States, access to European markets for its surplus oil and gas reserves, and land routes to the warm waters of the Mediterranean Sea. On the other hand, the United States, wary of a rising China, is seeking greater cooperation with Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. These strategies may have far-reaching implications for Pakistan. In this scenario, Pakistan must carefully consider its options in order to protect its interests in the ongoing New Great Game.

1.1 Statement of the thesis

The New Great Game is a struggle between existing and emerging powers to control the large energy reserves located in Central Asia, and to maximize the economic share from development, trade and consumption by those countries possessing them. Since the Central Asian Republican States (CARs) are land-locked, they need pipelines, rail and road connections for transport, import and export of goods. Pakistan has become a part of this "New Great Game" due to its geographical location, since it serves as a transit or end point of many transportation routes. This may be a blessing for Pakistan and bring substantial economic benefit, but it also poses risks inherent in being involved in a struggle between great powers. In this context, this study is aimed at determining; (a) What are the different opportunities available to Pakistan in the new Great Game of connectivity and what are the possible risks? And (b) What is the preferable strategy for Pakistan, keeping in view its national interests, security and prosperity?

1.2 Significance and scope

This study is significant, since it involves the future well-being of Pakistan. Pakistan should take advantage of the window of opportunity provided by geography and circumstances, where it can forge strategic alliances with powers involved in the New Great Game. If Pakistan makes a reasoned and thoughtful choice of strategy at this time, it may be assured of long term economic and political benefits which can help to bring it into the group of developed nations. However, adoption of a desultory or uncalculated policy may cause a loss of even its present development status and mire it in instability, terrorism and deprivation.

1.3 Review of the literature

Available literature on the New Great Game describes the history and evolution of the so-called New Great Game, including the strategies and motivations of the players involved, and analysis of their success or otherwise. These works are cited at relevant points in the body of this paper as well as in the references section.

1.4 Method

Research conducted for the purpose of this paper was mainly obtained from secondary sources. Books, articles, publications by government and international organizations, and resources available on the Internet were consulted. The research is mainly qualitative and analytical in nature, as warranted by the nature of the topic, although a Pugh matrix was constructed that provided for a semi-quantitative analysis.

1.5 Organization of the paper

Following the introduction, the body of this

paper is divided into three parts. Part 2 conceptualizes the New Great Game by tracing its history and background, and highlights the importance of connectivity. Part 3 identifies the main players involved, and discusses their motivations and strategies. Part 4 evaluates different policy options available to Pakistan for its involvement in the New Great Game. These parts are followed by the Conclusion, Perspective and References.

2. Conceptualization of the New Great Game

2.1 Historical perspective

The term "The Great Game" is attributed to the British intelligence officer, Captain Arthur Connolly, who first used it in 1835 (2), but it was popularized by Rudyard Kipling in his novel, *Kim*. It referred to the intense military and diplomatic rivalry between the British and Russian Empires of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Tsarist Russia sought to expand its territory and sphere of influence to create a large land-based empire, while Britain sought to prevent it from making inroads into Afghanistan and protect its "crown jewel" -- British India. Ultimately, the front line between the two empires bisected Afghanistan, Tibet and Persia, with Afghanistan being maintained as a buffer state. A century later, another Great Game is being played, by multiple powers -- USA, Russia and China, with India, Pakistan, Iran, Afghanistan and Central Asian States (CAS) in subsidiary roles. Instead of territorial hegemony and military action, this time the focus is more on economic control, diplomacy and deal-making.

Foster (3) and Abilov (4) described the New Great Game as the interplay of geopolitical strategies hinged on the energy resources of the

Central Asian / Caspian Basin region. This region became the theatre of global rivalry after the end of the Cold War because of its large reserves of natural resources (5), and involved both economic as well as strategic spheres (6).

2.2 Post-cold war era developments

The disintegration of the USSR in 1991 led to independence of the CAS. This Central Asian region comprises the core area of the Eurasian landmass, extending up to Russia in the north, the Caspian Sea in the west, China in the east, and Afghanistan in the south. It includes Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The bordering areas of Afghanistan, northeastern Iran and Pakistan, Mongolia, Xinjiang and Tibet in western China, and southern Siberia are also contextually and periodically included in this nomenclature.

The high energy demands of the USA, China and India coupled with attempts by Russia to re-establish its influence over the region have led to a struggle for influence or control over resources and transit routes across this region. Initially, Russia and the US sought control, but subsequently other states such as China, India, Japan, South Korea, the EU, and Turkey also have displayed interest in the region (5).

2.3 Energy – the new wealth

The importance of the region arises from the fact that it possesses large reserves of oil,

natural-gas and minerals, comparable to those of the Middle East. Estimates of the size of reserves vary. Kleveman (1) estimates that 110 billion barrels of oil lie beneath the Caspian Sea, while British Petroleum (7) places proven oil reserves at 5 billion tonnes (2.25% of the world's total) and gas deposits at 20 trillion cubic metres (10.7% of the world's total).

2.4 Components of the Game: resources, markets and routes

The combined population of CAS is ~ 60 million and its area is ~ 4 million square km (5). These land-locked countries are dependent on neighbors for transit of their imports and exports. Their large resources and potential markets represent an attractive opportunity for trade. For China, they present a potential overland route for transit of goods to European markets.

Since the region is landlocked, pipelines must be built to transport Caspian oil and gas to the Energy hungry markets of the West, China and India. During the Soviet era, the region's pipeline infrastructure was designed for Soviet needs, with all major pipeline arteries feeding north (Figure 1). However, after collapse of the Soviet Union, these vast resources suddenly became accessible for external powers, triggering the wild rush for their control. The countries that control the pipelines would also gain tremendous influence and lucrative transit fees.



Figure 1. Pipeline infrastructure during the Soviet era, with north-feeding arteries

The possible natural gas pipelines routes are (a) north through Russia, (b) south through Iran to the Persian Gulf, (c) west through Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey to the Mediterranean and Europe, and (d) east through some combination of the “-stans”, either to China’s Xinjiang province or across Afghanistan to Pakistani ports (Figure 2). The U.S. favors pipelines transiting through its allied states of Turkey, Afghanistan (post-Russian withdrawal and Taliban control) and Pakistan, and discourages those transiting through Russia, Iran or China.

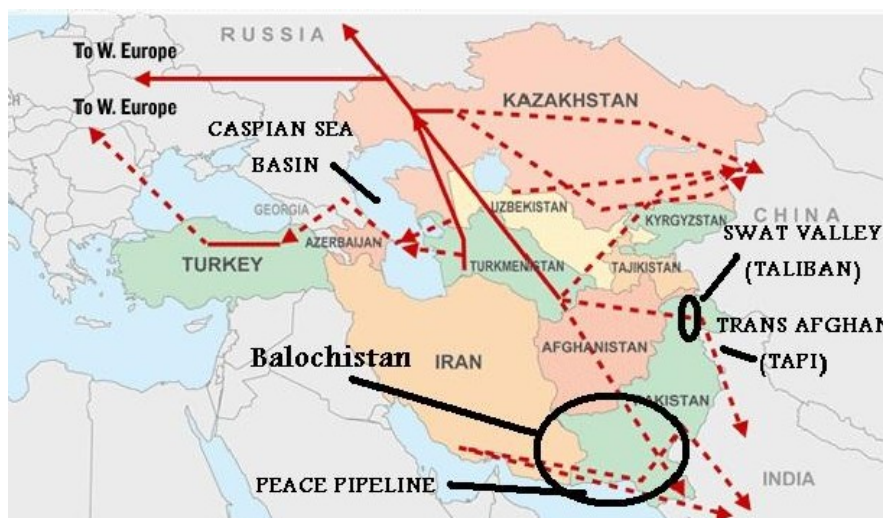


Figure 2. Present (solid) and future (dotted) natural gas pipelines

Central Asia is also the geo-strategic fulcrum of Eurasia. It shares borders with powers such as Russia and China and with countries such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran which face instability or are theatres of war (3). This enhances the geo-strategic importance of the

region, which can either be used to create a wedge between Eurasian powers or used as a launching platform for military operations. Thus, control by any power over the Central Asian region will have far-reaching security implications for others. Many strategists believe that one of the underlying motives of the US invasion of Afghanistan was to establish a military foothold and base of operations in the region, presenting multiple strategic advantages, such as controlling energy flow, isolating Iran, creating a wedge between the CAS and Russia, and the strategic containment of China.

2.5 Evolution of the New Great Game

The New Great Game can be divided into two phases. The first phase emerged from rivalry between two oil companies – Bidas and Unocal (8). Its beginnings can be traced to 1991, when Turkmenistan invited western oil companies to invest in its oil and gas sector. Bidas, an Argentinean oil company, was the first to invest at a time when others were hesitant due to a lack of investor protection legislation (9). Bidas started exporting oil from Keimir in 1994, and prepared a plan for a gas pipeline from Yashlar to Pakistan through Afghanistan. This pipeline was of great interest to Afghan warlords who also wanted to export their own gas. Accordingly, Bidas and the Afghan government signed an agreement in 1996, and Bidas started negotiations to create an international consortium for the project. It was during these negotiations that Unocal got involved (Figure 3).

Subsequently, differences arose between Bidas and Turkmenistan on prices and profits, as well as on Unocal's plan to construct a gas pipeline from Daulatabad to Multan in Pakistan (9).

Bidas accused Unocal of usurping its pipeline negotiations, but Turkmenistan considered it an opportunity to attract US investment in their country (10). Unocal then created the Central Asia Gas Pipeline (CentGas) consortium and signed a Central Asian Oil Pipeline Project agreement to transport oil from Chardzhou to Pakistan. Once involved, the USA started bypassing Russia, which was advantageous to Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan. As a result, two opposing alliances emerged; (a) USA, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Pakistan, Turkey and Israel; and (b) Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Tajikistan (9) (Figure 3).

After Turkmenistan cancelled its agreements with Bidas, it started negotiations with the newly installed Taliban government to build the pipeline. It established an office in Kabul and concluded preliminary agreements. Countering these moves, the USA used Pakistan to influence the Taliban in favour of Unocal, and Unocal started providing humanitarian support and aid programs to influence the Taliban (9). Pakistan, Turkmenistan and Unocal also signed an agreement to raise finances and start construction of the pipeline. However, since the Taliban demanded that the USA recognize their government - a condition not acceptable to the USA - the Taliban regime hindered the efforts of the US oil companies from constructing pipelines (9).

The situation again changed when the Taliban were defeated by the Northern Alliance. However, by this time, US policy shifted and it had started investigating other options, such as the Turkmenistan-Iran-Turkey gas pipeline. This was a major blow to the Afghan pipeline plans. Unocal was dealt another setback when Iran, in concert with Australia's BHP,

announced financing to construct the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline (9). Unocal was forced to dissolve its CentGas consortium and closed its offices in Pakistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan and Kazakhstan. Bidas also realized that it was not possible to construct a pipeline in Afghanistan under these circumstances, as there was no source of finance or construction (9).

The second phase of the New Great Game can be traced to after 9/11, when the War against Terrorism was initiated by the USA and its allies (11). Protagonists of the second phase were different (1), and included regional

stakeholders such as Russia, China, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan and Turkey, who relied on historic, cultural and geopolitical links in their attempts to control Central Asian energy reserves and to benefit from its geo-strategic situation (12). The US was the main trans-regional player. Another distinguishing aspect of the New Great Game was the active role of the CAS themselves (6). They now attempted to use the rivalry between the major powers to their own advantage (13). The situation; as it stands now; is even more complex since the USA has exited from Afganistan, and the Taliban has returned to power (Figure 3).

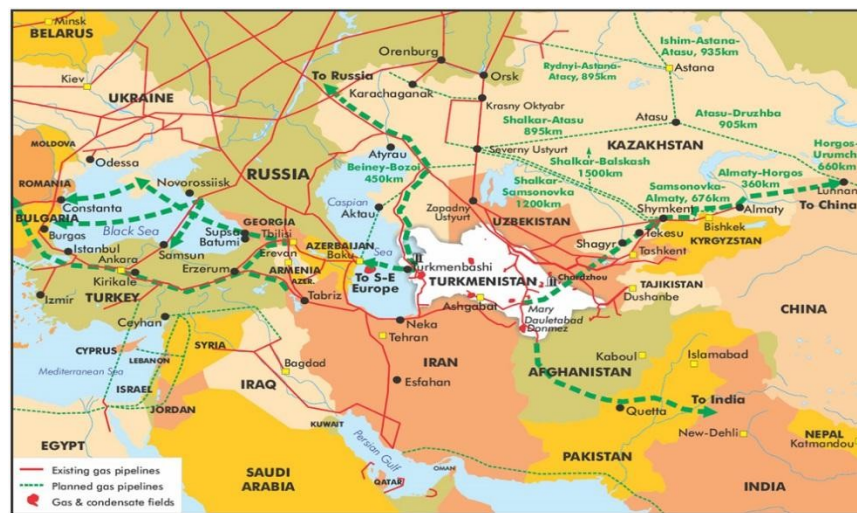


Figure 3. Alternate pipelines of the new Great Game

2.6 Connectivity in the New Great Game

Connectivity is an essential contributor toward current trends of globalization, prosperity and well-being of people. It enables trade, the exchange of goods and services between people, an indispensable part of development. Central Asia has now become a region of relative stability, converted from a troubled

region to an area of opportunity. It is situated between Europe and Asia, two of the largest energy-consuming markets, it not only offers enormous hydrocarbon assets but also is positioned as a land bridge connecting their economies. The connectivity to global markets enables the region to export its resources, as well as become a transit channel for goods. The

development of infrastructure is therefore a key to economic prosperity of this region.

Many studies have confirmed that infrastructure development, particularly in the transport, energy and telecommunications sectors, is one of the most important contributors to economic growth. A 1% increase in infrastructure is calculated to increase the GDP by 0.08% (14). Most countries in continental Asia are connected through the Asian Highway and Trans-Asian Railway networks, while maritime services link coastal regions and island states. Such linkages drive economic progress by facilitating international trade, foreign direct investment flows, and the establishment of global and regional production networks and global value chains. New systems for manufacturing, distribution and consumption have helped many countries in the region to diversify their economies, reducing dependence on traditional sectors, and creating new jobs. The emerging economies in particular have benefited from regional and global value chains.

China's rapid economic growth is reflected through a large expansion of energy production and consumption. It depends on imports for almost 50% of its liquid fuel and 10% of its gaseous fuel. China therefore follows a variety of strategies to improve energy connectivity, expanding its energy trade with Russia, South Korea, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand and Vietnam. In 2014, it signed a 30-year contract for Russian natural gas supplies worth a total of \$400 billion, involving the supply of 38 billion cubic meters of natural gas to China annually. Similar agreements with Kazakhstan and Mongolia are under negotiation. China invested significantly in physical infrastructure,

pipelines and power grids, such as the completion of the gas pipeline from Turkmenistan in 2009. Power grid connections enable it to export electricity to countries such as Vietnam and Thailand. China has become one of the major drivers of the region's energy integration and interdependence (14).

Other countries in the region are also involved in cross-border initiatives to secure energy, export goods and provide transit facilities; such connectivity involves pipelines, power grid connections, trade routes and infrastructure which go a long way in enhancing trade and bringing about economic progress in the region.

2.7 The politics of pipelines

During the Soviet era, all road and rail arteries as well as oil and gas pipelines from Central Asia were built northward. After the disintegration of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the newly established CAS initiated efforts to unlock the regional transport arteries. The New Great Game has evolved from Russian efforts to retain control over the CAS and their resources flowing through Russian controlled pipelines vis-à-vis US efforts to create alternate routes.

Russia's objective is to push the Americans out of its Central Asian backyard and to increase European dependence on its resources but its recent conflict with Ukraine has compromised these short term objectives. Three Russian pipelines are already supplying energy to Europe, and it has planned two new pipelines, the North Stream and South Stream. USA wants the EU to diversify its energy supplies and the Russia-Ukraine conflict is further compelling the EU to diversify its energy

needs. USA has proposed oil and gas pipelines to bypass Russia, China and Iran. Bill Richardson, the US Secretary of Energy under President Clinton stated “We’re trying to move these newly independent countries (Central Asian States) toward the West. We would like to see them reliant on Western commercial and political interests rather going another way...” (15)

As previously mentioned, the rush to lay alternate pipelines began with the Argentinean oil company Bridas, which proposed a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to Pakistan via Afghanistan (16). Iran constructed a gas pipeline from Turkmenistan in 1997 against US pressure, while in 1999, with US consent, Turkmenistan started work on the Turkmenistan-Turkey gas pipeline to Azerbaijan under the Caspian Sea. The idea of Central Asia as a ‘transportation corridor’ was sponsored by the US and Turkey in 1997 by proposing the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) oil pipeline, which became operational in 2005. The US also wanted to complete the Nabucco gas pipeline in parallel with BTC, to connect the Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum gas pipeline with Ankara (Turkey) and ultimately to Europe (17).

China, the second largest economy and consumer of energy also wants to acquire energy for its rapid economic growth and to expand its political influence. Similarly, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan are trying to build their own connections so that they become the preferred route of choice for pipelines. The ground reality in this complex interplay of political interests, strategies and countermeasures keeps changing. An interesting sideline to this narrative is that it is in a transit country's interest to destabilize (or

encourage destabilization) of countries or regions with competing transit pipelines so as to monopolize supply and thus control transit fees. This was demonstrated by Russia when it bypassed Ukraine by building the Nord Stream (1 and 2) pipelines under the Baltic.

3. Major players and their strategies

3.1 Russia – attempting to regain influence

Russia regards the Central Asian region as part of its historical sphere of influence and enjoys advantages stemming from its geographical location (5). Its overarching goals vis-à-vis the CAS were identified by Bergsager (18) and Malashenko (19) as; a] Safeguarding Russian territory from potential destabilizing factors arising from the region, b] Monopolizing energy production and transit routes from regional producers to international markets, c] Maintaining influence by supporting authoritarian political systems, d] Protecting Russian minorities in the region, e] Limiting the influence of external actors such as the US and China, f] Stopping the spread of Islamic radicalism. To accomplish these goals, Russia employed a multi-pronged approach: creation of cooperative economic mechanisms and institutions alongside political and economic pressure, such as price manipulation in oil and gas deals (20).

Russia’s geographical location coupled with pipeline alignments enabled her to control the routes for export of Kazakh oil and Turkmen gas to global markets. It exploits regional natural resources by purchasing oil and gas at low prices and re-selling them in world markets at high mark-up (21). To maintain its hegemony, Russia maintains bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (10), maintaining a

buffer zone against North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) enlargement (21). However, its hegemony after its recent war with Ukraine is under threat.

Russia created several organizations to encourage cooperation among the post-Soviet states, such as the Eurasian Economic Community (EurAsEC), which promotes a single market between Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Belarus. A Customs Union between Russia, Belarus and Kazakhstan was established in 2010, transformed into the Common Economic Space in 2012 to foster economic integration. In May 2014, the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU) was created, which aims to become a single market for free movement of goods, services, capital and labour by 2025 (22).

3.2 USA – sole superpower

After the disintegration of the USSR and the subsequent emergence of the new Central Asian States, USA became involved in the region in the early 1990s, seeking new sources of non-Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) oil and attempting to reduce Russian and Iranian influence by supporting pipelines bypassing these countries, such as the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline (BTC) and Nabucco pipelines, the Southern Gas Corridor, and the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) project.

In 2011, USA announced the ‘New Silk Road’ initiative, to promote economic and transit cooperation between South and Central Asia and enhance regional stability after the Allied troop drawdown from Afghanistan. This includes several infrastructure projects, such as

a rail line between Afghanistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, a regional electricity network, and the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI) gas pipeline. It hopes that TAPI will stop construction of the rival Iran-Pakistan-India pipeline (IPI) gas pipeline, link Afghanistan to global markets and provide transit revenues for both Afghanistan and Pakistan. However, subsequent to the Taliban taking over Kabul, these objectives have become difficult to attain.

Fearing extremist Islamic groups filling power vacuums arising from civil crises in the region, the US provides support to authoritarian regimes. This raises concerns that it is too focused on security at the expense of human rights. Blank (23) identifies US interests in the region; a] To contain Russian influence and Chinese involvement, b] To break the Russian monopoly over oil and gas transportation routes, providing opportunities to the CAS to access world markets, c] To promote western democracy, eradicate terrorism and Islamic extremism, and d] To create a Greater Central Asia, including Afghanistan.

To achieve these objectives, the US is developing bilateral relations with the regional governments (6), attempting to enhance regional cooperation and integration, promote economic activity and develop alternate oil and gas pipelines. It has focused on three countries, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, all strategically important because they share borders with China. Tajikistan is a gateway to Central Asia from the south, commonly used as a route for drug trafficking, human trafficking, weapons smuggling and communication of extremist ideas. The US has established bases in the region under the pretext of counter-

terrorism, which enable it to exploit regional routes and communication links. To further its energy strategy, the US purchased an oil company Petro Kazakhstan in 2005, established the China International Trust and Corporation in 2006 and signed pipeline agreements with the CAS.

3.2.1 *The New silk road strategy*

To maintain presence in Central Asia after withdrawal of her forces from Afghanistan, the US developed the “New silk road strategy”. It was announced in 2011; it aims to enhance regional cooperation in trade, energy and transportation and promote regional stability (24). The project will enable the CAS to benefit from trade opportunities and attract investment in energy and transportation sectors, encourage development in the region by linking it with global markets, and limit Iran’s influence in the region (24). The selected projects include the TAPI gas pipeline and the Central Asia South Asia (CASA)-1000.

3.3 China – emerging power

China’s demand for energy has grown considerably, becoming a net oil importer in 1993 and a net gas importer in 2006. It became the world's largest energy consumer by 2012, importing 57% of its oil, and increased it to 66% by 2024. China has initiated several strategies to ensure energy security, which include enhancing domestic exploration and production, energy conservation, promotion of renewable energies, and securing international transportation routes. China's oil and LNG imports mostly pass through the Strait of Malacca; with the international waters surrounding it being operationalized by the US Navy's 7th fleet; giving rise to fears that the US could halt shipments in case of a conflict. To

cope with this strategic weakness, China is constructing overland pipelines in Myanmar, Pakistan, and Iran and has intensified its involvement in the Caspian region (25).

It is developing multilateral institutions, such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), through agreements with Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. SCO helped China reduce the influence of its rivals (i.e. USA) in the region and re-define geopolitical alliances in its favour. In 2013, the Silk Road Economic Belt initiative was announced, to connect east, west and south Asia, a plan more comprehensive in scope than Russia's “Eurasian Union” and USA’s “New Silk Road” projects. Fu (26) identified the main Chinese interest in Central Asia as peaceful borders and stability with regional countries, including Russia and CAS, in order to control the Xinjiang situation. It seeks to control Central Asian energy reserves to ensure its future energy demands. Consequently, Chinese National Petroleum Corporation has signed deals with Kazakhstan, and is eyeing other oil projects. It is attempting to secure natural gas reserves by constructing pipelines. The Sino-Turkmen gas pipeline is a major success of Chinese energy policy (26). China is also playing a role in other sectors such as security, trade and economy. It aims for economic integration of the region through different regional organizations, especially the SCO. This will give China an opportunity to secure a strong geopolitical position. China wants multilateral relations with the CAS and partnership in trade, energy and transportation sectors (24).

3.3.1 *One Belt, One Road*

In 2013, Xi Jinping announced The Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB) and the 21st-century Maritime Silk Road (MSR), together known as the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) Initiative. This emanates from China's efforts to play a greater role in global affairs and its need to export surplus production. OBOR aims for connectivity and cooperation among 65 countries. It involves the creation of an economic land belt with countries on the

original Silk Road and a maritime route linking China's ports with the Mediterranean and African coast. Its main goal is to redirect China's domestic over capacity and capital for regional infrastructure development, improving trade and relations with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), CAS and European countries. OBOR will have a great impact on China's internal economy by stimulating the domestic economy through exports (Figure 4).

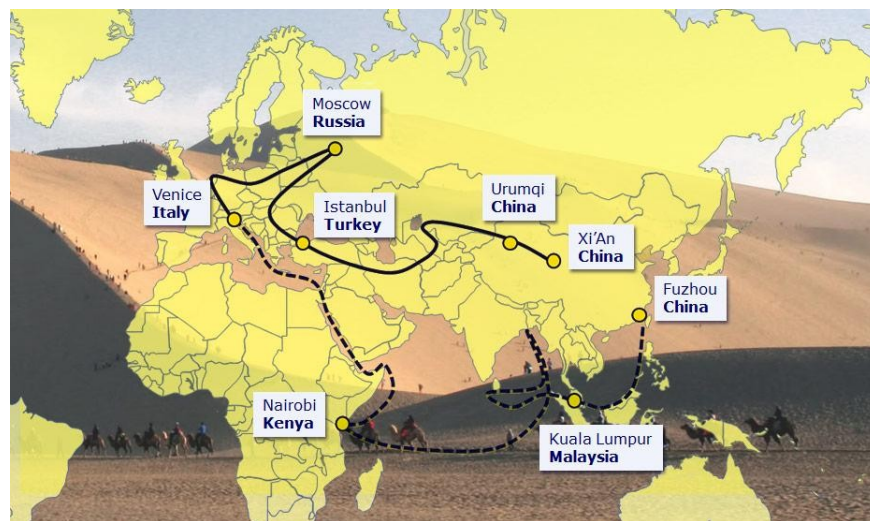


Figure 4. One-Belt-One-Road, <https://www.clsa.com/special/onebeltoneroad/>

Geopolitical reasons behind this plan include the fact that China's major trading partners were excluding it from strategic agreements, such as the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership and the EU-Japan agreement, which would increase its trading costs. In response, China negotiated Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with more than 70 countries, and has already signed FTAs with Singapore, Pakistan, Chile, Peru, Costa Rica, Iceland, Switzerland, Hong Kong and Taiwan.

These Chinese initiatives are viewed as strategic moves to counterbalance the US's 2011 announcements of the 'Pivot to Asia' and the launch of Trans-Pacific Partnership negotiation in the absence of China's membership. To allay worries that China has ulterior motives for its naval expansion and energy security, President Xi Jinping emphasized the famous "Three Nos"; 1] No interference in the internal affairs of other nations, 2] Does not seek to increase the so called "sphere of influence" and 3] Does not strive for hegemony or dominance.

3.4 India – would-be regional power

India's relations with CAS are significantly lesser than those of the other Asian powers, since Pakistan and China control all land access routes. Indian trade with the "Five 'stans" is less than \$1 billion a year, which is 1/50th of their trade with China (27). Resultantly, India seeks an alternative route through Chabahar and a North-South Corridor via Afghanistan eventually connecting to Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. India aims to be more involved in the region, by positioning as an alternative to other Asian neighbors, offering education, telecommunication, medicine and culture, from Buddhism to yoga. It uses fears of resurgent Islamic extremists by highlighting its secular and security credentials (28). It is making large investments in the development of Chabahar port in Iran.

3.5 Iran – isolated

Iran is an important regional player, whose strategy revolves around its cultural, security and economic concerns. According to Smith (13), Iran's prime objective is stability in the region. Fragile regimes and instability in the states are its major concerns, but its isolation at the international level prevents it from taking effective action. Any unilateral action by Iran would be unacceptable by the major powers. Thus, it is dependent on other actors to maintain security and stability of the region.

Iran is pursuing a pipeline strategy to transport Caspian Sea oil to the Iranian ports of Bandar Abbas and Bandar Khomeini for export to world markets. The Success of this strategy depends on gaining influence in Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan and Kazakhstan. The Iran-Turkmenistan gas pipeline enables the export of Turkmen gas through Iran. Iran also

concluded an agreement with Kazakhstan for an oil pipeline to transport 2 billion barrels of oil (3). Iran is focusing on strengthening her relations with individual CAS. In this regard, it enjoys some advantages. Its ethnic ties with Tajikistan are strong, and since Turkmenistan is a Shia state, Iran is using these ties to benefit from Turkmen gas reserves. Iran views Turkmenistan as a gateway to Central Asia and access to other CAS.

Iran's economic role in Central Asia is however, limited because its economy suffered after the 1979 revolution. It is trying to establish an economic bloc including Pakistan, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Afghanistan to promote trade with the CAS (29). Due to its economic conditions and international isolation for long period, it is unable to provide significant aid, but it can establish some infrastructure and joint venture projects. Its recent conflict with Israel and bombing of its nuclear sites by the USA has left Iran highly isolated and resultantly Iran's relationship and interests in the region are likely to be realigned.

3.5.1 *Route through Chabahar port*

India's strategic response to Pak-China cooperation is promotion of the route through Chabahar port, only 70 kilometers west of Gwadar. Unlike the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which runs through high altitudes and areas marred by Baloch insurgency, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) has a direct and relatively stable connectivity to Chabahar port. However, it is at disadvantageous position as compared to Gwadar port which has natural deep sea which attracts big ships. Moreover, shipments of goods to Central Asia through

Chabahar will cost India much more in terms of freight charges as compared to sending the same through Pakistan by land. This high cost of freight will increase the price of Indian items thus rendering them uncompetitive against Chinese products (Figure 5).

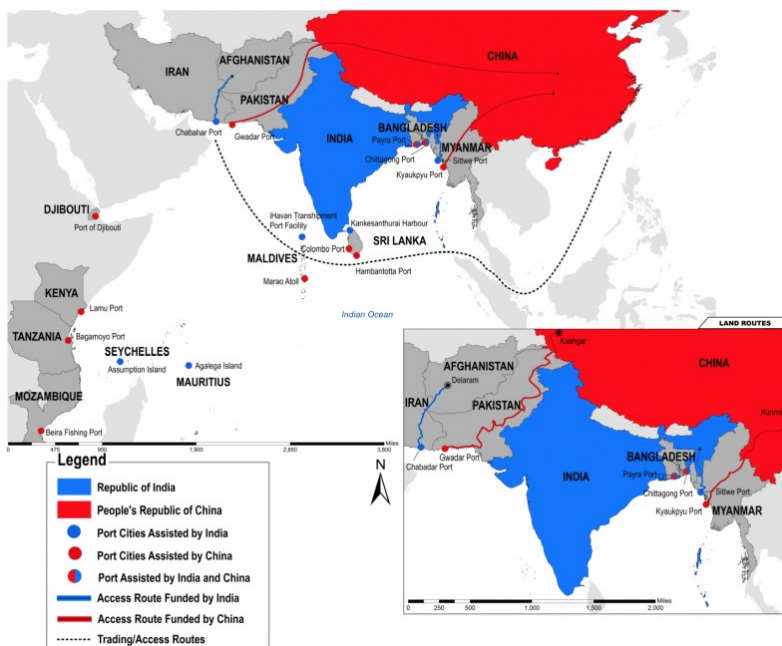


Figure 5. Competition for access and transit pipelines and routes

3.6 Turkey – between Asia and Europe

Turkey is a US ally, trying to enhance its role in the region. Turkey holds a strategically important position, being situated as a bridge between the Middle East, South-Eastern Europe, Caucasus, and the Caspian Sea regions. Turkey's main objective is for it to play a significant role in transporting energy resources of the Caspian region, Middle East and Russia to western markets (30). Its strategy involves the completion of East-West Energy Corridor which aims to transport oil and gas from the Caspian Basin and Central Asian region to western markets bypassing Russian territory. Its role is enhanced by the facts that it is a stable country and a reliable western ally, whose interests do not (completely) clash with those of the Western powers. Its model of

secular Islam - although becoming more conservative and authoritarian under Erdoğan - is more familiar to the peoples of Central Asia and it has strong ethnic ties with the Central Asian states.

For these reasons, the US has leveraged Turkey to acquire influence in Central Asia. In the beginning it focused on education, telecommunication, transportation sectors and cultural linkages. But western support dissipated in the aftermath of Kurdish human rights issues. Unrest in Kurdish areas made the US skittish about the trans-Turkey pipeline routes, which reduced Turkish importance. The Central Asian states also rejected Turkish role as a regional dominator, and as a result Turkey lost her influence in the region (12).

3.7 Central Asian States – resource-rich land-locked nations

Ironically, while the classic Great Game emerged with the rise of the Russian empire, the New Great Game started after the disintegration of the USSR, creating the independent CAS. The region's vast energy and mineral resources and geo-strategic location makes it strategically significant in contemporary world politics. Kazakhstan has enormous oil reservoirs and is the world's largest uranium producer, Turkmenistan has the fourth-largest natural gas reserves, and Uzbekistan is a major producer of cotton and gold. Being land-locked, the CAS depend on neighbours for export of their resources. These features; among others; make them a tempting target for the great powers.

After the Soviet disintegration, the CAS were in a fragile economic condition. Their initial motive was to develop economically, thus reducing dependence on Russia. Therefore, they actively encouraged ties with USA and Europe, aiming to integrate their economies into global markets (31). They responded to initiatives aiming to balance Russian influence, and leverage their natural economic resources. Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan exploited the power rivalry by allowing western oil companies to invest and build pipelines, which reduced dependence on Russia and provided significant economic benefits (26). Rivalry between major powers gives the CAS opportunities to decide their alliances, and extract economic concessions (32). Seeking a greater geopolitical role, they extended cooperation to the powers. Kyrgyzstan provided the Manas Base to United States Air Force (USAF) for transport purposes, and allowed Russia to establish a military base in

Kant. In 2001, Uzbekistan provided Karshi-Khanabad base to the US-coalition forces, but closed it in 2005 after US opposition to an Uzbek forces operation in Andijon. In 2004 it entered into strategic cooperation with Russia for use of military facilities and also created a joint antiterrorism force (33). Tajikistan provided a refueling facility at Dushanbe airport to coalition forces aircraft. It also provided a permanent base to a Russian Motorized Infantry Division in Dushanbe. Turkmenistan provided a refueling facility to coalition forces aircraft. Kazakhstan developed a transit center for coalition forces, extending cooperation to regional and trans-regional actors. To acquire regional influence, it became a member of the SCO, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) and the Central Asian Eurasian Economic Community. It is constructing pipelines with the cooperation of different countries, and attracting investment in its oil fields (34).

The CAS play a central role in pipeline politics. Their initiatives in different pipelines have improved their relations with regional and trans-regional countries, enhancing their geopolitical role, e.g. the TAPI pipeline, the Caspian Coastal pipeline, pipelines to China, BTC and Nabucco.

The CAS opted not to depend on any one power but to develop relations with different players to gain maximum benefits. However, they have to maintain a cautious balance in promoting the role of the major players in controlling regional trade, transportation and energy resources (19).

3.8 Pakistan – unique opportunities

Located between Central, South and West Asia, and having well developed ports at Karachi and Gwadar, Pakistan has a unique geo-strategic location with great potential advantages. It can play a vital role in the connectivity between the CAS, China, Iran and India. It can provide much needed outlets to the land-locked CAS, providing transit routes for their energy resources to India, China and elsewhere. Pakistan itself can benefit from energy imports, while trade in other goods would be mutually beneficial. Its Muslim identity and historical and cultural links with the CAS can supplement efforts made by the business community. On the security front, being itself a victim of terrorism, bilateral relations with CAS can support mutual efforts to curb extremist threats. Thus, Pakistan's economic and security interests are interlinked with the overall regional security environment and economic interdependence.

Seeking greater cooperation in economic and security spheres, Pakistan has signed many bilateral and multilateral agreements. The TAPI gas pipeline and CASA-1000 represent landmark cooperation between the CAS, Afghanistan and Pakistan. These ambitious projects will further develop inter-regional linkages between Central and South Asia.

Pakistan is involved in the New Great Game due to its partnership in three important pipelines/corridors – TAPI and IPI and CPEC (see Table 1 and Figures 6 and 7). Such pipelines are essential for a country faced with a serious energy crises and rapidly depleting indigenous gas reserves. Pepe Escobar states “Pakistan is an energy-poor, desperate customer of the grid. Becoming an energy

transit country is Pakistan's once-in-a-lifetime chance to transition from a near-failed state into an ‘energy corridor’ to Asia and, why not; global markets” (35).

Even Russia, which was initially opposed to these projects, has now expressed support. This change in Russian stance is attributed to its new strategy of developing a geo-political axis across Central and South Asia to the Middle East to counter the US plan for a Greater Middle East or Greater Central Asia. Pakistan can leverage this to its advantage if it plays its cards right and balances its relations with Russia, China and USA.

Pakistan will be the biggest beneficiary of projects such as the TAPI and CASA-1000. There are encouraging indications that peace in Afghanistan has become a reality, due to the exit of US-NATO forces from Afghanistan, cooperation between Afghanistan and Pakistan to fight terrorism, and support of regional countries like China. Pakistan is uniquely placed for reaping significant benefits through enhanced connectivity in the expected scenario.

Pakistan will benefit from the decreased strength of Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Pakistan-based) and supported by the Taliban regime of Kabul after this corridor establishment as well as a decrease in terrorism and separatism in Balochistan and in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan. Also, the increased connectivity is expected to enhance the availability of energy in Pakistan to meet its rising energy demands. Moreover, there will be improvement of balancing of political matrix between the giant rivals of China and USA and scale of trade-off between US-China rivalry may be eased.

Table 1. Pugh Matrix comparing the two pipelines and the Economic Corridor

Desired outcomes	Weightage factor (1-10)	Pipeline (probability of achieving desired outcome, scored from 1-10)		
		IPI (score x weight)	CPEC (score x weight)	TAPI (score x weight)
Increases development of Balochistan	6	6x6=36	6x6=36	1x6=6
Increases trade with China (especially exports)	9	0x9=0	9x9=81	5x9=35
Decrease strength of Tehrik Taliban Pakistan (TTP, Pakistan-based) and supported by Taliban regime of Kabul after this corridor establishment	5	5x5=25	1x5=5	9x5=45
Enhancement of availability of energy in Pakistan to meet its rising energy demands	8	8x8=64	9x8=72	9x8=72
Increase in rail, road and improvement in infrastructure in Pakistan	7	2x7=14	2x7=63	3x7=21
Decrease terrorism incidents in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan	6	5x6=30	1x6=6	4x6=24
Decrease terrorism incidents in Balochistan of Pakistan	6	9x6=54	0x6=0	2x6=12
Improvement of balancing of political matrix between the giant rivals of China and USA	7	1x7=7	0x7=0	7x7=49
USA’s investment in mineral, energy and manufacturing sectors in Pakistan	8	0x8=0	2x8=16	9x8=72
China’s investment in mineral, energy and manufacturing sectors in Pakistan	8	0x8=0	2x8=16	6x8=48
Decrease chances of war with India	8	9x8=72	0x8=0	6x8=48
Addressing water sharing with ‘upstream’ India	9	8x9=72	0x9=0	5x9=45
TOTAL	NA	374	295	477

The “weightage factor” and “Score” in Table 1 are subjective but those subjective assumptions are based on the importance of the desired outcomes which are strategically debated in the public policy realm by high-level government bureaucracy, intelligentsia and public opinion makers.



Figure 6. Proposed pipelines in South Asia (adapted from reference 3)

3.8.1 *Turkmenistan – Afghanistan – Pakistan - India (TAPI) pipeline*

Signed in 2002 with strong US support, TAPI will transport 33 billion cubic meters per year from Turkmenistan's Daulatabad gas field, through the Afghan cities of Herat, Helmand and Kandhar, Pakistan's Quetta and Multan and terminate in the Indian city Fazilka (Figure 6). Although India joined the agreement in 2008, little progress has been made due to regional instability. TAPI will enable Turkmenistan to earn substantial foreign exchange and reduce dependence on Russia; enhance employment in Afghanistan as its largest development project, besides earning transit fees of ~ US \$160 million per year; and fuel the industrial and consumer requirements of Pakistan and India. The decision matrix in Table 1 identifies TAPI as the best choice for Pakistan to leverage the New Great Game.

3.8.2 *Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline*

In 1995, Iran and Pakistan agreed to construct a pipeline linking the vast South Pars gas field to Karachi, also called the "Peace Pipeline". India joined this initiative in 2008 (Figure 6). Through this pipeline, Pakistan would get 60 million cubic meter gas per day and India will get 90 million cubic meters per day. The two pipelines, are considered as rivals. But while IPI has a secure route from Iran to Pakistan and India, TAPI passes through war torn Afghanistan under the Taliban (3). The IPI Pipeline will significantly reduce the chances of war with India due to corridor (IPI) integration. Moreover, the water dispute between both countries may be addressed due to intertwined energy needs. Furthermore, Pakistan's turbulent and terrorism-affected

Balochistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province could see investment in infrastructure, social and industrial development on a possible trajectory toward peace. In addition, the much needed energy demands of the Indo-Pak sub-continent may be met. Table 1 identifies the IPI pipeline as the second best choice for Pakistan to leverage the New Great Game.

3.8.3 *China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)*

In April 2015, Chinese President Xi Jinping and then Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif signed a \$46 billion agreement launching CPEC, the largest Chinese investment in a foreign country. Under CPEC, the Karakoram Highway from Xinjiang to Islamabad will be extended southwards to Gwadar Port (Figure 7). CPEC benefits both countries, acting as a trade bridge between China, CAS, the Middle East and Europe through Pakistan, generating thousands of jobs and billions of dollars in revenue. Xinjiang's proximity to Central Asian borders means that freight could be directly transported from Gwadar to CAS and vice versa. Similarly, Central Asian oil could be transported to Gwadar for export. Presently, China mainly relies on shipping routes through the Strait of Malacca which take ~ 45 days to reach Europe. CPEC can shorten this trip to 10 days, as well as reduce Chinese dependence on the Malacca route; a potential point of blockade by the United States in case of hostility. Power projects make up a large component of CPEC. These may reduce the demand-supply gap in energy-starved Pakistan. Similarly, expansion of Pakistan's road network will significantly improved its infrastructure.



Figure 7. Proposed China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor (CPEC), Figure attributed to the BBC

At the same time, the potential negative impact of CPEC on Pakistan's industrial sector also has to be considered. A flood of cheap goods from China may supercede the already weak local industry. Initially, there was some controversy about the actual route of the Corridor and rumors of change in the route to favour Punjab. Different maps appeared in the media, which caused concern and agitation in the smaller provinces. These concerns of the smaller provinces regarding the CPEC route were settled by the government, clarifying that there would be multiple interconnected trade routes. In actuality, the CPEC has benefitted all the provinces and encouraged the development of smaller towns along the routes. However, there is a possibility of support of non-state actors by India/ USA/ Iran/ Afghanistan or the UAE to destabilize Pakistan in order to persuade China to abandon the CPEC, which must be taken into consideration.

The CPEC will increase trade with China, especially exports. The CPEC will help meet the rising energy demand, followed by the enhancement of availability of energy in Pakistan. Furthermore, increase is expected in rail, road and improvement in infrastructure in Pakistan. Also, investment from USA and China in mineral, energy and manufacturing sectors in Pakistan will be boosted. However, the decision matrix in Table 1, places the CPEC; when compared with the TAPI and IPI; as being the last choice for Pakistan to leverage the New Great Game.

4. Policy options and evaluation

4.1 Policy towards USA and China

Pakistan can either (a) adopt a pro-US / pro-West focus, (b) shift into the Chinese camp, (c) follow a neutral and non-aligned stance, or (d) maintain balanced relations with the two major powers. Each of these options has its own

merits and risks. For example, several bitter experiences have shown that Pakistan cannot rely completely on the US to further its strategic interests. The US has a notorious record of losing interest in Pakistan whenever its objectives are completed, withdrawing support in times of dire need. In place of its “Indo-Pak” / “South Asia” policy, the US has relegated Pakistan to “Af-Pak”, i.e. lumped with Afghanistan, showing the lower priority given to Pakistan after the US forces exit in Afghanistan.

On the other hand, Pakistan cannot fall completely into the Chinese camp. China itself is still a growing power, cautiously enhancing its regional influence. At this stage, it neither wants an open confrontation with the US, nor can fulfill all of Pakistan’s needs in terms of trade and aid. It has grand designs throughout the continent, and is not just focused on Pakistan. Despite the prevailing Pakistani belief in a strong, everlasting friendship, the Chinese realistically view Pakistan only as a potential route to the Arabian Sea, a thorn in the side of India, and a market for Chinese goods. Pakistan also cannot risk antagonizing the US by completely severing ties and shifting to the Chinese camp.

Remaining neutral or non-aligned is not a viable option as Pakistan needs finances and resources for its survival and development. This leaves the last policy of balancing relations between the two major powers, gaining advantages from each.

According to the ‘String of Pearls’ Theory, CPEC is just one of the many mega projects planned by China in Central, South and South East Asia for expanding its political and

economic sphere of influence, to counter US influence in the region. Pakistan can become a transit corridor for China through Gwadar. A pipeline between Gwadar and China’s Xinjiang region can reduce China’s dependence on the Malacca Straits, which is effectively controlled by the US navy. To counter China’s economic and military expansion, the US developed the ‘Pivot to Asia’ strategy, partnering with India, Japan, Indonesia, Singapore, Philippines and Vietnam. The competitive nature of these moves has placed Pakistan in a critical position, where it can potentially balance the super power rivalries and promote regional trade cooperation.

Pakistan must secure its own national interests by maintaining balanced relations with both China and the West. Cautious maneuvering can enable Pakistan to sustain relations with both powers and meet its own needs. Uncalculated moves can make Pakistan a victim of the “new Great game” between big powers.

4.2 Policy towards Afghanistan and Iran

Due to the hostile Indian presence in the East, Pakistan needs to maintain good relations with its Western neighbors. It needs to build relations of trust, based on Muslim brotherhood, culture and trade. After the Taliban recapture of Kabul, Pakistan is now in good shape to reap geographic dividends. While avoiding interference in their internal affairs, Pakistan needs to be vigilant to prevent the soil of these countries being used for terrorist and disruptive elements. Relations with Afghanistan have suffered in the past due to the Durand line dispute and Pakistan’s ‘strategic depth’ policy. The withdrawal of US troops provides Pakistan an opportunity to rebuild its relations and infrastructure, such as

road and rail links for boosting trade with Afghanistan and CAS. The Peshawar-Kabul Motorway is under consideration by the NHA, while the Sherkhan-Ninjayan route has been identified as trade corridor between Tajikistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan under the auspices of the Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC). Work is underway for improvement of the Chaman-Spinboldak-Kandhar rail link and feasibility studies for Peshawar-Jalalabad, Khost-Miran Shah/Bannu rail links are ongoing; as are the Helmand-Bahramcha-Yakmuch-Panjgur-Gwadar and Basima-Chaman-Quetta-Gwadar links for enhancing bilateral trade. Similar efforts are needed to re-build deteriorated relations with Iran and enhance connectivity through roads, rail and pipelines.

4.3 Policy towards the Central Asian States

In the 1990s, Pakistan had high hopes for trade relations with the CAS: It could improve its balance of payments by exploiting the potential of an \$80 billion market, benefit from transit income, and meet all its energy needs. Political and strategic benefits were also envisaged – the CARs could be a source of support against India, creating an Islamic corridor stretching to Turkey. Military partnerships and religious alliances would give Pakistan leverage vis-à-vis India.

However, Pakistan's support for the Taliban government in Afghanistan, aiming for a safe route to CARs, was disagreeable to these secular nations. Matters worsened when jihadist movements penetrated Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, for which the Taliban were accused. The CARs distanced themselves from Pakistan and its Taliban-friendly policy, and even opposed Pakistan's

application for observer status in the SCO in 2001.

Having reviewed its Taliban-friendly policy, Pakistan should try to re-ignite its relations with CARs, as it can gain much by accessing energy resources and providing a transit route. However, these countries may require Pakistan to open its trade routes and grant MFN status to India, which may be detrimental to Pakistan's industrial base.

5. Conclusion

Regionalism and de-globalization are emerging as important trends in the contemporary world. Organized regional cooperation can successfully resolve issues of economic development and regional security, as in Europe and East Asia. Connectivity – by road and rail networks, pipelines and power lines – plays a key role in enhancing regional cooperation.

The vast resources of the Central Asian region are attracting interest from regional and international powers, creating a scramble for influence. Notwithstanding renewable energy, they realize that whosoever wins control over this region is likely to dominate global energy geo-politics in the coming decades. The main rivalry is between Russia, USA and China, but India, Pakistan, Iran and Turkey are also significant players. The CAS have their own interests, while Afghanistan plays the regional role of the perpetual unstable pariah. Each of these countries is formulating strategies to maximize its own benefit, forging alliances, developing connectivity and enhancing trade relations.

The New Great Game has opened up windows of opportunity for Pakistan; it can obtain cheap gas and oil to accelerate its economic development, provide transit services for energy and other goods to earn substantial income, and export to the growing markets of CAS to earn foreign exchange. However, Pakistan needs to be nimble and diligent to leverage the maximum benefit out of this favorable situation, in which altruism and self-interest partially coincide. It must maintain calculated relations with all the players while pursuing its own interests. It cannot afford either to be entrapped in the other players' strategies or to miss the opportunity and allow rivals to gain influence at its expense.

6. Perspective

Establishing and improving political links with neighboring as well as important powers would facilitate future cooperation. As elaborated in detail earlier, Pakistan must cultivate and maintain balanced relations with all of the protagonists.

Building of infrastructure is an important pre-requisite. The need for enhanced connectivity is obviously a must, but the devil is in the details, for example, Pakistan desperately needs energy resources and natural gas has to be imported, whether it is from Turkmenistan, or Iran. With TAPI being delayed by the Afghan situation, IPI seems more feasible. If Pakistan can persuade Iran to lower its gas price and turn IPI into IPC (Iran-Pakistan-China), with China on board, the odds of the pipeline being constructed might increase.

Before all this can take place, Pakistan needs to put its own house in order, by addressing the instability in Balochistan, growing religious

extremism throughout the country, and shambling internal infrastructure. It must fortify its internal solidarity and security, which are vital to obtain benefits from external relations. Activities of religious and political parties should be monitored by the government, and groups with extremist actions must be restricted. Balochistan is highly strategic, as both gas pipe-lines as well as CPEC will pass through it. For this reason, the government needs to get Baloch leaders on board. It must also build necessary physical infrastructure (roads, rail, pipelines, grids), if it wants to become a transit corridor. Pakistan must make sincere efforts for ensuring peace and stability in Afghanistan, it being the shortest route to CARs. Joint economic relations must be encouraged among Pakistan, CARs and Afghanistan. Commonalities of religion and culture should be highlighted and people-to-people contact should be encouraged.

Pakistan should focus on timely implementation of CPEC Phase II. Implementation of CPEC, in any case, should not be hindered either by internal factors like local politics or corruption or inefficiency or by external factors. There is a need for creation of an all powered autonomous authority which can ensure effective and timely implementation of this project so that the significant developmental potential of the project for Pakistan can be realized. It must be understood that if this project must not be envisaged and implemented as only an infrastructural development project. Its impact must be delivered to other sectors of Pakistan's economy such as manufacturing, health, social services, housing and finance. The cooperation between Pakistani and Chinese entities both in the public as well as in the private sector must

be enlarged. Restrictions such as “sovereign guarantees” for debt finance, must be removed at the earliest. Pakistan needs to make all decisions largely based on economic considerations like China has done with its archrival USA. There is therefore a need to downplay the CPEC as a security project.

Pakistan must weigh its moves carefully on the complex, dynamic chessboard of New Great

Game. It must carefully evaluate risks and benefits of its options and develop a strategy which serves its own interests; while being manageably altruistic. With improved conditions in Afghanistan, Pakistan must make strategic moves to regain influence in CAS, fulfill its energy requirements, avail of lucrative transit income and earn foreign exchange through exports.

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