

## **India's Security and Strategic Interests in Central Asia**

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*The article is a humble attempt to explore the various strategic and political challenges that India faces in its Connect Central Asia Policy (CCAP) in the context of the New Great Game which has been developed over time in the Central Asian region. The next big challenge for the (CCAP) in India is to establish and strengthen its energy links with the region to ensure energy security. Once the wealth of the area was established in precious energy resources, the strengthening of strategic links would be of fundamental importance for India and, given that the situation in the region of Afghanistan and Pakistan has continued to be problematic since the 1990s. India's interest in this region is driven by the reduction of radical Islam which has the potential to create political instability in the Central African Republic, which has an indirect effect on Afghanistan and Pakistan, and finally on the Indian province of Jammu and Kashmir.*

**Keywords:***New Great Game, Energy Security, Islamic Extremism, Afghanistan Stability*

The Central Asian region has assumed greater strategic importance for India after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the unexpected creation of five independent states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Historically, Central Asia has been part of India's geostrategic district. Relations between India and Central Asian countries were strengthened during the long period of their association with the former Soviet Union. Indo-Soviet security agreements included Central Asian countries in an integrated framework. With the emergence of Central Asian countries as independent national entities, India began with the aim of establishing new relationships with them. India regards Central Asia as its "extended and strategic neighborhood" and attaches great importance to its geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economics interests. More specifically, Central Asia's position near Afghanistan makes it important not only in the India-Pakistan context, since India also needs access to Central Asian energy resources. India is now examining the region through its Connect Central Asia policy framework, which is based on a proactive political, economic and personal commitment to Central Asian countries, both individually

and collectively. Therefore, politics can be seen as a broad-based approach that includes political, economic and cultural connections between India and the Central Asian Republics. The Central Asian region has assumed greater strategic importance for India after the break-up of the Soviet Union and the unexpected creation of five independent states: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. Historically, Central Asia has been part of India's geostrategic district. Relations between India and Central Asian countries were strengthened during the long period of their association with the former Soviet Union. Indo-Soviet security agreements included Central Asian countries in an integrated framework. With the emergence of Central Asian countries as independent national entities, India began with the aim of establishing new relationships with them. India regards Central Asia as its "extended and strategic neighborhood" and attaches great importance to its geostrategic, geopolitical and geo-economics interests. More specifically, Central Asia's position near Afghanistan makes it important not only in the India-Pakistan context, since India also needs access to Central Asian energy resources. India is now examining the region through its Connect Central Asia policy framework, which is based on a proactive political, economic and personal commitment to Central Asian countries, both individually and collectively. Therefore, politics can be seen as a broad-based approach that includes political, economic and cultural connections between India and the Central Asian Republics.

India's growing commitment to Central Asia aims to promote mutual peace and prosperity. Central Asia can once again be a bridge between East and West if its neighborhood is peaceful and stable and if the only external interference is one of the beneficial economic contributions. That bridge can also contribute to peace, prosperity and energy security worldwide.<sup>1</sup>

Central Asian reality emerged after the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 simultaneously, a new geo-political and geo-economic situation developed. The change has had its influence on India, requiring it to tailor its policies to enable it to serve its following essential interests in the region:

- Leveraging from natural resources of Central Asia, ensuring its access.
- Accelerating trade and investment.
- Striving for peace and stability in the region. India and Central Asia and Afghanistan are victims of terrorism and its elimination lies in their mutual interests.

## **Energy Security**

Ensuring a secure and uninterrupted supply of energy is essential for moving the economic wheels of India. Currently, India gets almost three quarters of its oil consumption from abroad, much of the volatile region of the Middle East. Therefore, energy security has become a central component of Indian national security and foreign policy. With the projection that India will increasingly depend on imported energy, reducing dependence on the Middle East and cultivating alternative energy sources has become a vital concern. Central Asia contains vast hydrocarbon deposits both on land and in the open sea in the Caspian Sea.<sup>2</sup> These house around 4 percent of the world's natural gas reserves and around 3 percent of the oil reserves. Most of these resources are located in Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan, although Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan also have the potential to generate hydroelectric power. In addition, Central Asia has uranium ore reserves plus enrichment potential; therefore the region could be used as a source of uranium for the Indian civilian nuclear program, which in the long run would help diversify its energy base.

The emergence of India as a world power depends on its constant economic growth which requires adequate energy availability. Rahul Roy Chaudhury of the Institute for Strategic Studies in London says: "Energy resources stimulate India's economic growth and its consequent growth as a global power. In the absence of energy security, India will have difficulty overcoming the key challenge of the high rates of economic growth ". The uninterrupted, sufficient, reliable and secure supply of energy at an affordable price is a global necessity and India is no exception. Indian energy demand has grown and will continue to do so to maintain GDP growth targets predicted at the G8 summit in St. Petersburg, it is said that "to achieve sustained growth of 8% until 2031, India, as minimum, it should increase primary energy supply from 3 to 4 times and electricity supply from 5 to 7 times the current consumption. "Local energy production cannot meet growing demand. Various measures have been taken to fatten the basket of energy by adding renewable energy sources, such as wind energy, biodiesel, ethanol, photovoltaic energy and solar thermal energy. Although measures have been taken to reduce consumption levels through the development of energy efficient vehicles, buildings and durable goods, dependence on oil imports is likely to continue, most of which currently comes from the Middle East, a region unstable It is believed to be the case after the 9/11 event. India must diversify the supply of countries in different regions. In this study, the energy

scenario of India is discussed together with that of the Republics of Central Asia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan and various options for ensuring resources and energy supply through routes currently available in order of operation, proposed or conceived, analyzed and also examines the current energy cooperation of India and prospects with the countries of Central Asia.

### Estimates of India's Oil and Natural Gas Demand

	Gas (in mmscmd)	Oil (in mmt)
2006-2007	231	173
2011-2012	313	190
2024-2025	391	364

Source: India Hydrocarbon Vision 2025

mmscmd: million metric standard cubic metres per day, mmt: million metric tonnes

Central Asian republics was to put the economies of their states on the road, which had gone downhill, and preserve their independence. Just before the world economy went into recession, the US Energy Information Administration (EIA) predicted that global energy consumption will increase by 50 percent between 2005 and 2030. It was clear that emerging economies will account for much of this expected growth. Among emerging economies, the greatest demand was expected in Asia, particularly in China and India. Despite the slowdown in 2008, economic projections remain high in the medium and long term. During this period, fossil fuels (oil, natural gas and coal) will continue to supply much of the energy and oil will remain important.

Despite rather low per capita energy consumption, India is the fifth largest consumer of energy in the world and will likely become the third in 2030. The demand for primary commercial energy has grown almost three times at an annual rate of 6% between 1981 and 2001. To keep up with the rest of the Asian dynamic and eradicate poverty, it will be essential that India continues to grow by around 8-10 percent or more over the next 25 years. The energy requirements for sustained

annual growth represent a great challenge. According to the government's integrated energy policy, India must increase its primary energy supply by a factor of three or four, its capacity / electricity supply by a factor of five to six compared to its 2004 levels. 2003- 04 as a basis, the supply of commercial energy in India is expected to grow from 5.2% to 6.1% per year, while the total primary energy supply is expected to grow from 4.3% to 5.1% per year. By 2030, the power generation capacity is expected to increase to nearly 800,000 MW from the current capacity of around 160,000 MW. Likewise, coal needs are expected to expand to over 2 billion tons per year.

The importance of oil for India can be seen in the fact that in 2006 oil accounted for 36 percent of the country's primary energy mix.<sup>9</sup> Since India is relatively low in oil and gas resources, it must depend on Imports for meet your needs. Energy demand with more than 70 percent of the demand for crude oil met by imports, India's oil import bill was close to \$ 90 billion in 2008-09. IEO has shown that even with the baseline projection (5.8 percent annual growth rate), India's energy consumption between 2005 and 2030 will grow at an average annual rate of 3 percent.<sup>4</sup>

### **Security Interests:**

Today, there are growing security concerns in Central and South Asia regarding the emergence of state-sponsored cross-border terrorism, religious extremism, political Islam and ethnic unrest, which radiates from Afghanistan and Pakistan. Terrorism is gaining importance in the range of non-traditional threats in Russia, India, and Central Asian states. It has taken on a new dimension with the formation of transnational ideological, financial and technological networks. These ties have made terrorism a powerful source of destabilization, both regionally and internationally. India faces Pakistan-sponsored cross-border terrorism in J&K, Russia in Chechnya and Central Asia in Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan.<sup>5</sup>

Pakistan's effort to use the pan-Islamist letter to influence Central Asian republics in Indo-Pakistani affairs is also of direct interest to India. These facts were communicated to India by these countries on Indo-Pakistani relations. As for the people of these countries, they are attracted to the Islamic connection with Pakistan. But at the same time, their interaction with India during the 70 years of connection with the Soviet Union has left a positive attitude and feelings of friendship

towards India. There is awareness of the long cultural, linguistic and literary link with India. But if India does not feed this with a receptive action, the Islamic defenders of Pakistan can submerge this underground current of goodwill and friendship. During the good old days of the Taliban regime, Afghanistan had become the epicenter of terrorism with shrines and training facilities provided to people such as Al Qaeda, the Uzbekistan Islamic Movement (IMU) and other radical Islamic groups operating in Central Asia. . With developments in Afghanistan reaching a critical stage, Russia and the Central Asian countries strongly support the entire member because they want India to have a greater presence in the region. Full membership of the SCO will provide India with greater visibility into the affairs of the Central Asian region, which is strategically important for India. In addition, it will help India manage the negative impact of a Talibanized Afghanistan in the post-2014 scenario much more effectively.

For these reasons, India wants to play a more important role in the Central Asian security matrix and prevent real and perceived threats to its national security. Over the past decade, India has sought to improve its security resources in the region, in particular by acquiring a first foreign military post in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is of particular concern to India, as only a narrow 20km stretch of Afghan territory separates it from Kashmir administered by Pakistan. India began renovating Ayni airbase in 2004, reportedly spending \$ 70 million as part of its aid to Tajikistan. Although New Delhi has never publicly announced its intentions, it has been speculated by the media that a team of MiG 29 bombers would have been stationed at the airbase. Some thought that Ayni airbase was emblematic of India's growing strategic aspirations and an attempt to project Indian military power into Central Asia. Not only would it allow India to respond to situations in the region that threatened its security, but it would also increase India's options in the event of high tensions with Pakistan, as it would allow it to attack Pakistan from behind.<sup>6</sup>

Islam and Islamic values in Central Asia are rooted in their local traditions. Before the seventh-century Arab invasions, the Central Asian region was the cradle of many religions: Zoroastrianism, Judaism, Christianity, and Buddhism. The presence of other religions led to the development of several distinctive features that differentiated Islam in Central Asia from the Arab variant. First, he favored the Hanafi Law School, a pragmatic and banal behavioral regulation system. Second, it opposed formalism. Central Asian Islam reacted to the imposition of external

Arab rituals by developing Sufi movements. The development of Sufism led to internal spirituality, mysticism and the worship of saints. The latter added distinctive elements to Central Asian Islam with sanctuaries of local saints generalized in the region, which are not found anywhere in the Muslim world. Therefore, the Central Asian region was the bastion of moderate and traditional Islam, which is highly syncretic and believes in the philosophy of adaptation to contemporary conditions. The roots of radical Islam in Central Asia sprouted long before the collapse of the Soviet Union. Radical Islam in Central Asia, according to Martha Brill Olcott, represents two battles: one between "Islam and the forces seeking to transform the socio-political role of Islam", and the second is the "doctrinal dispute within Islam which has been characteristic in the practice and teaching of faith for over five hundred years."<sup>7</sup>

All other systems of government, democracy or socialism are used by Islamists as fundamentally imperfect because they are created by human beings and therefore are imperfect. Vijay Kapur states: "Belief in a community of Allah on earth continues to influence Muslim fundamentalists who believe that non-believers (or Kafir) have eroded Islamic discipline and attempted to impose a secular policy on an essentially proud and nationalist."<sup>8</sup>

In a few years, that is, in the mid-1980s, Kashmir's Muslim culture and faith in secularism were overcome by fundamentalist ideology. The two movements of Jammāt-e-Islami and Aljihad, the latter an underground organization, influenced by the ideology of the Iranian revolution, emerged as a strong meeting point for the people. Several Islamist militant groups have emerged who have tried to Islamize the socio-political structure in the valley. A campaign has been launched to clear the valley of non-Islamic elements. Extremist organizations like Hizbul-Mujahideen, Jamait-ul-Mujahideen, Harkat-ul-Ansar, Lashkar-e-Toiaba have embarked on a religious crusade against non-Muslim minorities and are proud to kill them. The extremists launched a systematic malicious campaign against the Hindus of Kashmir through sermons in mosques and periodicals in local newspapers, and finally on April 14, 1990 they received an ultimatum to leave the valley in two days or face destruction and death. The entire community of around 3,500,000 was expelled from their homes with 1000 members brutally murdered. The houses belonging to the Pandas of Kashmir, the educational, cultural and religious institutions, their commercial establishments were burned or

destroyed to erase the cultural identity of the non-Muslim minority in Kashmir and create a mono-ethnic Islamic political order.

Another sinister terrorist project was to destroy the composite socio-cultural structure and secular politics in Kashmir. Islamists have tried to put the media under their control, Hizbul-Mujahideen has ordered Jammu national newspapers to stop spreading in the Kashmir valley.<sup>9</sup>

The emergence of extremist groups and activities in the Republics of Central Asia and Afghanistan will have a negative effect on Kashmir. For geographical reasons, India's strategic concerns are related to the regions bordering its northern and northwestern border regions. "For India, the Kashmir problem refers not only to the 54 million Muslims living in the Kashmir valley, but also to the peace and security of the whole country."<sup>10</sup> Pakistan, which has a much closer proximity in terms of geographic location and similarity of ethnic presence with Afghanistan, already sponsors cross-border terrorism in Kashmir.

Stability in Afghanistan With its geostrategic position, Afghanistan has remained at the center of India's regional foreign policy, despite the emergence of numerous events leading to India's diplomatic isolation in Afghanistan, such as the emergence of Afghan mujahideen, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the expulsion of the pro-Indian government Rabbani. In addition, India supported non-Pushtun groups that opposed the Taliban regime and formed the Northern Alliance which controlled areas in northern Afghanistan. India also provided technical assistance, high altitude war equipment, and medical facilities on the border of Tajikistan, establishing a hospital in Farkhor on the border between Afghanistan and Tajikistan and providing medical assistance to the soldiers.<sup>11</sup>

Their fragile political stability and poor military forces are not able to effectively monitor their border with Afghanistan. Against this backdrop, counter-terrorism measures and security and defense cooperation are important areas for India-Central Asian ties. India has provided training programs to different Central Asian states in the aim of strengthening military cooperation. Military training for the armed forces from the Central Asian states is primarily provided through the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program and officers from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan regularly attend courses in Indian National Defense College (NDC), Indian Military Academy (IMA) and National Defense Academy (NDA). Meanwhile, India and



Central Asia security cooperation may increase with India's full membership to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Working as an important regional platform of countering-terrorism and intelligence sharing, SCO may help India play a greater role in Afghanistan.

On the one hand, India has entered into the close military and intelligence relationships with neighbouring states with Afghanistan, especially central Asian states that are concerned or even threatened by Islamic extremist groups. Many extremist groups in Central Asia, such as the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), seek to establish a caliphate by overthrowing governments. The Taliban, Al Qaeda and the "Islamic State" have successfully established their presence in the states of Central Asia and Central Asia. Its fragile political stability and poor military forces cannot effectively control its border with Afghanistan. In this context, counter-terrorism measures and cooperation on security and defence are important areas for the links between India and Central Asia. India has provided training programs to several Central Asian states with the aim of strengthening military cooperation. Military training for the armed forces of the Central Asian states is provided primarily through the Technical and Economic Cooperation Program of India (ITEC) and officials from Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan regularly attend courses at the Defence College National of India (NDC), Military Academy of India. (IMA) and the National Defense Academy (NDA). In the meantime, the security cooperation of India and Central Asia can increase with India's full membership of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). By working as an important regional platform to combat terrorism and the exchange of information, the SCO can help India play a more important role in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

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