

INDIA – TAJIKISTAN RELATIONS: PROSPECTS AND CHALLENGES

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Introduction

India and Tajikistan share a geo-cultural similarity. Both the countries had historical contacts of ancient times. Although both the countries have the physical barrier of high Himalayan and Hindukush mountain ranges, and they are having close socio-economic and cultural relations. The main role played ideological linkage of Zoroastrianism, Buddhism, Islam, and Sufism by the invasion of Aryans, Kushans, Sakas, Turks, Mughals etc, with the high mobility of scholars, spiritualists, statesman, craftsman, artists, literati, and traders. The movement of people, idea, trade, culture influences, the human development given the footprint into the political, economic and social life into the whole region. (Warikoo 2016)

Geographically speaking Tajikistan is smallest in size, of all Central Asian countries. It shares borders with four countries- Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Afghanistan, and China. Therefore strategically, Tajikistan is important for India, because it is very nearer to Pak occupied Kashmir. The mutual similarity is established particularly by the common Indo-Aryan ancestry of the Tajik and Indian languages. The President of Tajikistan Emamoli Rahmon attaches immense importance to the Aryan heritage of the Tajiks being parallel to that of Indians. The works of Indian poet Amir Khusrao, Saadi, Bedil, Ghani Kashmiri, Zebunissa and others have had great influence on the Tajik literature. While the Indo-Aryan group of language belongs to Tajik, and Pamiri language has similarity with Sanskrit. As well as Indian classic Panchtantra became famous as Kalila Dimini in Tajikistan.

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The establishment of Islam in Central Asia and its spread to India in medieval times borrowed new dimension at present times. The entry of Muslim artisans, Syeds, traders, and mercenaries from Central Asia reshaped the geopolitical history of India. With the expansion of Persian (Tajik) language in India, great works in Persian literature by literary giants were produced. (Warikoo 2016)

Tajikistan just after its independence in 1991 by the Soviet Union witnessed instability in the region, and its economy and social condition got adversely affected by the civil war from 1992 to 1997. After the independence of the country most of the radical Islamist groups like Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT), Taliban, Al Qaeda, Jamaat-i-Islami, Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan played an active role in the revival of Islam in the Central Asian region. Therefore after independence, the whole Central Asian countries witnessed Islamic radicalisation.

Both the countries India-Tajikistan have healthy diplomatic relations. The President of Tajikistan Mr Emomali Rahmon and Indian Prime Minister Shri Narendra Modi in 2015 has expressed their close cooperation in the area of defence and security. As well as reviewed the cooperation and further expanded the existing cooperation.

The two countries successfully conclude the Foreign Office Consultations on 17th November 2016. The meeting of the Joint Working Group (JWG) in Defence Cooperation on 2nd November 2016 agreed that this type of consultations next to with Joint Commission of Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, Joint Working Group on Counter-terrorism and regular consultations between National Security Council have to carry on for joint assistance. Both the countries admit that terrorism and extremism immensely affected peace, stability, and progress for all countries. The two leaders decided that terrorism in all its forms must be ruined without any distinction between good and bad terrorists and called for an end to support, hold and condition of protected havens to terrorists. Both leaders reaffirmed their resolution to make stronger bilateral counter- terrorism cooperation, enlarge security and defence ties and work for the untimely adoption of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism by the United Nation General Assembly. For both the countries, it is an immense

responsibility to stabilize President Rahmon always given support to India's candidature for permanent membership of an expanded United Nation Security Council. He also supported India's full membership of Shanghai Cooperation Organization (MEA 2016).

India as a full member of Shanghai Co-operation Organisation framework serves an constructive tendency into the Central Asian region. The two countries has scope in political, economic, trade cooperation. And the development of inter-parliamentary relations. Tajikistan is ready to attract Indian investment for implementation of projects in infrastructure, trade, service, production, energy, particularly of renewable energy, and establishing joint production ventures in different areas. Both the countries for the connectivity in a shorter term can increase the number of direct flights between Dushanbe and Delhi. Tajikistan's potential in tourism, widening cooperation and experience sharing in the area of medicine was considered an important beneficiary for the peoples. For the two countries strengthening of cooperation in establishing joint diagnostic and medical care centers, humanitarian, cultural and education will be the beneficial area. (Tajik Embassy report 2018)

Cultural Relations

India's soft power reach is visible in Tajikistan. And the positive perceptions of India can further be conditional by the 600 plus Indian films that are dubbed to the Tajik language every year. These translations were possible because in Tajikistan many universities have strong Hindi and Urdu departments. It is indicating the existence of a deeper scholarly interest in India and the demand for Indian languages as well.

In addition, both states share a rich familiar past. In March 1947, the famous Tajik poet Mirzo Tursunzade in his visit to India wrote several poems on the time of Independence in India. These poems generated extensive interest among the people of Tajikistan. Consequently, the works of Indian writers such as Rabindranath Tagore, Prem Chand, and others were translated into Tajik. There are also facts of the regular history in India, for example, the famous 17th- century Tajik poet Abdul Qadir Bedil in central Delhi. And the Bollywood DVD's are readily available in several markets around the city. To further, the interest in Indian culture and history among the Tajik people, the Indian Embassy in Dushanbe frequently organizes celebrations of the festivals

of Holi, Diwali and the birthday of Mahatma Gandhi. In the existing bilateral relationship, these efforts are likely to support the goodwill and could give confidence added people to people contact - with welcome implications for trade, investments and for India's hard work to build deeper development partnerships in the broader Central Asian region. (Mullen and Prasad 2014)

Bilateral relations

The two countries India- Tajikistan had established diplomatic relation on 24 August 1992, after one year of Independence of Tajikistan. India has opened its diplomatic mission in Dushanbe and Tajikistan opened its embassy in New Delhi in June 2003.

The Tajikistan President visited India six times; three visits were official in 1993, 1995, 2001 and three State Visits 2006, 2012, 2016. From the Indian side in 2003 Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee paid an official visit to Tajikistan. In 2013 Vice-President of India Muhammad Hamid Ansari was visited, during this time Indian government has announced to give one supercomputer to Tajik Technical University.

The last high dignitary visit was State visit of Prime Minister Modi to Dushanbe on July 13-14, 2015. The ministers of Foreign Affairs mutual visits by the Minister of External Affairs of India SM Krishna to Tajikistan took place in July 2012, whereas Tajik Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. S. Aslov paid the first official visit to India in May 2015. The last visit by Indian External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj to Dushanbe took place on September 2014 for the participation of Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

Minister of Defence of Tajikistan Colonel-General Sherali Mirzo visited India officially on 6-9 February 2018. India and Tajikistan have a joint intergovernmental Commission on Cooperation in Several fields led by the Ministry of economy and trade. This commission reviews the economy, industry, trade, science, culture etc. the 9th session of joint Commission was held in New Delhi on 16 June 2017.

There is in addition, a political consultations mechanism among the foreign offices of two countries. These consultations are conducted annually. In 2016, the last meeting took place in

Dushanbe, Indian delegation was headed by Secretary West Sujatha Metha. Two sides considered an extensive range of issues, including State Visit of the President of Tajikistan to India in December 2016. This visit has addressed the area of political, military, regional security, economy, energy, culture and science, consular matters as well as partnership in international arenas. For counter-terrorism affairs, the two countries have a joint working group. It is a platform to share an opinion on current counter-terrorism affairs. India and Tajikistan had its ties to fight against terrorism in the late 1990's. The ties have grown stronger since 2002, especially in the aspect of counter-terrorism and defence co-operation. (Tajik embassy 2017)

Economic Relations

The route for transportation of goods from India is by sea to Bandar Abbas and from there via Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan by land. This route is very time consuming and the costs are very high. Apart from this, there are difficulties at border crossings. India mainly exports pharmaceuticals, meat and meat made products, apparel and clothing accessories and iron and steel. From Tajikistan, India is importing different types of Ores, slag, ash, aluminum, organic chemicals, herbal oils, cotton, and dried fruits. The bilateral export import data mentioned for five years from 2008 to 2017. As per the export data below, we can see the highest import in the year 2014 to 2015 and the lowest from 2008 to 2009 due to the Tajikistan natural disaster. (Ministry of External Affairs 2017)

Export Data from India to Tajikistan:-

| Export Year | 2008-2009 | 2010-2011 | 2012-2013 | 2014-2015 | 2016-2017 |
|--------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Total | 84,075,505.87 | 113,696,426.38 | 163,431,828.96 | 189,634,841.76 | 184,943,355.34 |

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry India

URL: <http://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/ecntcom.asp>

Import Data from Tajikistan to India:-

| Import Year | 2008-2009 | 2010-2011 | 2012-2013 | 2014-2015 | 2016-2017 |
|--------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Total | 137,443,555.45 | 168,346,695.57 | 266,916,195.69 | 273,708,657.84 | 257,766,559.22 |

Source: Ministry of Commerce and Industry India

URL: <http://commerce-app.gov.in/eidb/Icntcom.asp>

As per the import table, we can clearly see the highest import data from 2014 to 2015. India delivered foremost food assistance in 2011 to 2012. To defeat a crisis caused by an exceptionally harsh winter in January-February 2008, therefore India gave a grant of US \$ 2 million. In June 2009, the US \$ 200,000 cash support was given by India to conquer damage caused by floods in April-May 2009. After flash floods in Kulyab province in May 2010, India provided the US \$ 200,000 humanitarian cash support. India always provided humanitarian assistance during the natural disaster. Recently, in 2017 also India provided USD 100,000 to Tajikistan as humanitarian help for natural disasters. (Ministry of External Affairs 2017) In 2016, India and Tajikistan signed a memorandum of understanding in the area of avoidance of double taxation and prevention of fiscal evasion with respect to taxes on income. (MEA 2016)

Strategic Relations

For India, Tajikistan's importance lies in its geo-strategic location. As it is mentioned above, it shares borders with China, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Its proximity located into Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). India's regional calculus, Tajikistan takes an important place, especially in the perspective of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The penetration of extremist forces into Tajikistan can have serious security concern for India because of its closeness to POK and its impact on Kashmir.

Tajikistan is rich in hydroelectric power. It has the largest natural water resources in the region. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan have 90 percent of water resources of Central Asia. And Tajikistan has 65 percent of the glaciers into the region. In the Commonwealth of Independent States, in the area of hydroelectricity, Tajikistan is the second largest producer after Russia. According to the official report Tajikistan's National Strategy for Energy Sector Development 2006-2015, the country is going to reach a production of 35 billion KWh in 2015. Tajikistan also has deposits of more than 40 semi-precious stones, silver, and gold. Tajikistan has large reserves of mercury, lead, brown coal, zinc, antimony, tungsten, and uranium deposits. These all resources make Tajikistan an important country into the Central Asian region that offers numerous opportunities for India.

India and Tajikistan shares close security and defense relations. India has upgraded the Ayni airport in Dushanbe, and it is totally operational now. In the defense sector, India is giving training to Tajik forces, numbers of Tajik military cadets and young officers undergoing training at many defense institutes in India. This military training is free of charge for the Tajik military personnel. (Roy 2012)

Security Issues

Geographically, Tajikistan surrounded with Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Uzbekistan. These countries were witnessing the activities of Islamist radical groups in the name of *Jihad* formation of Islamic State, agenda of Islamic *Caliphate*, Islamic law, revivalist movements etc to destabilize the situation in the Central Asian region. Afghanistan being a neighboring country has played a crucial role, the Taliban group had supported fully the inside militant group of Tajikistan. And Tajik –Afghan border were indulged into drug trafficking and attempted to attack the Tajik government by the militants. The Central Asian militants fought alongside the Taliban.

Basically, the radical groups indulged into the Islamic radicalization were Hizb-ut-Tahrir, Al Qaeda, Jamaat-i-Islami, Taliban, and recently ISIS. As after the disintegration of Soviet Union, Hizb ut Tahrir (HT) became active in the late 1990's in Tajikistan. This organization has been getting funds from the mahalla, mosques, and followers. Due to Tajikistan sharing its border with Uzbekistan and Ferghana Valley being the hub of radical groups, Islamic radicalism has been influencing the people of Tajikistan. HT has also grown because of the dissatisfaction of Tajik people with the Islamic Renaissance Party. (ICG 2001) Tajikistan government responded towards the activities of HT by declaring the group illegal in 1999.

Al Qaeda had spread from Afghanistan to Pakistan and Central Asian region. Tajik troops had battled with this terrorist group in the remote areas. Abdullo Rakhimov is one of the followers of bin Laden, as he was trained in the camp of Rasht valley, which is 30 miles north in Tajikistan along its border with Afghanistan (Swami 2010). The Tajik militants had joined hands with Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Al Qaeda against the Tajik government. As we know Al Qaeda was well connected with IMU and Taliban, therefore it was operating actively in

this region. (Roggio 2009) Apart from this, the present leader Al Zawahiri claimed the Al Qaeda's presence in the Indian Subcontinent. He clearly said it is good news for Bangladesh, Myanmar and Indian states of Gujarat, Assam, Jammu and Kashmir. Although Al Qaeda has no presence in India, they are trying to reach out towards Muslim youths of Kashmir and Gujarat. Indian security sources gave the information about Uttar Pradesh and Bihar is also coming under the alert. In India, Islamic militants are well connected to Kashmir separatists and from Pakistan linked Al- Qaeda groups (BBC news 2014).

Jamaat-i-Islami is an oldest and most significant Islamic revivalist movement of Pakistan. Its ideology and activities amount to an Islamic revolution. It calls for an Islamic revolution to create an Islamic state. (Nasr 1995) Jamaat-i- Islami was formed in 1941 by its founder Maulana Sayyid Abu ala Mawdudi who was the chief ideologue of this party till 1972. After its formation, this party worked as a revivalist party. It seeks to establish a state based on the principles of Islamic law. After the partition of the Indian subcontinent in 1947, Maududi along with his other Jamaat leaders and members moved to Pakistan, though some other Jamaat-i-Islami members remained in India, Kashmir, and Bangladesh (Nasr 1995). Most importantly, Tajikistan's Islamic Movement Nihzat-i Islami got influenced with the Jamaat and its ideology. In the 1980's during the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, Zia-ul-Haq with the US and Saudi Arabia support created militant Afghan Mujahideen to oust the Soviet forces and also across in Tajikistan. Pakistan's Jamaat-i-Islami party used this opportunity to spread the Islamic revolution in Afghanistan and Central Asia. (Synnott 2009).

Post 9/11 the US-led 'war on terror' in Afghanistan defeated the Taliban. However, even after their defeat, the Taliban continue to be actively posing a challenge to the reconstruction process in Afghanistan. According to Ashley Tellis, "since the successful presidential election in October 2004, the Taliban insurgency has metastasized in scale, intensity and fury". The Taliban tactics remain limited to "hit and run attacks". Yet their influence is increasingly being felt in areas from where it was previously absent. A new phenomenon is the emergence and rise of Taliban movement within Pakistan itself. The Taliban is even targeting Pakistani forces themselves, historically their main source of support. The two phenomena are linked and share some characteristics both follow the different logic in each of the two countries. In the case of India, it

has faced the Kandahar hijacking and hostility in 1996 to 2001. Taliban has an active involvement with the international jihadist groups. As well as, the Taliban has a strong connection with Pakistan, although for Pakistan Taliban became an evil. For India and Tajikistan it is very important to stabilize Afghanistan. (Sareen 2012).

Pakistani Taliban was also known as Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP) is a major threat to India and it is very active in Tajikistan as well. TTP has started a jihad in Kashmir and attacked Indian security forces. They are running jihadi operations with the Kashmiri Mujahideen. The chief of TTP Maulana Fazlullah clearly said to join hands against the Indian army into Kashmir. Both TTP and Al Qaeda have the main aim in India to plan jihad in Kashmir. It has given full support by Pakistan. As a result, for Pakistan based Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish- e- Mohammad and Hizbul Mujahedin have found to penetrate the Line Of Control to participate in Kashmir militancy.

Tajik people were affected due to the pathetic socio-economic situation and the misinterpretation of Islam by the radical sources. Now ISIS is also recruiting people from the Central Asian region. The Tajik government has reported that 190 Tajiks are fighting in the Syrian conflict for ISIS, which is the cause of serious concern. And on the Indian side, Taliban, Al- Qaeda all are active to the Pak occupied Kashmir with the name of Jihad. They are brainwashing the Kashmiri people. Pakistan is supporting most of the terrorist groups to disturb the Indian side. For curtailing terrorism both of the nation Tajikistan and India are effectively making their policy. India, always in every international platform raising the question to curtail the biggest challenge terrorism.

As The President of Tajikistan visited India in 2012, and the joint statement of Tajikistan and India, both the countries address terrorism as the biggest challenge for the security and peace of the nation. They gave importance to the need to work jointly towards eliminating the problem of terrorism including the exchange of information, data, financing of terrorism and related matters. They strengthened the need for dialogue between security agencies. Both the countries further gave impetus to the need for adoption of "Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism" by the UN General Assembly in the future. In this regard, they agreed to maintain

consultations between the Ministries of Foreign Affairs and to synchronize their efforts within the framework of the Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism.

Both the countries discussed the Afghanistan situation and the challenges facing by the region. They addressed the problem of terrorism and drug trafficking. They confirmed the validity of the importance of sustained peace and stability in the country, mainly, in the context of the proposed withdrawal of the International Security Assistance Force in 2014 from Afghanistan. Both the countries accentuate their support to the Government of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan in establishing an independent, peaceful, democratic and successful Afghanistan. (MEA 2012)

The President of Tajikistan Emmomali Rehmon visited on 2016 in India and signed the Memorandum of Understanding between Financial Intelligence Unit of India and the Financial Monitoring Department under the National bank of Tajikistan relating to cooperation in the exchange of financial intelligence connected to money laundering, interrelated crimes, and financing of terrorism. (MEA 2016)

Connect Central Asia Policy

India's Connect Central Asia Policy, first introduced by Minister of State for External Affairs E. Ahmed in Kyrgyzstan with the track 2 initiative organized on 12 to 13 June 2012. The main aims were fast-track India's relations with the whole region. The policy consists setting up of universities, information and technology centers, hospitals, an e- network in telemedicine, joint economic ventures, improving air connectivity to boost trade and tourism, strategic partnership in defense and security affairs, joint scientific research (Das 2012).

The agreement of Turkmenistan –Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline has the importance for India's future energy plans. It will connect India with Central Asia and we can easily build up our strong economic relation. Indian companies can show its capability towards the construction sector and build world-class structures at reasonable rates. For the land connectivity, the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) is required, which had given importance too. The Indian banks will be set up if it will get a positive environment (Ahamed 2012).

This policy had given the opportunity to set up a military hospital and also planned to operate up to 14 flights to Dushanbe. And another area of interest of this policy is India's engagement to Central Asia towards the economic sector. (Kothari 2014)

External Affairs Minister SM Krishna visited Tajikistan on July 2012. His visit to Dushanbe is the first by an Indian External Affairs Minister (EAM). He discussed with his counterpart Hamrokhom Zarifi about bilateral cooperation on several issues including energy, counter-terrorism, and communication intended at further establishing bilateral ties. They had discussed the situation in Afghanistan and regional developments. During this visit, S M Krishna also addressed a conference of the Indian Heads of Missions (HOM) to 11 countries in the region. (Kothari 2014)

Conclusion

As India –Tajikistan shares close relations with each other historically. And the geostrategic location of Tajikistan can give India a chance to engage with some other central Asian countries and Afghanistan. Both the countries share healthy cultural relations. Therefore India's soft power is very much visible. When it comes to bilateral ties between the two countries, it has witnessed many official high level visits of the leaders. As well as, shares an active diplomatic relations. The Economic relation between India and Tajikistan is mainly exports pharmaceuticals, apparel, clothing, meal, accessories etc. but the main hurdle for the healthy economic relation is connectivity with the Central Asian region (CAR). As CAR is landlocked so for connectivity we have to look into Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan. Therefore the project of International North South Corridor, Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline should speed up by the policy makers. For increasing up the trade temporary solution is to start more number of air cargos.

As Tajikistan, is strategically an important country because it shares borders with China, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan and Kyrgyzstan. Its proximity located into Pakistan occupied Kashmir (POK). It is very rich in hydroelectric power and has vast natural resources. Both the countries share defence and security relations as a result India has upgraded the Ayni airport in Tajikistan. When it comes to security issue, both the countries are the victim of Terrorism, drug trafficking, money laundering and all. And for India, it is an important task to focus on the security aspect of

Tajikistan because of the proximity of the country in Pak Occupied Kashmir. Both the countries leader is willing to stabilize Afghanistan due to the security reason. So the time has come to focus actively into the Connect Central Asia policy for the proactive relation with Tajikistan and with the Central Asian region.

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