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Choi Han-Woo**

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Korea University of International Studies
17, Imjeong-ro, Yongsan-gu, Seoul 140-897, Korea
Fax: +82-2-707-3116 Email: kuis@kuis.ac.kr
Homepage: <http://www.kuis.ac.kr>

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Association of Central Asian Studies

India and Central Asia Contours of Emerging Relations

Tabasum Firdous, Firdous Ahmad Dar

University of Kashmir, India.

Abstract: Political and security compulsions as well as energy, trade, transit and commercial gains mainly determine India's policy towards Central Asia. Access to Central Asia's energy resources is one of the main objectives of India's policy towards the region. India is a big country in South Asian region well poised to emerge as an economic power. Naturally she would also like to make some impact on the new strategy in South Asian as well as Central Asian region. India, traditionally known to the Central Asians as Hind (Hindustan), has had loose as well as strong links with Central Asians. She evinces interest in economic cooperation with Central Asia, especially in organizations that have the ability to contribute to her energy requirements. India has gained maneuverability in war against terror, a phenomenon that intermittently raises its head in some vulnerable parts of Central Asia. Indian foreign policy has made steady success in stabilizing relations with the neighbouring countries like Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Turkey and the strategic Central Asian neighbourhood. War in Afghanistan has enhanced India's profile as a supporting country contributing to Afghanistan's development and peacetime plans. In the changed regional strategic scenario India is finding it important to put her relations with Central Asian States on a different keel. This means total deviation from

her recognized policy of benign negligence. Indian policy planners attach importance to Central Asia in the India's regional strategic landscape, In nutshell, Central Asia has grown in importance for the world and India cannot remain unconcerned about it. Her successful experiment with democratic and pluralistic dispensation as political ideology, and her deep inroads into scientific and technological fields in contemporary times make her a model developing Asian state from which her neighbours can draw inspiration.

Keywords: Political, Trade, Transit, Commercial, Terrorism, Central Asia, Afghanistan, Global

1. Introduction

Foreign policy and diplomacy are the wheels with which the process of international politics operates. All states have to adopt some kind of foreign policy and also diplomacy to execute that policy. It is the adjustment of the actions of state in favor of one's own state which George Modelski (1992) calls "the purpose of foreign policy," "It means the system of activities evolved by the communities for changing the behavior of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment."¹ Scholars hold that even a decision to have no relation with a state is also a foreign policy.²

The implosion of the Soviet Union in 1991, and the emergence of was a major event of contemporary world history. The geographic

¹ George Modelski, (1992). *A Theory of Foreign Policy*, London p. 3.

² Feliks Gross, (1954) *.Foreign policy Analysis*, New York, , pp. 47-48.

space of the former Soviet Union with its enormous natural resources, diverse religions and ethno-lingual national groupings, continue to attract world attention for building geo-strategic relations, investments and building of politico-military alliances. The geo-strategic significance of Central Asia today has been determined by two main factors. First, Central Asia has become important because of the discovery of hydrocarbon reserves and second, it has become a major transportation hub for gas and oil pipelines and multi-modal communication corridors connecting China, Russia, and Europe, the Caucasus region, the Trans-Caspian region and the Indian Ocean. Afghanistan has achieved significant importance as it not only serves as a strategic bridge between Central Asian countries (Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan) and South Asia but also maintains geopolitical importance for vital regions like India, Pakistan, Iran and Middle East.³ Central Asian countries are open to major powers that resorted to policies to exploit or use the potential resources of Central Asia for their long term benefits. The new world order and war on terrorism after 9/11 played through the cards of new great game have put every developed and emerging state on the toes. India though started very lately has reframed its policy towards the region.

Countries like Turkey, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Afghanistan and Pakistan are also making efforts to create a position of influence in this region. Japan and South Korea are establishing economic ties with these

³ The Central Asian region with its rich oil resources of energy, enormous mineral resources and a large consumer market is of Geo- strategic importance for Indian huge energy hungry market. Peace and stability in Central Asian states and Afghanistan to be most important and crucial factor for India's security. India's concern over the influence of Pakistan in Central Asia will be countered by increasing our connection with Afghanistan besides CARs.

Republics. These powers are in a mute scuffle to shadow their interests in Central Asian Republics. The U.S. and European nations sought to absorb the Central Asian states into their orbit of influence through economic engagement and security cooperation (via NATO's Partnership for Peace Program). China, too, embarked on a similar path to enhance its strategic presence in the Central Asian states, after having first solved boundary issues with Russia and its Central Asian neighbors.

Nevertheless, in the late post-Cold War era, Central Asia became a focal point of interests among three major power players of contemporary international politics –two contiguous countries i.e. Russia and China, and third outside power – the USA.⁴ The Russia and Central Asian countries are poised to become major suppliers of energy resources to China's rapidly growing economy.

Central Asia got renewed significance after 9/11, when the region found itself amidst the US 'War on Terror', and became frontline region in the war. It is on account of the policy adopted in this 'War' that USA has sought direct intervention in the region.⁵ USA is presently

⁴ Scholars of immense reputation on Central Asia (Ahmad Rashid, Sir Hartford Mackinder: Heart land Theory) held that the said region would be bowl of struggle and strife among some of the leading powers like Russia, China, USA. Geo-strategist and former United States National Security Adviser, Zbigniew Brzezinski, analyzed Central Asia in his 1997 book, *The Grand Chessboard*, terming the post-Soviet region the 'Black Hole' and post-Soviet Central Asia (the Caucasus, former SSRs, and Afghanistan) in particular the 'Eurasian Balkans'. He was of the view that what happens to the distribution of power on the Eurasian continent will be of decisive importance to America's global primacy and to America's historical legacy;

⁵ After the collapse the of Soviet Union, the second most significant strategic event to occur in the Central Asian arena, and at the global level as well, was the American response to the 11 September 2001 terrorist attacks, which took the form of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF). The war against terrorism, launched in October, 2001, brought the U.S. and NATO next door to Central Asia. Central Asian countries such as Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan readily granted the use of bases to OEF forces. Other

occupying a better position as their technology and capital are big frustrating excuses that motivates developing China to go along with other alternatives. China has preferred not to come to front but to develop a broad array of secure relationships with countries that could provide it with valuable trade, technology, investment, and international political support and thereby reduce its vulnerability to American power. China's strategic relationship with Russia is a component of this policy.

India's arrival on the Central Asian Chess board was late, for India as an emerging regional power in South Asia is naturally interested in any change occurring within or close to the region, which may have strong implications for her security. India began to associate herself with the Central Asian Republics and recognized its strategic importance for healthy and propitious existence of India. Central Asia attained importance for India and they stressed Central Asian geographical, historical, Cultural, milieu responsible for auspicious prospect. India asserted that encouraging relation with Central Asian would facilitate them to tackle firmly fundamentalism, extremism or terrorism. The importance of Central Asia judged by India can be understood by the intensity of the statement made by Prime Minister Man Mohan Singh in 2006, which follows as:-

“When we look at our extended neighborhood we cannot but be struck by the fact that India is the only open pluralistic democratic society and rapidly modernizing market economy between the Mediterranean and

countries provided over-flight and miscellaneous support. This U.S. response was largely welcomed by big powers like Russia, China, the Central Asian states and India.

the Pacific. This places a special responsibility upon us not only in the defense of our values but also in the search for a peaceful periphery. We have traditionally conceived our security in extending circles of engagement. Today, whether it is West Asia, the Gulf, Central Asia or the Indian Ocean region, there is increasing demand for our political, economic and defense engagement.”

India attained some say by putting their shoulders parallel to international bodies that prefer secularism, democracy, and improving the lot of the common people. India also reinforced their stand in Central Asia by a similarity of views in the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and in many other areas of security. Also, with the intense power play taking place between Russia, China, the U.S. and the Western countries in the strategic arena of Central Asia, India's emphasis on soft power strikes a positive chord among these nations. The growth of the Indian economy creates an ever-growing demand for energy and natural resources to fuel and maintain the momentum of our growth. The discovery of large reserves of hydrocarbons and other resources needed for sustaining economic growth makes the Central Asian region immensely attractive for forging a mutually beneficial cooperative relationship.

2. India's Expectations, Challenges and Responses in Central Asia:

India takes no time to benefit from the relation that spreads on the carpet between India and Central Asian countries. New Delhi is seeking access to Kazakh oil and gas and participation in mega projects like the Iran-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline and another linking Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India (TAPI). Indian oil companies are active in Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan involved in the development of Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Iran-Pakistan pipeline project (TAPI), and the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline. Two important landmarks signified India's change in approach towards the region- the first was in Nov. 2003, when Indian Prime Minister visited Tajikistan and initiated the move to renovate and upgrade the Ayni air base. The second was in August 2005, when Indian state owned company ONGC combined with Mittal industrial group to form OMEL and made a serious effort to acquire energy asset in Kazakhstan. As the Beijing times put it "After the successful diplomacy in southeast Asia, India is now planning to play its historical role in Central Asia after a long gap."⁶

The country now seeks to strengthen its diplomatic and economic ties with the newly independent states of Central Asia. India's approach of minimal involvement in Central Asia had already begun to change as the geo- politics of the region developed to New Delhi's advantage. India has to undertake attitudinal change towards Central Asia. Just, as it has focused attention on ASEAN countries as an integral part of the neighborhood.⁷ Geopolitics of oil pipelines in Central Asia

⁶ Why India attaches importance to Central Asia, "Beijing Times"(2003). Nov. 15

⁷ J.N. Dixit, "*Emerging international security: Indian perceptions with a focus on south Asia and Central Asian predicament*," K. Santhanam and R. Dwivedi(2004) (eds.), *India and Central Asia*, New Delhi, Anamaya publishers,.

has received much press. Silk Road, stabilization of Afghanistan through reconstruction programmes made one feel the importance of resource economy in the country's foreign policy. Afghanistan because of its geo-strategic location, neighboring Iran, Pakistan, and the Central Asian states has remained the focus of Indian regional policy. The US campaign against terrorism under the banner of "Operation Enduring Freedom" provided a good opportunity for Indian policy makers to its foreign policy goals in the region. The construction of a strategic road from Delaram in the Herat province to Zaranj town on the Afghanistan-Iran border will give India an advantage over Pakistan in Central Asian Region. The road will give access to sea-ports to Afghanistan and facilitate trade between India and Persian Gulf countries.

In Central Asia, ONGC Videsh, the international arm of ONGC, has been actively pursuing foreign energy sources for energy supply contracts and the exploration and drilling rights. ONGC has made significant inroads into Iran, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan and most recently in Tajikistan. It has formally bid on Tengiz and kashaugan oil fields and the kurmangazy and Darkhan exploration blocks in Kazakhstan. From the commercial standpoint, India's interests determine that it gain access to the region's rich natural resources, such as oil and gas, uranium, rare earths and minerals, copper, gold, diamonds etc. and to acquire, if possible, some specialized defense technologies and defense production facilities.

India realizes that a pipeline from Central Asia to its shores would make immense commercial sense, and would fit in with its policy of diversifying its energy supply sources from the Persian Gulf region. Experts point out that in the 21st century, Central Asia will become an

important region. India as an extended neighbor of CARs has major geo-strategic and economic interests in this region.⁸ The future prospects for cooperation between Central Asia and India in the field of energy security seem to be very bright.. This region is thought to contain key global reserves. According to an estimate based on Central Asian sources the confirmed oil deposits are between 13 to 15 billion barrels, which is 2.7% of all the confirmed deposits in the world whereas confirmed deposits of natural gas in Central Asia, are around 270 to 360 trillion cubic feet, which constitute around 7% of world deposits.⁹ So far as oil and natural gas reserves are concerned, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan are among some of the world's largest depositories of energy. Kazakhstan is the second largest producer of petroleum in the CIS after Russia. In February 2005, Kazakhstan produced 4.75 million tons of oil and gas condensate, including 362,646 tons of condensate. It raised gas production tentatively by 39.6 percent to 4.211 billion cubic meters (bcm) from January to February 2005.¹⁰ The reports indicate that Kazakhstan with recent recoveries of oil has come to occupy fifth place in the world among the oil rich countries. Discovery of the Mangyshlak oil reserves in Kazakhstan brought it to 5th place in the world.¹¹ Turkmenistan which is known as cotton producer country and is world's 10th largest producer possesses world's third – largest reserves of natural gas and substantial oil resources as well. It extracted 58.57 billion

⁸ Meena Singh Roy. (2001). "India's Interests in Central Asia", *Strategic Analysis*, Vol. XXIV, No. 12 p. 2273.

⁹ Meena Singh Roy. "India-Central Asia Relations Changing Dynamics and Future Prospects", Kuldip Singh (2005). *South-Central Asia: Emerging Issues*, Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, , p. 63.

¹⁰ The Times of Central Asia,(2005). Vol.7, No.10 (313), March 10, , p. 5.

¹¹ P.L Dash.(2005). "Caspian Oil Politics and Pipeline Options", Kuldip Singh (ed.) *South-Central Asia: Emerging Issues* Amritsar: Guru Nanak Dev University, , p. 99.

cubic meters of gas in 2004. Uzbekistan has immense potentiality of natural gas and is one of the 10 top natural gas producers in the world. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan have rich potentiality of hydroelectric energy. Two power stations at Nurek and Rogun on the Vaksh River in Tajikistan produce 2,700 megawatts and 1.1 Million kilowatts respectively. Similarly, the power stations on the Naryn River in Kyrgyzstan at Toktogul, Shamoldy-say, Kurpsay and Task-kumyr make the republic an exporter of hydro-electricity. The hydro-electricity potential of Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan can be developed. The feasibility studies have already been conducted indicating the possibility of supply of power to India through overhead transmission lines.¹²

India's interests in Central Asia are three pronged. From a security perspective, India would like to encourage the development of stable and secular regimes in Central Asia. Because lest weakened, unstable states with centrifugal tendencies can become bases for terrorist, separatist and fundamentalist elements, which could link up with counterparts in Afghanistan and Pakistan. At the same time, India's interests coincide with ensuring that any instability and chaos in the region does not lead to a "domino effect", of which there is a serious danger. On the role major powers in the region, India is watchful of the possible impact of developments in Central Asia on the Xinjiang region of China that would have a direct bearing on India's security interests. Beyond that, India seeks to have a firm foothold and exercise influence in Central Asia along with other great powers so that this strategically located region does not become an area dominated by forces inimical or hostile to India's interests. It is in India's interests to track any military

¹² The Times of Central Asia,(2005). Vol.7, No.3 (306), January 20,

presence in the region that could potentially threaten it. The common threat of terrorism resulted into growing convergence of views on the need to cooperate and jointly fight this menace. Realizing that Central Asia held the key two of its major worries-Pakistan's expanding influence over Afghanistan and beyond, and the threat of a growing belt of fundamentalism and cross border terrorism –India choose to co-operate closely with the Central Asia. India's Afghan policy should be analyzed in the context of the principles and perceptions of the overall Indian foreign policy. Afghanistan has certainly provided an important opportunity to India to re-establish and consolidate its influence in the whole Central Asian Republics.

In recent years Central Asia has been referred as India's "extended neighborhood". Shyam Sharan, confirmed in a speech given at the Shanghai Institute of International Studies in Nov. 2011, that "Geography imparts unique position to India in the geopolitics of the Asian continent, with our footprint reaching well beyond South Asia and our interests straddling across different sub-categories of Asia-be it East Asia, West Asia, Central Asia, South Asia and South East Asia."¹³ Indian commentators view the Central Asian region as a critical to India's security and long term economic security and feel that New Delhi needs to balance the growing influence of regional rivals both through its own policy and alliance with other major powers.¹⁴ India's emergence as a global and nuclear power over the last decade has allowed it to play an

¹³ Text of the speech available on the web-site of Indian ministry of external affairs, <http://www.mea.gov.in/mystart.php?m=530111969>

¹⁴ C, Raja Mahon.(2006). India and the balance of power; Will the West Engage, *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 85, No. 4, p.1.

active role beyond its immediate neighborhood, especially in Central Asia and Afghanistan.

Post-cold war period has challenged the security perception for nation states. Economic and security especially energy security have come to the forefront. For feeding up of her vast market, India is in the process of diversifying its economic relationship with new players like China, West Asia and Central Asia. Oil diplomacy has gained currency in the current phase of India's foreign policy. India's diplomacy in persuading the major powers of the world that its nuclear programme is not meant for aggressive policy rather it is for security of its territorial integrity. India's emerging foreign slogans like 'Gujral Doctrine, look East Policy, signing of Next Step in Strategic Partnership in 2004 and Indo-US Civil Nuclear deal' are the direct outcomes of her energy security. The simple reason for it is to sustain its economic growth and keep pace with changing times. Political and territorial issues have been sidelined substituted by economic diplomacy. Soft borders and road connectivity became the dominant trends of present India's foreign policy. India's relations with ASEAN countries have gained new highlights. Signing of Comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) and Comprehensive economic cooperation agreement (CECA) with Japan, Malaysia and Indonesia are the clear indicators of India's economic engagements with its neighbors.

The new U.S. thinking of linking South and Central Asia with possibilities of a wider new grouping could fit into Indian thinking. Improvements in India-Pakistan relations, however, would be a crucial input into this strategy. Sensing this alignment, China may try to accommodate some of India's security and economic concerns. If the

U.S. is unable to influence Pakistan on dismantling terrorist infrastructure, India will continue to work with Moscow and Tehran to consolidate some control in Central Asia.

Over the centuries, Central Asia has been India's door to the outside world and has deeply influenced India's history, culture and polity. While the region south of the Himalayas has largely determined the mainstream features of Indian civilization, Central Asia has also influenced India in important ways. From a geopolitical and security perspective too, the Himalayas have never been India's frontier. Today, as in the past, Central Asia continues to play an important role in India's security. Thus, India cannot afford a passive approach to Central Asia; it has to be a player in the region.

India has many advantages in Central Asia. It is not handicapped by any negative historical legacy. Nor does India pose to Central Asia any direct contemporary threat, whether ideological, demographic or territorial. On the other hand, as India has always had a romance and mystique for the people of this region, India's "soft power" has the potential to be a powerful influence on this region. India's technical-economic assistance programs like ITEC (ITEC or Indian Technical Economic Cooperation is a bilateral program of assistance of the Government of India), particularly in areas like information technology, are seen as very relevant and useful for Central Asia. India is also the nearest large market for products of the region. Asia's rich cultural heritage and natural beauty could attract large numbers of tourists from India at the same time; there are many glaring weaknesses in India's policy and approach towards Central Asia. When the Central Asian

republics attained independence, they looked forward to India playing a prominent role as a major partner in all spheres of activity.

Central Asian countries continue to have some expectations that India would play a much larger role in Central Asia. India is a potential balancing factor to the other major players in the region. India's major dilemma and constraint is how to access Central Asia. Given the situation in Afghanistan, and Pakistan's unwillingness to offer transit facilities to India, the traditional access route via Afghanistan is blocked for the foreseeable future. All possible routes to Central Asia via Iran are neither reliable nor optimal, even less so in view of the international pressures on Iran today. India could, however, explore the possibility of establishing links with Central Asia via China, since that is the only other overland route to Central Asia from India.

3. Future Suggestions:

India's major policy objective in Central Asia are to establish stability and peace in the region, work against the spread of terrorist groups, ensure India's energy security, involve Central Asia for greater regional co-operation and control drug trafficking. Chinese Analysts believe that India's role in Central Asia will become greater in the future for two reasons. First, as its comprehensive strength grows, its influence will expand in its neighboring regions, including in Central Asia. Second, it seems that India is pursuing an active diplomacy in Central Asia and is determined to be an active player in the region. India could also take some advantages of some very useful mechanisms or structures- such as

the SCO and Russia- China- India triangle to increase its influence in the region.

Similar views have been articulated by some Japanese experts, who believe that India's position in the Central Asia is strong. However, a triangle between Central Asia, Pakistan and India or Between Central Asia-India and China may bolster India's advantage toward Central Asia. But China-Central Asia and Pakistan or Central Asia-Russia and China relation may pose a potential challenges. However, India needs to urge or insist on her presence in Central Asia for meeting the diversified needs ranging from political to economic ones.

Recently India has activated its policy towards Central Asia through diplomacy, field surveys, visiting cultural centers, etc. Given its inherent handicaps, India cannot achieve its objectives by acting on its own in Central Asia. Thus in order to protect and preserve its interests in the region, India has no alternative but to closely consult and co-operate with the other major powers that have interest and presence in Central Asia. Aspiring to be an influential global power, India has to be a player in the unfolding "Great Game", in Central Asia, on an equal footing with the other major players like the United States, Russia and China. Thus, India must remain integral to Eurasian energy politics. India needs not only to make significant oil and gas investments in Eurasia, but also leverage its position as a major existing and potential consumer of imported energy, and as a key transit country for Eurasian oil and gas to global markets. Eurasian oil and gas pipelines and power transmission lines from Central Asia to India would give India the much-needed meaningful economic links with, and an overland access route to these countries. . The need of the hour is for bold and creative thinking by all

the major players present in Central Asia who are interested in a stable and peaceful Central Asia.

The geographical significance of Afghanistan is key to India's strategic position as it is a crucial link for enhancing energy and economic co-operation between South and Central Asia. In that context, India has always preferred to follow a "soft power" strategy in Afghanistan, sticking to a civilian, peaceful rather than a military one.¹⁵ Broadly speaking, three principal aims construct India's Afghanistan policy: First, the resolution to marginalize the Taliban regime in Afghanistan; Second, the maintenance of strong and stable relations with Afghanistan which could promote greater regional stability in India's favor; and third, the use of Afghanistan as a "gateway" in the development of a stable network with the Central Asian States.¹⁶

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¹⁶ G Fair, "India in Afghanistan-1" The express Tribune, October 30, 2010, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/70064/india-in-Afi>

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Fetisova 3, Mirobod, Tashkent, Uzbekistan
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