**Pakistan and the CAR states**

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September 17, 2021

The strategic rivalry between the British Raj and the Russian Empire to gain control and supremacy of Central Asia is known as the “Great Game”. Central Asian Republics formed the southern boundary of Tsarist expansion, to be guarded against British Colonial advances in this direction. The British were desperate to make sure that their border was clear so that the Russians could not sneak into British-controlled areas, so they decided to demarcate the border. The border was demarcated on November 12, 1893 and this agreement created the Wakhan Corridor which separated British India from direct contact with Russia. The end of the Cold War led to the dismantling of the Berlin Wall and the collapse and disintegration of the former Soviet Union in December 1991.

The world’s fifth largest population of Muslims are concentrated in Central Asia. These states are of immense significance as Kazakhstan and Tajikistan hold 30 percent of the world’s uranium. The region’s oil and gas reserves are estimated to be the second largest in the world. These states produce 90 percent of all cotton produced by the former Soviet Union. Russia tried to ‘Russify’ these states but failed. It however, considers the region as its legitimate area of influence. Russia considers the US’ threat to take away the region from Russia, therefore it has ensured its presence through the Eurasian Economic Union (EEU), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO), a military alliance and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO).

[Germans all set to vote for new parliament on Sunday](https://nation.com.pk/25-Sep-2021/germans-all-set-to-vote-for-new-parliament-on-sunday)

The Shanghai Five was established to promote greater cooperation; it later transformed into the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) with the inclusion of Uzbekistan. China also wants to integrate the Central Asian Republics into the Belt and Road Initiative and CPEC. China has already invested billions of dollars for the development of Central Asian oil fields. The US is interested in the mineral rich republics and also due to their strategic location. In 2015, the US launched the C5+1, as the US believes that these republics can play an important role in peace and stability in war-torn Afghanistan. At the same time the US is also trying to undermine the Chinese and Russian influence in the region and contain China’s Belt and Road Initiative.

In the past, Indian policy has been to encircle Pakistan by influencing Central Asia Republics. India used Tajikistan as its base for logistic supplies to the Northern Alliance and Modi visited all the five states in 2015. Later, India also established an airbase at Farkhor in South Tajikistan. India has also conducted military exercises with Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. The historical connection of Pakistan and Central Asia can be traced back to the civilisation of Harappa and Mohenjo-Daro, almost 5000 years old. The national dress of Pakistan, its language and even religious traditions are influenced by Central Asia. The Pakistani cities of Multan, Thatta, Peshawar and Lahore had direct trade links with Samarkand, Bokhara and other cities until the early 19th century.

[Pakistan condemns extra judicial killings in IIOJK](https://nation.com.pk/25-Sep-2021/pakistan-condemns-extra-judicial-killings-in-iiojk)

Pakistan can play the role of the bridge, linking the region with other regions through CPEC. Pakistan can have access to Central Asian markets for its goods which is possible after the restoration of peace and stability in Afghanistan. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan can sell excess electricity to Pakistan through Central Asia—South Asia Electricity (CASA)-1000 (an energy export agreement between Afghanistan, Pakistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan. The Central Asian Republics can get access to Pakistani markets, especially agriculture products and information technology sectors. Uzbekistan is the most populous country in the Central Asian Republics. Pakistan was among the first countries to recognise the independence of Uzbekistan in 1991. In 2018, the Uzbek government proposed a railway corridor through Afghanistan to gain access to Pakistani ports. A 600-kilometre track has been proposed from Termez in South Uzbekistan through Mazar-e-Sharif, Kabul, Peshawar to the Pakistani ports of the Arabian Sea.

[PCMR urges ministry of religious affairs to show sympathy on forced conversions](https://nation.com.pk/24-Sep-2021/pcmr-urges-ministry-of-religious-affairs-to-show-sympathy-on-forced-conversions)

During his recent visit to Uzbekistan, Prime Minister Imran Khan signed an agreement worth 500 million dollars covering trade, transit, visa, security and cultural cooperation. Tajikistan is separated from Pakistan by the Wakhan Corridor and this strip is a buffer between Pakistan and Tajikistan and the Central Asian Republics. The Darkot pass is a link from Yasin (GB) to Chitral (KP) and Wakhan (Afghanistan) through Baroghil Pass. Similarly, Irshad Pass connects Chapursan valley (Hunza) with the Wakhan corridor. The Wakhis have close links with the people of Hunza (upper Hunza) and Ishkoman (Ghizer) in Gilgit-Baltistan as they share a common history, language and culture. CPEC can provide access to Tajikistan from GB to China using the Karakoram Highway (KKH) by passing through Afghanistan. There is another route through Wakhjir Pass (old Silk Route) to link Wakhan and Central Asian Republics. This road in the Wakhan corridor which would end up linking Afghanistan and the Central Asian Republics to Karakoram Highway (KKH) and to Kashgar. It will be a shorter route to China from Tajikistan fulfilling the objective of Chinese energy security. The road will also help Tajikistan to link to Pakistan ports through KKH. In June this year, the Tajik president visited Pakistan and signed a number of agreements including a defence agreement. Pakistan is located at the crossroads of Central and West Asia. Pakistan could become Central Asia’s gateway in two different directions to the Middle East and Far East Asia.