

## Defensive Strategies of Central Asian Republics: From Bipolarity to Multipolarity

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### Abstract:

This qualitative study analyzes the world moves from a bipolar to a complex multi-polar system, the importance of the Central Asian Region for all countries i.e., Russia, China, US, India, Iran, Turkey and Pakistan, geo-political and geo-strategic threats in a critical region of Central Asia. The regional powers including Russia and China dominate the US through the region; all these countries benefit from natural resources in this region. The result of this study shows that all countries especially developed states play an important role in this region to achieve their economic objective, US, China, and Russia hold proxy wars in this region due to communist and capitalist divisions. This study recommends Russia and China both have significant clout in Central Asia. Pakistan must establish friendly ties with these Central Asian and communist countries to get economic benefits. Pakistan should not be overly reliant on the Western bloc. States should maintain amicable ties with neighboring states.

**Keywords:** Pakistan, Central Asia, Caspian's Sea, conflict of interest, pipeline networking projects, energy politics

### INTRODUCTION

The Central Asian region is a hub of regional along with international geopolitics at the same time. The regional powers including Russia and China have set their strong roots in Central Asia to curb the probing dominance of The USA and its allied members under the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) flag. Other vital countries, such as Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan, are squeezing their nerves to gain a piece of the multipolar system. A multipolar system is a great example to comprehend the dynamics of contending ideologies in world politics. The two ideologies of capitalism and communism have collided once more. There is still a conflict of interest between all states, even amongst China and Russia too, who aim to restrain capitalism. Again, as Muslim states, Iran, Turkey, and Pakistan aspire to expand their influence in the Muslim republics of Central Asia in their unique ways, often at odds with one another.

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Central Asia has long served as a vital crossroads for major nations. The Iranians, Soviets, English, and Chinese, to mention a few, have all fought for power. Since its assistance for the Jihadists against the Soviets, the United States has become a major player in the area. The 'Multi-Polar System' in the Central Asian region is a system of economy, geopolitics, and diplomacy involving major powers and regional actors. Each of these powers has its geographical interests and competitive advantages. China is keeping expanding its economic clout in the area to advance its own economic goals, while Russia will maintain its influence in the region. As the Central Asian region becomes a more vital region for big powers i.e. China, Russia, and the U.S., the Multi-Polar System is a battleground for economic, ideological, and geopolitical conflict. China will run against Russia, the traditional hegemon, as it attempts to develop land connections to the Mediterranean Basin. As a newcomer, the United States should utilize its diplomatic clout to counteract both.

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

Central Asia has evolved as a vital arena of world security, with increased strategic importance that has surpassed the region's geographic isolation and geopolitical marginalization. Security in Central Asia is becoming an important consideration in the larger picture. Russian, Chinese, and American interests are all at stake. Furthermore, stability in Central Asia and Along its periphery, it has an additional impact on a number of states, including India, Iran, and Pakistan. This article investigates the main powers' interests in Central Asia and the quest for stability and security in the region (Edwards,2003).

Central Asian governments have attracted the attention of regional and global powers since their independence. This region is landlocked, but it is rich in natural resources. Pakistan, on the other hand, lacks energy resources and has so stayed eager to gain from these states. Pakistan and Central Asian states share a same history, religion, and culture. In terms of geostrategic importance, Pakistan offers these regional governments the shortest path to global maritime trade. They have signed various agreements, treaties, and memorandums of understanding (MoUs), but these agreements have been rendered useless due to Afghanistan's political volatility and precarious security situation, as well as a lack of attention on the part of Pakistan's policymakers. This research aims to investigate the shifting links between Pakistan and Central Asian countries. Furthermore, it emphasizes Pakistan's interests in Central Asian republics as well as its strategic significance. The goal of this research is to explore the challenges and potential in Pakistan-Central Asian relations (Islam, 2010).

Energy security is critical for every country's economy to thrive. As a result, governments strive for long-term and secure solutions to meet their energy needs. Without a doubt, Central Asia is a significant supply of energy. However, transportation is a related issue. As a result, since the region's independence from the former Soviet Union, governments in the region have attempted to obtain access to global markets via land and water. South Asia, on the other hand, is energy-starved and eager to get access to Central Asia's abundant natural resources through bilateral and multilateral connections with the five CARs. As a result, despite multiple hurdles and geopolitical limits, regional connection between Central Asia and South Asia has been a primary priority in the last two decades. The advantages of improved connectivity are obvious: Access to ports in South Asia would stimulate CAR economies, while connectivity with rapidly rising South Asia would mutually boost commercial potential. The ancient cultural and trade relationships between South

Asia and Central Asia, as well as the current connectivity demands, are examined in this study based on old historic links and regional geopolitics. Afghanistan's position as a land bridge in the region has been studied in order to facilitate regional economic integration between Central Asia and South Asia. It has also been stated that common challenges must be overcome, and opportunities for multilateral partnership, economic cooperation, and development between the two regions must be pursued (Rashid, 2008).

Central Asia, a newly born region of Asia, is expected to have significant geopolitical, geoeconomic, and geostrategic significance for its peripheral regions. The region was also expected to become a focal point for regional and global powers' strategic interests. The study focuses on Pakistan's policy options in relation to its economic security as an extended peripheral actor in Central Asia. Central Asia's natural oil and gas reserves can also provide economic connectivity between the aforementioned actors. According to the study, the region is a cost-effective source of energy for Pakistan. The Central Asian Republics account for 2.4% of global oil production (31.2 million barrels) and 4.2% of global gas production (20.2 billion cubic meters). Despite historical affinities, religious similarities, and geographical proximity, Pakistan's relations with Central Asian countries need to be improved. Furthermore, the study highlights the prospects and challenges of strengthening economic ties between Pakistan and Central Asia, given that the former is a landlocked region and the latter provides the shortest land route access. However, due to Afghanistan's poor law and order situation, this phenomenon was unable to materialize. The New Great Game and global power politics also make it difficult for Pakistan to develop strong economic ties with Central Asia and benefit from its natural resources (Martin., 2010).

### **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

A theory of strategy provides essential terminology. Political purposes are used to make the policy. The state made the policy in the expression of a desire to achieve its objectives. The Central Asian region is very important for different regional powers. Each state uses different power tactics to achieve its objectives. Different policies are made by Russia, China, the USA, India, and Pakistan. Both China and Russia develop their strong roots in this region. The world becomes a complex multipolar. Both China and Russia try to develop their dominance over the US (Edwards,2003).

Strategy is the realm of war that includes the range of conflict among nations and other international actors. Tactics are the parts or pieces that are concerned with themselves, operational art with the combination of the pieces, and strategy is the combination of these combinations. Central Asia is the hub of natural resources. It becomes a battleground for many years. Russia, China, India, the US, and Pakistan use different strategies to gain benefits. China and Russia try to get the benefits of becoming the superpower in the future. The world moves toward a complex multipolar system. China, Russia, and the U.S. adopt the strategies to achieve their objectives. Russia, China, and the US struggle to attain, keep and enhance power and energy resources are the supreme objective of these countries

The geographical strategy defined the different kinds of operational levels which may be broader and more regional in position, and strategy is theater-wide, intercontinental, or global. The Rivals also offer the rival camp advantages and want to take a strong position in the multipolar system. The rivalry held in central Asia as the region is very important for natural resources. Central Asia is

a strategic region that creates a wedge between the Eurasian powers. It also provides a platform for military operations in Eurasian. The U.S. has an interest to establish a military foothold in Central Asia because Central Asia provides a lot of advantages to it. It controls the flow of energy from Central Asia. Asia Pacific region is very complex regarding the multipolar system.

### **BIPOLAR SYSTEM VS. THE MULTIPOLAR SYSTEM**

There is a difference between Bipolar System and Multipolar System (Ingram, 1982). Hence, to avoid confusion regarding the Bipolar System and Multipolar System; the following are the similarities and differences:

#### **Similarities**

The nature of conflict remains the same i.e., on the basis of increasing influence, exploitation of resources, and power politics. The conflict revolved around the single most important objective which was to dominate the region of Central Asia. Resource-rich Central Asia is still the target of all. One of the main reasons behind this conflict is the national interest of acting states. Capitalist block vs. communists' conflicts (Edwards, 2003)

#### **Differences**

<b>Sources</b>	<b>The Bipolar System</b>	<b>Multipolar System</b>
<b>Different actors</b>	The British Empire and the Russian Empire	Russia, China, USA, Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, India
<b>No. of players</b>	Limited	Exploded
<b>Period of conflict</b>	19 <sup>th</sup> century	21 <sup>st</sup> century
<b>The intensity of violence and Threat Effect</b>	Region	The whole world
<b>In a high colliding position</b>	External actors	Non-state actors and internal actors

Table no. 1. Source: The difference between Bipolar System and Multipolar System <https://www.geopolitika.ru/en/article/multipolarity-unipolarity-hegemony-theories-and-concepts>

#### **The Turning Point in the Initiation of the Multipolar System**

In the 1990s cold war ended simultaneously with the end of the influence of the USSR over the states of central Asia. All of these states are sovereign but the turning point toward the Multipolar system was that of the incidence of 9/11. The Central Asian States got independence from the USSR after its collapse in the early 1990s. The incident of September 11, 2001, changed the whole scenario of world politics as it was the first time that non-state actors established their regimes. In order to tackle or simply grind the regime or rule of the Taliban, the United States of America invaded there. The real Multipolar System started when the USA initiated to penetrate or involved in other Central Asian States (Rashid, 2008). Interests of states in the Multipolar System as shown in Figure No. 1 are the following:

## Interests of States in the Multipolar System

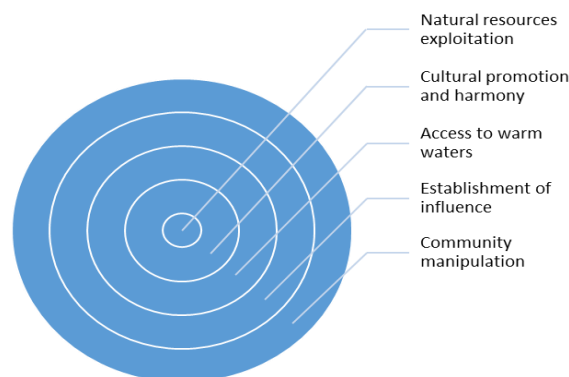


Figure no. 1. Source: <https://www.currentaffairsreview.com/the-rise-of-multipolarity-in-international-politics/>

### **Establishment of influence over Central Asian Republics and exploitation of their natural resources (USA and EU)**

The newly regenerated game geopolitical game in Central Asia is for three reasons: First control of production of oil, second control of the pipelines which will transfer the oil to the western market and Third access to Caspian Sea. USA, with the cooperation of European Union, wants to exploit natural resources and to create its influence over Central Asia states. Its main target is hydrocarbon resources (Islam,2010).

### **Cultural harmony (Turkey)**

Turkey being close to Europe is providing a way for Baku- Tiblisi-Ceyhan pipeline. She wants to cash factor of affinity of the Turkish race living in Central Asia with Turkish culture (Özgün, 2011).

### **Sectarian or community promotion (Iran)**

Iran is trying to manipulate elements of the Shiite community living in Azerbaijan (Rashid, 1994).

### **Hostile states' interests (Pakistan and India)**

Pakistan and India, regional hostile states, have become part of this system. Pakistan is offering a route for Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI). India wants to contain Pakistani influence in Central Asia (Bhat, 2020).

### **Factors giving power to external players to interfere or play part**

The Multipolar System is a highly complex system in which states have engaged themselves in rational power politics. Central Asia has become a laboratory to test the principles of world politics enunciated by many realists like Hans J. Morgenthau (Martin., 2010).

- Ethnic problems like the presence of Russians in many states weakened the internal structure of the states.
- Newly emerged states were relatively poor states and had to depend heavily upon other states to get economic stability.
- These Muslim states could not escape from the Soviet legacy and its strong influence.



- The states could not define the boundaries of the Caspian Sea (Afridi, 2017).
- Central Asia provided a theatre to China, Russia, and The USA for regional and power rivalry.
- The lack of power centers gave birth to instability in the region.
- Intrastate conflicts like the Tajik civil war started.
- The power vacuum was created after the fall of the USSR. All these factors provided a pretext for external players of this game to play their tricks on the chessboard

### Caspian Sea and conflict over it

The Caspian Sea, located between Europe and Asia is a landlocked sea. The inland sea is bordered by five countries:

- Russia
- Kazakhstan
- Turkmenistan
- Iran
- Azerbaijan.



Figure number 2. Source: The Caspian Sea and Central Asian conflicts over it  
<https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/strategic-importance-caspian-sea>

The Caspian's symbolic location importance stems from its availability of energy-rich resources. Huge amounts of hydrocarbon resources are found in the water, both in sea deposits and inland areas in the immediate area. It is believed that the Caspian has 480 million barrels of crude oil and 8.7 trillion cubic meters of gas in known or probable reserves (Chausovsky, 2014).

As a result, the region has a plethora of current natural gas and oil projects, and all of the Caspian coastal republics are major energy producers. However, due to disagreements between these bordering states about where to demarcate borders and how to share the energy resources, much of the Caspian Sea's undersea oil and natural gas deposits have remained untapped. For nearly two decades, negotiations to create marine borders have been ongoing. Many ideas and more opportunities have been discussed, but no solution that is acceptable to all these states has yet been reached.

Europe's attention has been drawn to the Caspian because of its potential energy resources. Energy extracted by Azerbaijan as well as Turkmenistan and supplied via the crucial Southern Highway

Road is considered as a method to diversify away from Russia's grip on the continent's energy supply. However, Iran and, in particular, Russia have stymied such plans, with both nations opposing projects such as the Cross natural gas pipeline. This has resulted in difficult geopolitical issues in the area, with the Caspian Sea emerging as a key point of conflict between Russia and the Western countries. The Caspian Sea's relevance in this regard has only grown as a result of the recent conflict in Ukraine (Romanowski, 2015).

### **Conflict Extended from the Central Asian States to World Politics**

Since the beginning of modern international politics, Central Asia has served as a battleground due to the abundance of natural riches that may be found there. The vast quantities of available energy are the primary factor behind the rekindled interest of major nations such as Russia, the United States, and China. The political climate in the Gulf Region is being impacted as a direct result of Iran's participation in this system. To pursue a policy of hegemony in the Middle East, Saudi Arabia has shown support for both the United States of America and the Taliban administration. Two major powerful states of South Asia have arrived in this area in an effort to expand their own spheres of influence, and they are vying against one another to do so. The competition on both the strategic and economic fronts is having an effect on the politics of South Asia as well. To put it another way, Central Asia serves as a linking point for a number of diverse regions, including the Gulf, the Middle East, South Asia, East Asia, Europe, and the Indian Ocean. Due to the increased interconnectedness, there is now a conflict of interests.

### **Resources as the Center of Attention of Central Asian Countries**

#### **Oil reserves**

<b>Country</b>	<b>Rank regarding oil reserves</b>	<b>Oil reserved barrels</b>
<b>Kazakhstan</b>	12 <sup>th</sup>	30 billion
<b>Azerbaijan</b>	20 <sup>th</sup>	7 billion
<b>Turkmenistan</b>	42 <sup>nd</sup>	600 million or 0.6 billion
<b>Uzbekistan</b>	43 <sup>rd</sup>	594 million or 0.594 billion

Table no 2. Source: Proved oil reserves of Central Asia and Caspian Sea region countries with significant oil reserves, 2009

Having 30 billion barrels of proved oil reserves,

- Kazakhstan ranked 12th in the world
- Azerbaijan ranked 20th, having seven billion barrels.
- Turkmenistan ranked 42nd, having 600 million barrels
- Uzbekistan ranked 43rd, having 594 million barrels
- Saudi Arabia ranked 1st in the world, having 266.8 billion barrels
- Croatia ranked 66th, having 79.15 million barrels.

In 2009, the entire amount of the world's proved oil reserves was 1,332 billion barrels. Kazakhstan, which is located in Central Asia, holds a prominent position among these states.

Kazakhstan will be able to sell up to ten million barrels of crude per day to the world by 2020, as much as Saudi Arabia (Kusznir, 2015). This prospect is a potential nightmare for the international

oil cartel OPEC. The Kashagan find has kicked off a crucial stage in the multipolar system (Kurečić, 2010)

### Uranium

Kazakhstan is among the three major uranium-producing states of the world. Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are providing 20% requirements of uranium to the states of the world. If Kazakhstan becomes the leading producer of uranium in the world the worth of the states will be enhanced on the international stage (Cheney, 2001).

### Natural gas

Turkmenistan was rated 13th in the world for its production of natural gas with 68,880 million cubic meters, and Uzbekistan was placed 14th for its production of 65,190 million cubic metres. Producing 27,880 million cubic meters, Kazakhstan ranked 27th. Azerbaijan ranked 42nd, producing 9,770 million cubic meters. For comparison, Russia ranked 1st in the World, producing 654,000 million of cubic meters, And Croatia ranked 53rd, producing 2,892 million cubic meters of natural gas in 2009. The total natural gas production of the World in 2009 was 30,21,000 cubic meters.

Country	Natural gas production (Cubic meters in millions)	Rank
Turkmenistan	68880	13 <sup>th</sup>
Uzbekistan	65190	14 <sup>th</sup>
Kazakhstan	27880	27 <sup>th</sup>
Azerbaijan	9770	42 <sup>nd</sup>

Table no 3. Source: Natural gas production of Central Asia and Caspian Sea region countries with significant production, 2009

### Is Conflict in Central Asia a Conflict of Ideologies or a Conflict of Strategic and economic interests?

Bolshevik Revolution shaped communism as a practical theory. It made communism a political and economic system. At the same time, the cold war was also due to ideologies namely capitalism and communism.

**Proponents of Capitalists:** The USA and West Europe

**Proponents of Communism:** Russian Federation, China, Cuba, and North Korea

The Multipolar System is, at the same time amalgam of conflict.

- Ideologies
- Strategic interests
- Economic interests.

Under different titles and banners, the United States and the USSR strive to project their influence in the region. Under the banner of liberalism, the United States wishes to pursue its goals. The following lines will detail the United States policy toward Central Asia. "The overarching and long-term goal of US strategy in Central Asia is for these countries to develop into stable, free-market democracies that can act as a bulwark against the development of possible instability and conflict in



the region." This overarching goal is in the US's best interests on three levels. Security in the region, political and economic transformation, and energy development are all priorities (Rashid, 1994).

China and Russia are also targets for the United States. China's goals and expenditures in Central Asia are viewed by the US as a clear challenge to US interests and, as a result, regional stability. According to the theory, China decided to take advantage of the US military's absence in the region, enabling China to prevent over-reliance on water occupied mostly by The Navy and to move by regions where China's ground power has an edge to assure oil supplies. As a result, US supremacy in the region has been seriously hampered (Kurečić, 2010).

Russia's major goal is to keep foreign influence outside of Central Asia often as feasible and to also control Chinese influence if that isn't possible. Because this is a zero-sum battle, strengthening its power in proportion to Western influence is the best strategic assumption for achieving the strategic objectives.

Knowing the complications of world politics will be aided by a quick summary of the objectives as well as policies of the many actors in the Multipolar System (Jamil, 2017).

### **Interests of Countries in the Central Asian Region**

#### **The United States of America**

U.S. forces have invaded Afghanistan. It's fair to wonder what was gained by such a big military operation. Hydrocarbon resources are not abundant in Afghanistan. It's merely a link on the way to Central Asia, the heart of the world's oil reserves. Afghanistan was the target of a military assault by the United States. It's a fair question to wonder what this big military onslaught was intending to accomplish in the first place. The presence of hydrocarbon resources is not very abundant in Afghanistan. Simply put, it acts as a conduit to Central Asia, which is the primary location of the world's hydrocarbon resources. It is not the objective of the Global War on Terror to wipe terrorists from the face of the earth through the course of this conflict. In the 1990s, the United States recognized the Taliban rule to benefit from a proposed oil and gas pipeline that would have started in Turkmenistan, passed through Afghanistan, and ended in Baluchistan (Pakistan) on the Arabian Sea (Vepachedu, 2018).

However, because the Taliban rule obstructed the pipeline's development, the United States had no choice except to overthrow the regime.

Even if the Attacks of 11 September have never even happened, the United States would still have proceeded to the invasion of Afghanistan with the Taliban. A study released focuses on strategies to meet America's energy needs over the next 2 and a half decades (Cheney, 2001). Energy security is now a top issue for trade and foreign policy, according to the study. The Caspian Basin has been identified as a fast-expanding new source of supplies.

The United States is now developing a multi-faceted approach. The new Silk Road Strategy includes India and aims to limit China.

#### **Russian Interests in Central Asia**

Russia established the Commonwealth of Independent Republics to unite newly independent Central Asian states. Russia has significant oil and gas reserves, but geostrategic considerations

have pushed it into the New Great Game. The maintenance of Russia's conventional influence in the area, as well as the protection of economic investment and involvement in future economic growth, is all priorities for the country.

### **China's Interests in Central Asia**

China is a key ally in the area, with clear geopolitical and economic goals. She is following a non-confrontational policy. She aspires to have friendly connections with the countries of Central Asia. Chinese authorities established the SCO for this goal, not just to fight the United States, but also to protect Chinese Strategic interests in the Central Asian region (Cheng, 2008).

### **Iranian and Turkey's Interests in Central Asia**

Iran and Turkey both have cultural ties to Central Asia. There is a religious component in each of these states. Iran and Turkey, on the other hand, have opposing interests. Iran supplies the shortest pipeline route and seeks to preserve regional dominance in the Gulf, but its attempts are thwarted by the United States. Iran had been sanctioned by the United States, and corporations that had done business with Iran had been fined. Iran signed a \$2 billion contract in September 1997 to develop the massive gas field reservoir of Southern Pars in the Gulf Region. The US government issued thinly disguised threats to penalize the company's US subsidiaries. Turkey, on the other hand, has friendly relations with the United States and Western Europe. Turkey is aiming for the Baku-Tbilisi-Cehyan pipeline. Iran has made great progress in Turkmenistan in creating a railway system that would connect all five Central Asian republics, as well as Russia, to the Persian (Iranian) network and then to the Gulf (Edwards, 2003).

Iran and Turkey's main goals are to utilize natural resources and build their pipeline networks. Both are attempting to capitalize on geographical closeness as well as cultural and religious affinities (Özgün, 2011).

### **India's Interests in Central Asia**

To counter Pakistan's growing influence in the region, India has expressed interest in gaining a foothold in Central Asia. In point of fact, the hostile and combative relationship that exists between India and Pakistan has a negative impact on the ecological system that underpins all of South Asia. The nature of the ties that exist between these two major governments is essential to the maintenance of peace and security in the region, as well as the growth of the economy in that area. The situation in India is quite difficult. India is included in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India pipeline (TAPI). The President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, is a staunch defender and friend of India. He is currently working on a project that is being referred to as the "New Silk Road Initiative."

This project aims to improve regional cooperation and economic development by increasing collaboration between Central Asian republics, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. India is spending in Central Asia to further its strategic and energy goals. Being a member of TAPI will improve people's perceptions of Pakistan (Kaushiki, 2013).

## Pakistan's Interests in Central Asia

In terms of size, Pakistan is a small country. Its geographical location has taken it to the Multipolar System battleground, where it will play its part because it has its share. Pakistan has had to go through a lot to keep its place in this tournament. Pakistan's effort to get access to Central Asia is indeed not new. Pakistan attempted to form an 'Islamic Bloc' in the 1990s to increase its political weight and promote its corporate interests in the Central Asian region and beyond. This was viewed as a crucial part of Islamabad's much-desired strategic depth in the event of a confrontation with India. Pakistan's effort to infiltrate Central Asia dates back to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan (Stegan & Kuszniir, 2015).

Islamabad has been attempting to build strategic depth over the past thirty years. However, in a discussion with Lutz Klevevan, Naseerullah Babar, the head of operations for Afghan affairs, claimed that Pakistan desired a prosperous and peaceful Western neighbor. They had discovered, he said, that Afghanistan is an ideal route for products coming from Central Asia. Those countries, particularly for oil and gas, required an Asian outlet. To fight the Soviet Union, the CIA, and the ISI collaborated. Former Interior Minister NASEERULLAH BABAR has been dubbed the "Godfather of the Taliban." "A connection from Turkmenistan could be a godsend for the area," he continues, "but we needed peace for that."

Pakistan backed Hikmatyar's regime when the Soviet Union left. It was part of the ISI's goal to bring stability to Afghanistan. Hikmatyar was unable to lead the administration. A civil war broke out between the Taliban and NATO." This concept of strategic depth' emerged at the end of the 1980s and shaped Pakistan's goals in Afghanistan for the next two decades. The policy amounted to making Afghanistan a friendly state, with two goals in mind: denying India military superiority in Afghanistan and ensuring that the Kabul administration would not push Pakistani Pashtuns to break away. Pakistan aided the Taliban in capturing Kabul in 1996 by providing logistical, military, and political support. In Afghanistan, the Taliban kept the peace. After 9/11, the situation shifted. In Afghanistan during the Karzai administration, Indian influence increased.

The Taliban's defeat has resulted in negative developments in the national defense situation. To begin with, India now has unrivaled access to Afghanistan. During the Taliban era, India helped the Northern Alliance, which was hostile to the Taliban, together with Russia, Iran, and Tajikistan, among others.

Pakistan had emerged as a key ally in the United States fights against terrorism. Pakistan lost billions of dollars in losses as a result of supporting the United States Operation Enduring Freedom. The amount of foreign direct investment has declined. Pakistan's pains and sacrifices are for a few key goals.

They are few, yet they have become Pakistan's lifeblood.

1. In Afghanistan and Central Asia, Pakistan seeks strategic advantage.
2. Pakistan seeks to build positive relations with China, Russia, and the United States to provide stability to Afghanistan.
3. Pakistan wishes to keep Indian influence in Central Asia to a minimum.
4. Pakistan also wishes to collaborate with regional groups such as the SCO and ECO.

5. Pakistan also aims to create a secure, inexpensive, and alternate route to Central Asian republics through Gwadar, so that they can connect to the global market (Akram, 2016).

### **Economic Interests**

Pakistan is experiencing a power shortage. Pakistan's social, political, and economic conditions have all been harmed as a result of this shortage. Unemployment has risen, as has social violence. It is a well-known truth that a state's solid foundations are built on the foundations of a healthy economy. Pakistan's total growth rate is 3-4%, with the potential to expand to 7-8% if the deficiency is addressed (Wunderlich, 2019).

The Trans-Afghanistan Pipeline (TAPI) is a seven-billion Asian Development Bank-backed project. The pipeline will help Pakistan meet its 25% energy gap. Similarly, the Central Asia South Asia Regional Power Trade Project aims to provide electricity from Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to Pakistan. The entire fight lies in national interests (Bhat, 2020).

### **Pakistan Utilizes Regional Organizations in Central Asia**

Pakistan is a member of the ECO and an observer at the SCO. These are two of the most important regional organizations. These two organizations are primarily made up of Central Asian countries. The SCO is seen as a counterbalance to NATO. The SCO has taken a clear anti-American stance, opposing American political and military involvement in Central Asia. The goal of the ECO was to create a single market for products and services, as well as to encourage the growth of economic and capital markets among Muslim countries.

Pakistan hoped that this would increase its opportunities to export textiles, telecommunications equipment, and industrial goods, as well as provide it more access to the region's energy resources. This might be readily accomplished within the ECO framework if transportation infrastructure is improved and tariff arrangements for the transit of commodities are simplified.

Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan, as founding members, have much more experience and expert knowledge. Pakistan may pursue geopolitical and economic goals through both the SCO and ECO platforms (Akram, 2016).

### **CONCLUSION**

To conclude, the transition from the bipolar system to a multi-polar system in Central Asia is a multifaceted challenge. Major countries, including United States, Russia, China, India, Turkey, Iran, and Pakistan are struggling for influence in this geographically crucial region. The United States aims to secure access to valuable oil reserves and establish stable democracies. On the other hand, Russia seeks to maintain its historical influence and counter Chinese encroachment, while China focuses on expanding its economic presence through BRI. Iran and Turkey leverage religious and cultural ties with India countering Pakistan's influence through TAPI pipeline. Pakistan relatively smaller in size plays a major role in Multipolar system by collaborating with major powers, pursuing regional partnerships. The regions potential and web of national interest underscore Pakistan to maximize its gains while promoting peaceful cooperation and strengthening relations with both Eastern and Western blocs.

## Recommendations

Pakistan must establish good ties with the Central Asian and South Asian governments. In the fields of trade, research, and technology, these relationships must be built on peaceful coexistence and collaboration. To address regional and international issues, Pakistan needs to collaborate with all regional governments.

Pakistan has accessibility to the ECO and SCO systems. Regional and global agreements must be made on these platforms. Pakistan should also join the Energy Charter Treaty (ECT) to complete deals with Turkmenistan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan under the ECT, as these nations are already members.

Pakistan must strengthen bilateral ties with Central Asian countries. Irritants such as Pakistan's backing for the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) should be eliminated. Pakistan should provide services in the scientific and technological fields, finance, and military aid to these countries. Pakistan should make the most of its status as a Muslim country. The promotion of free commerce should be encouraged. In the process of production and export, these states' commodities need to be insured. Gawadar Port's importance will be projected. Pakistan should also endeavor to establish a corridor to Central Asia.

Pakistan must adhere to a strict policy of peaceful cooperation. Pakistan, although a nuclear state, cannot afford a large-scale conventional conflict. As a result, the issues with India must be resolved. The Taliban should be negotiated with. It is necessary to establish a favorable status in the eyes of regional powers and at the international level.

The influence of both Russia and China in Central Asia is substantial. Having cordial relations with these communist nations is essential for Pakistan. Overdependence on the Western bloc is unhealthy for Pakistan. It is general knowledge that states should maintain amicable ties with neighboring states. Unfortunately, Pakistan's relations between these two countries India and Russia are strained. Without Russia and China's support, Pakistan will be unable to harness Central Asia's natural riches. China has expressed opposition to the TAPI project. Pakistan's foreign policy is in need of reevaluation, and it must give regional nations a greater voice.

The ECO system isn't working properly. This is the most powerful and effective forum through which Pakistan may gain the maximum benefit from Central Asian countries. The ECO must improve ties among its members. ASEAN should be used as an example for ECO. It will promote bilateral and multilateral commercial linkages and agreements. It is through it that member nations must resolve their inter-state problems.

The Multipolar System is a difficult undertaking. A state's interests cannot be pursued only by unilateral action. In this system, there is a lot of interconnectedness. Pakistan must behave in a sensible and measured manner, and previous mistakes must never be repeated.

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