



E-ISSN: 2706-9117  
P-ISSN: 2706-9109  
IJH 2020; 2(2): 205-207  
Received: 17-07-2020  
Accepted: 23-08-2020

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## Indian security and central Asian republics (CARs)

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### Abstract

India and Central Asia connected to each other from ancient time and always affected by the Central Asian invaders such as Saka, Kushans, Hunas, Turks, Mongols, and Mughals. Indian sub-continent always has security issues from this region. Today situation not so change from its past and still, India have a security concern from Central Asian region. Both regions have some common threats - such as terrorism, religious radicalism, drug trafficking, weapons proliferation etc and these threats direct connected to Indian security. Thus Central Asia is of vital importance to India not just in terms of energy security but also for reasons of national security. The significance of this region for India's security is immense. The scholar wants to study the existing security environment in the CARs and evaluate the strategic importance of the region for Indian national security.

**Keywords:** Security, religious radicalism, weapon proliferation, terrorism, drug trafficking, SCO, NATO, "The Great Game"

### Introduction

India and Central Asia share a long history of engagement. Politically, this ranges from the Kushan Empire, which spanned across the territories of modern Central Asia and India to the Mughal conquest of India during the early 16th century. In ancient Indian history, much of India's political history was shaped by events in Central Asia. One important aspects need to be underlined here, that Central Asia was a staging ground for invasions into India. The region's description in the military context is amply found in our history textbook.

The emergence of predominantly multi-ethnic and multi religious Central Asian Republics (CARs) has added a new strategic dimension to the geopolitics of the whole of Asia and more so on, for the countries located in its immediate neighborhood. India and Central Asia shares common borders with Afghanistan, which is a major source of spreading religious extremism in the region. India has a vital interest in the security and political stability of the region. Obviously Kashmir issue will pressurize India to be aware of political developments which are taking place in the Central Asian region. Any activity done by Islamic extremist group in the CARs could energize similar elements active in Kashmir. For reasons dictated by geography, India's strategic concerns are tied up with the regions bordering its north and northwest. Pakistan in its northwest continues to be antagonistic towards India. Pakistan is already sponsoring cross-border terrorism in Kashmir. For India, the Kashmir issue pertains not to four million Muslims living in Kashmir Valley alone, but to the peace and security of 130 million Muslims elsewhere in India. Therefore, for India the geo-strategic importance of CARs is immense. Under no circumstance can India ignore this region. On the other hand, instability in Afghanistan has also adversely influenced peace and security in our region.

### Objectives

1. To find out security issues for India through CARs.
2. To find out geostrategic importance of CARs for India.
3. To find out Indian policy towards CARs for Indian security.

### Methodology

The source of literature for the sake of this paper has been gathered from the journals, books, newspapers and website.

### Security issue for India

Terrorism and religious radicalism are the most focused security issues for India through Central Asia but some other common threats also visible between these regions-such as

Kashmir issue, ethnic chauvinism, arms proliferation, smuggling of fissile materials including WMDs and drug trafficking, narcotic funded violence and crime. These shared security interests were a driving force behind India's engagement with the region. Some commentators suggest that this was articulated through a 'Look North Policy' that emphasized shared concerns along with a desire to 'promote stability and cooperation without causing harm to any third country.' These issues have a direct bearing on India's security, especially keeping in mind that the major source of initiation is through Pakistan. Today there are mounting security concerns in Central Asia and South Asia over rising cross-border and state sponsored terrorism; religious extremism/political Islam and ethnic unrest, coming out of Afghanistan and Pakistan. Terrorism is gaining prominence in the range of non-traditional threats in India and Central Asian state.

It is close to areas where scores of camps for jihadist and anti-India terrorist groups are based, and it is in the proximity of territory where Pakistan and China are engaged in massive military cooperation. New Delhi sees the region as a source of religious extremism and is concerned to check the rise of radical Islamist groups which may present a terrorist threat. Since the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, Central Asia has been a fertile recruiting ground for radical Islamist groups. And there are reportedly scores of jihadist groups based in the region. Given the transnational nature of these groups, including links with the Taliban and other militant groups in neighboring countries, this generates a high degree of unease in New Delhi. The fear is that if the emergence of jihadist groups is not checked, they will eventually pose a serious threat to India's security, especially in the contested state of Kashmir.

This concern is exacerbated by the situation in Afghanistan. There is a prospect of increasing insecurity in Afghanistan following the NATO withdrawal in 2014, which may spill over and destabilize fragile Central Asian states. Furthermore, New Delhi fears that a resurgent Taliban integrated into Afghan power structures post-withdrawal will be counter to India's interests. For these reasons India is keen to play a bigger role in Central Asia's security matrix and to prevent real and perceived threats to its national security.

Another problem related to terrorism, and one that confronts India and CARs is that of drug trafficking. A lucrative drugs trade in Central Asia poses a major threat to stability in Central Asia. Central Asia was hit hardest by the explosion in Afghan heroin. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan developed important opium routes and became significant opium producers themselves. Hence, this region has become an invaluable area of the global narcotics trade. A large number of drugs smuggled to India from this region. As per the state wise NCRB data, Punjab has emerged at the top position with 10,220 registered cases of drug trafficking in 2012. Golden Crescent (Afghanistan, Iran and Pakistan) was the main source of these illegal drugs. Drug trafficking potentially poses a major security threat to the region. India needs to pay greater heed to drug trafficking, since much of the money generated is used to fund activities of extremist Islamist terror networks that possess the ability to foment trouble for India in the long run.

The Central Asian region is strategically located between two nuclear superpowers, Russia and China, as well as their nuclear armed neighbors Pakistan and India. Central Asia

previously served as a raw materials base for the Soviet weapons program, with Kazakhstan holding large reserves of highly enriched uranium, while Kyrgyzstan has substantial amounts of nuclear waste scattered around. Kazakhstan produces the largest share of uranium from mines (42% of world supply from mines in 2019) and Uzbekistan was 5<sup>th</sup> largest producer of uranium. This, coupled with the absence of special detection equipment at border and customs checkpoints, rampant corruption and little political will, have the potential to render the region highly susceptible to and a lucrative route for smuggling fissile material. This has serious security implications as there is potential danger of proliferation of lethal weapons technology and material into the hands of not just states hostile to India, but also non-state actors like the Taliban, ISIS, al-Qaeda and groups like the IMU linked to them. This weapon proliferation can create big threat to Indian security.

### **Geostrategic importance of Central Asia for India**

Geo-strategically India and CAR always important to each other from beginning of human history. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Central Asia was the region of "The Great Game" – The ongoing contest between the British, from their base in India, and imperial Russia, from its contiguous territory. The geo-strategic importance of the Central Asian states requires India to have good relations with them. Close relations could they benefit in several ways: It would counter balance Pakistan from using the Islamic card against India in Islamic world. India and the Central Asian states are affected by narco-religious terrorism arising instigated by the Taliban, so there is scope for India to work out a common strategy with them. Central Asia provides space to control all security threats. Managing plural states despite proximity to aberrant states is tough. India and Central Asia can cooperate in evolving common mechanisms and measures to jointly combat terrorism. All these developments have direct security implications for India.

### **Indian policy towards this region for national security**

Over the past decade, India has sought to enhance its security assets in the region, notably through the acquisition of a first foreign military outpost in Tajikistan. Tajikistan is of particular concern for India since only a narrow 20 km stretch of Afghan territory separates it from Pakistan-administered Kashmir. There are several reasons underpinning India's interest in a base at Tajikistan, one being the Pakistan factor. The Pakistani incursion at Kargil in 1999 laid bare the failure of Indian intelligence and opened India's eyes to the need for a military presence outside its borders, such as presence in Tajikistan. India also can monitor anti-India activities in the region.

After the fall of the Taliban regime, India was determined not to lose the foothold it had gained in Afghanistan thanks to its ties with the Northern Alliance in the late 1990s. Delhi was anxious not to allow Pakistani influence to grow again in Afghanistan. This was behind India's decision to remain at Ayni and Farkhor air base after the fall of the Taliban. A military base in Tajikistan is active as it also enhances India's options in the event of war with Pakistan. From Tajikistan, India would be able to strike Pakistan's rear. India's presence in Ayni has enabled a significant role in Afghanistan's reconstruction and stability since 2002. Since Pakistan does not allow India overland access to

Afghanistan, India has had to channel its economic and relief assistance to Afghanistan through Farkhor. The IAF airlifts supplies to Ayni, which are then transported to Farkhor and onward to Afghanistan by road.

India's growing military profile in the region might have been prompted by the need to counter Pakistan's influence, but it also increased India's options in the event of heightened tensions with Pakistan, since it would enable India to strike at Pakistan from the rear. However, Russia – still regarded as the dominant security actor in Central Asia – appears to have been unwilling to sanction India's attempt to establish a military foothold in Tajikistan, Perhaps fearful that this would open the door to US and NATO influence. After a decade of negotiations between New Delhi and Dushanbe, in 2011 the Tajik Foreign Minister launched negotiations with Russia to discuss possible deployment of the Russian military at Ayni, while also ruling out the deployment of Indian or American forces at the airbase. Despite this setback, India continues efforts to strengthen bilateral cooperation on security with Central Asian states. In recent years, it has shown signs of changing tack in its military outreach to a more 'soft power' approach.

In July 2011, the Indian and Kyrgyzstan announced plan to open a joint military research centre there, as well as an initiative to train Kyrgyz soldiers to serve in UN peace-keeping missions. It was considered that lower-profile initiatives like military hospitals and research centres may allow Indian military officers to build relationships with their Central Asian counterpart. When India's Vice-President visited Tajikistan in April 2013, both governments stressed the importance of cooperation in dealing with anticipated security threats from Afghanistan. India also has established Joint Working Groups on Terrorism with Tajikistan and Kazakhstan. However, despite shared concerns over security, there is little effective security cooperation between India and Central Asian states. Whereas Russia conducts numerous joint military exercises with these states under the framework of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) and Collective Security Treaty Organization, and China does to some degree through the SCO, there is limited direct collaboration with India's armed forces. India did join the multilateral SCO as an Observer in 2005, and in 2017 become a full member. The SCO is one of the most prominent multilateral bodies with regard to Central Asia, and the issue of counter-terrorism regularly features on the agenda of SCO summits. However, it is doubtful that India will be able to utilize the SCO platform to advance its own security interests, given the predominant Chinese influence within the organization and Beijing's sensitivity towards Pakistan, which is also an Observer in the SCO.

### Conclusion

India has a strategic stake in ensuring that Central Asian region remains geopolitically and economically stable. India's interests make it imperative for the country to evolve a clear policy which can address both the existing and potential challenges that may erupt in the coming years. Indo-CAR relations are based on promoting regional security, bilateral trade, effective management of religious fundamentalism, terrorism and freedom from power rivalry. But, still there are certain challenges which India may have to face and for that India have to be ready to handle the new threats. India can play a vital role for making CARs as the

chessboard for "New Great Game 2.0," And India can maintain peace and security in this region.

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