

Why Did Pakistan Actively Engage in Central Asia Since 1991?

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ABSTRACT

Central Asia, Pakistan's western extended peripheral region, has extensive economic, political and strategic importance. The region drew the interests of regional and extra-regional players after the disintegration of the USSR in 1991, owing to its geo-strategic location and extensive natural resources, particularly energy resources. The main objective of this study is to know why did Pakistan actively engage in Central Asia Since 1991? The complex interdependence theory helps to understand this engagement. There are many important economic, political, strategic and interdependency reasons behind the projection of interests and active engagement of Pakistan in Central Asia. Central Asian Republics (CARs) are potential partners of Pakistan in both regional and international affairs and have strategic importance to counter-balance India, offer cost-effective energy resources, and potential trade market. Likewise, for the landlocked CARs, the geo-strategic location of Pakistan, inter-regional connectivity, quest to get access to the nearest seaport, and diversification of the export market for their energy resources are some compelling factors to tilt towards Pakistan. Their religious affinity and historical linkages have also worked to engage them actively. This study explores and analyses the rationales behind Pakistan's active engagement in Central Asia in light of the country's broader regional policy. The study is based on secondary data using the Content Analysis Technique.

Keywords: Pakistan, Central Asia, engagement, interdependency, economic interests, political interests, strategic interests.

Introduction

Central Asia comprises five countries; Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, and Uzbekistan occupies an area of 4 million km² and has a 64.7 million population. These countries got independence in 1991 from USSR (Javaid & Rashid, 2015). Kyrgyzstan covers an area of 98,500 km², Kazakhstan 2,717,300 km², Uzbekistan 447,400 km², Turkmenistan 488,100 km², and Tajikistan 143,100 km². Geographically the region covers an area from the Caspian Sea in the west to the border of the People's Republic of China in the East. It borders the North by Russian Federation, and the South by Afghanistan and Iran. Central Asia is also called the "Heart of Asia" (Adnan & Fatima, 2015) due to its geo-strategic location. It has abundant natural resources and occupies a very important geo-strategic location; therefore, it attracted the attention of other countries. It is a landlocked region which makes it dependent on its bordering regions, i.e., West Asia, South Asia, and East Asia, to access the sea for its

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imports and exports. Historical relations between Pakistan and Central Asia can be traced back to the 2nd century BC, as nomadic people of these two neighbouring regions had financial, social and religious relations (Shaheen, 2011). Peshawar also remained the capital of the Kushan dynasty (Shaheen, 2011). When CARs gained independence, Pakistan immediately acknowledged their geo-political, economic, and strategic importance in the new regional order and re-established the centuries-old relations.

The leading objective of each state's foreign policy is to achieve its political, economic, and strategic interests, urgencies and requirement while following its relationships with other nations of the world, same is the case of relations of Pakistan with Central Asia. Many economic, political and strategic reasons have compelled Pakistan and CARs to engage actively. The present literature is composed of Islamabad's relationships with Central Asia and the Afghan issue's challenge to the connectivity of both regions. While this study has focused systematically on economic, political and strategic factors provided to Pakistan's engagement with Central Asia since 1991, the opportunities for Pakistan created as a result of this active engagement, principally opportunities in the context of energy security, trade, Gwadar port, CPEC and Pakistan's terrestrial location being an asset for Central Asia. To actively engage and fulfil its foreign policy objectives in the region, Pakistan's strategy has been guided by several financial, geo-strategic, and geo-political interests, as well as the concern of India's dominance in the region, which remains a major element in the formation of its policy towards the CARs. In reality, on the one hand, Pakistan's policy is shaped by its economic and political objectives in Central Asia and on the other hand, it has been shaped by two connected elements from the very beginning: the fear of New Delhi's growing influence in Central Asia and a desire to uphold a strategic equilibrium with New Delhi. Its deep attachment to the Muslim Brotherhood is another major aspect of its foreign policy toward Central Asia. These threads also influence Islamabad's strategy toward Central Asia.

Research Methodology

This thesis is based on Content Analysis Technique (CAT) which is a widely recognized and wide but properly deployed research technique in social sciences qualitative research (Khayyam et al. 2018). This methodology is used for examining data collected from research articles, books, magazine and newspaper articles and other similar and related documents since the 19th century (Harwood & Garry, 2003). It is Qualitative research. The inductive method is used in the analysis and conclusion. To conduct this research study, data collected from research papers, books, official reports, newspapers, online publications, magazines, booklets, press briefings, press releases, and statements published in local and international newspapers.

Results and Discussion

Rationales behind Pakistan's Engagement in Central Asia

One of the essential elements of the contemporary state system is the engagement of countries in productive manners. No country can remain isolated in the world. Various reasons, interests and necessities compel a country's engagement with other countries. Engagement among countries is an effective tool for strengthening and accelerating growth and meeting unmet local requirements to enhance the quality of life of their citizens. It contributes to creating opportunities, transmitting information, and sharing skills to improve living conditions and make the world better. States develop foreign policies based on certain strong ideas that reflect their national morals and interests to establish ties with other nations. Pakistan is in the same situation as the rest of the world. Islamabad's policy is to preserve, advance, and expand national interests abroad. Following the guiding principles given by the founding fathers, the Foreign Ministry helps to defend the country's interests abroad and pursue the development agenda for growth and prosperity (MoFA Pakistan). Pakistan prioritises its mutually beneficial engagement and cooperative relations with neighbouring countries in its foreign policy. In this regard, Central Asia is significant to Pakistan for various reasons. The independence of CARs, along with the Middle East's tumultuous geo-political environment and the world's expanding need for energy resources, has shifted global attention to Central Asian hydrocarbon resources as a strategic option. Improving the

bilateral ties of Pakistan with Central Asia is in the national interests of both regions. The geographic position of Pakistan is an important asset for its north peripheral nations (Afghanistan and China) and extended peripheral countries (Central Asian Republics). The importance of relations between Central Asia and Pakistan has constantly been felt, not only due to new tendencies in regional and international political, economic and strategic strategies but also because of the previous bond of religious, cultural, and commerce ties that formed the foundation for this relationship.

Economic Reasons

The primary objective of Pakistan to engage in Central Asia is economic interests. In light of different economic interests, Pakistan preferred Central Asia in its foreign policy. Therefore, over the previous thirty years, Pakistan has increasingly developed good and mutually beneficial economic ties with this region. Pakistan already had historical, religious, cultural, and economic links with Central Asia, which benefited Pakistan's renewed involvement in the region. These historical links have created a favourable environment for Islamabad. Like other countries, Pakistan also needs regional trade partners. Central Asia is a very good option as it is a 90 billion dollar trade market (Hameed, 2021). With two out of four neighbours (India and Iran) it already has very low trade relations due to political differences. In such a scenario, Central Asia is a potential option for Pakistan to have regional trade partners. Bilateral trade with CARs and becoming a transit trade route are Pakistan's priorities in its engagement with these countries. The trade market potential of Central Asia is \$90 billion (Bhutta, 2021), while Pakistan is facing a \$30.796 billion trade deficit in 2021 ("Trade Deficit Widens 106%", 2022). Trade with Central Asia is in favour of Pakistan. If their trade relations improve, it is obvious that Pakistan could balance its trade deficit. Pakistan is also interested in importing many natural resources and raw materials from Central Asia. On the one hand, the central Asian markets have a lot of potential for Pakistani products, and Pakistan can also import comparatively low-priced products from Central Asia. Regional connectivity is very important between Pakistan and Central Asia (Rauf, 2021). Despite many challenges, Pakistan has established good trade relations with Central Asia. It can further improve by making inter-regional connectivity smooth. All the shortest routes are through Afghanistan; therefore, with the stability in the country, trade of Pakistan with CARs.

Along with trade potential, the region is also a source of cheap and sustainable energy security for Pakistan. Energy security is a pressing problem in today's world, and each country strives to secure its energy requirements. Pakistan desperately needs these resources to fulfil its needs and accelerate its economy. The energy crisis costs the country's economy between 2% and 2.5% of GDP annually (Ahmed, 2017). Pakistan is required to import 80% of its energy. Currently, it is importing oil from the Middle East, LPG gas from Qatar and United States, and coal from South Africa. At the same time, all these energy resources are available cost-effectively in Central Asia. Therefore, Pakistan privatized this region in its foreign policy. The region is energy-rich, having 31.246 billion barrels of oil (2.37% of the world's total reserves), 265 trillion cubic feet gas (4.28% of the world's total reserves), 38,704 million short tons coal (4.16% of the world's total reserves), 928 thousand tons Uranium (17% of the world total reserves), and the hydroelectric potential of the region is estimated 460 billion kilowatts annually, about 90% of that capacity is untapped (Asian Development Bank, 2010). Among the CARs, Turkmenistan has the largest natural gas reservoirs as it has approximately 17.5 trillion cubic meters, ranked the 5th largest gas reservoirs in the world (Khetran, 2019), and Kazakhstan has the largest oil reservoirs. According to IEA 2018 statistics, Kazakhstan is Central Asia's major oil producer, having the world's 12th largest known crude oil reserves. The country was ranked as 9th world's greatest coal producer (108 million tonnes Mt). It is the 17th largest producer of crude oil (91.9 Mt) and the 24th gas producer (38.7 bcm). To import energy resources from Central Asia, Pakistan has initiated many schemes like the TAPI gas pipeline (Abbas, 2012), TAP-500, Trans-Afghan Railway line (Cuenca, 2021), and CASA-1000 power transmission line ("Trans-country CASA-1000, TAPI projects", 2021). Apart from these energy resources, the region is also full of natural resources. Among the 118 periodic-table elements, 99 are available in Central Asia. These factors attracted Pakistan towards Central Asia (Khwaja, 2008). Alongside energy security and natural resources,

Pakistan is also looking to be the energy-transit corridor between South Asia and Central Asia, bringing huge transit fees and other related businesses and economic benefits to Pakistan. Pakistan is located at the cross route of the two regions. Therefore, it serves as a transit state for these countries, allowing them to export their energy reserves to South Asian countries through pipelines and to the rest of the world through its seaports. All South Asian countries are facing energy deficits. In South Asia, the energy issue can be addressed within the region if regional countries are committed to finding a solution. The TAPI gas pipeline project was unquestionably the first step in realising the energy trade potential between the two regions, as Pakistan is a major route for Central Asian energy export to the international market and their foreign trade. This is a great chance for Pakistan, and if it is properly exploited, it will transform the country's whole economic landscape.

Another aspect in this regard is that Pakistan will become the region's trade hub due to the construction of the Gwadar deep seaport and the connecting of rail and road networks. Central Asia is landlocked, while Pakistani ports are the nearest and most cost-effective ports for land-locked Central Asia. Pakistan is a gateway to Central Asia (Stuff Study, 1994). Karachi is the closest port city to Central Asia. The distance between Karachi and Dushanbe is 2,720 km via road through Afghanistan. Bandar Abbas port of Iran is on 3,400 km distance, Vladivostok of Russia is 9,500 km, and another port of Russia Rostov is on 4,200 km distance from Central Asia (Rashid, 1994). Pakistan aims that Central Asian Republics do their international trade through its ports. For this purpose, Pakistan has initiated many connectivity projects with CARs like The Quadrilateral Traffic in Transit Agreement (QTTA), the 573 km long Trans-Afghan Railway line and the extension of CPEC to Central Asia. It is important to mention that the shortest connectivity route between Central Asia and South Asia is through Afghanistan, as it is located at the crossroads of the two regions, but at present, connectivity through the Afghan route is hampered by the law-and-order situation in the country. Due to this issue, Pakistan and CARs have established another route of connectivity through China called the QTTA route. It connects Pakistani ports with Central Asia through China. The QTTA route has completely avoided the troubled Afghan route, but it is very long.

Connectivity between Central and South Asia is not new but centuries old for economic and trade purposes. The ancient Silk Road of China has worked as a means of connectivity in the whole region (Malik, 2017). CPEC is economically very significant (Khetran and Khalid, 2019). It has renewed the concept of inter-regional connectivity. But regional connectivity still faces many problems in South and Central Asia (Ahmar, 2021). Both China and Pakistan want to extend CPEC to Central Asia, and CARs have also shown interest in joining this project. It will significantly decrease the distance between landlocked Central Asia and the sea. For Landlocked countries such as Central Asian States distance coefficient of the gravity model is 5.5%. Every 1% decrease in distance from the port increases trade by 5.5%, and CPEC will decrease this distance by 22% (Munir & Shafiq, 2018). The extension of CPEC to Central Asia will ensure the access of CARs to Pakistani ports and increase Pakistan's trade with CARs many folds. Pakistan is interested in this region and hopes to create strong ties with them. At the same time, all these countries are landlocked. Therefore, attempting to get the quick and shortest route to the Arabian Sea in order to discover new markets and opportunities for exporting their resources. CPEC will work as a link between consumer-based South Asian economies and production-based Central Asian economies. This corridor will benefit all regional stakeholders more if they collaborate on key security and geo-political problems and work together to promote regional integration and economic cooperation.

Political Reasons

As one of the main foreign policy objectives of Pakistan is to establish good and mutually advantageous relations with its close neighbours, therefore, Islamabad duly acknowledged the emergence of CARs after the collapse of the USSR and extended recognition and established good relations with them shortly after their independence at the end of Cold War. There are many important political reasons behind the projection of Pakistan's regional interests. During the cold war period, Pakistan was following the policy of internationalization, as evident by joining the Western block and the policy to become the leader of the Muslim world, but it soon disappointed. After the Cold War era's culmination, Pakistan adopted the

regionalism policy. It started to improve relations with regional countries, especially CARs and tried to formulate a regional block of Muslim countries.

Pakistan's quest to make allies to counter India is an important objective of its active engagement in Central Asia. Three sides surround the country by its political rivals: India, Iran, and Afghanistan. In this scenario, Pakistan found Central Asia as the best option to make regional friends and allies and establish cordial relations within the region to consolidate its position vis-à-vis India. Pakistan was compelled to make allies as India has already made an alliance in regional affairs with Iran and Bangladesh against Pakistan. Following the objective to consolidate its regional position, Pakistan successfully lobbied to include all CARs in Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) soon after their independence. ECO is an important regional organization having many prospects (Pomfret, 1997). It became a potential platform to advance the interests of Pakistan in Central Asia, but due to multiple reasons, including lack of economic resources and policy implementation issues, it is unsuccessful to fulfil the interests of Pakistan in Central Asia. ECO has not proved as effective a platform as Islamabad expected it. After failures in the past, Pakistan has now adopted more modest regional aspirations (Fair, 2008). Now Pakistan is looking toward Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The entry of Pakistan as a full member of SCO is a fresh move to strengthen its relations with CARs, a potential opportunity to consolidate its position and role in regional affairs and safeguard its interests in the SCO region. SCO has many potential opportunities for Pakistan (Syed, 2017).

Another reason for Pakistan's active engagement in Central Asia is to facilitate its regional economic interests and strengthen regional integration. Regional integration is important for development (Schiff & Winters, 2003). Pakistan has many economic interests in Central Asia, which need strong political relations with CARs to be fulfilled. Pakistan also needs to have strong political partnerships with CARs to strengthen regional integration, successful completion of joint inter-regional connectivity projects, facilitate the energy projects like the TAPI gas pipeline, CASA-100 and TAP-500, the extension of CPEC to Central Asia and connectivity of CARs through Pakistani ports with the international market.

Strategic Reasons

There has been competition between Pakistan and India in South Asia from the very beginning. Both want to dominate regional politics and get a hegemonic position in regional affairs. Their competition has already made South Asia futile for cooperative engagement. Indian factor is an important aspect of Pakistan's policy towards Central Asia (Roy, 2006). When the USSR disintegrated in 1991 and the five CARs emerged, arch-rivals India and Pakistan also started competing there. New Delhi attempted to limit Islamabad's engagement in Central Asia, while Pakistan tried to consolidate its position. Pakistan needs allies, a potential opportunity to counter Indian influence, and its hegemonic aspirations in regional politics. Central Asia is a potential option for political alliance and a regional Muslim countries bloc. Pakistan also aims to increase defence relations with CARs and establish strategic partnerships with them. Its strategic aims toward the region have continued mostly unchanged since 1991 but dismantling the significant impediments that stand in the way of realising its interests in the region, looking beyond the country's abilities now and even in the near future.

Pakistan's ties with these countries have improved in recent years, but they have not reached the level they are required. There are many differences and rivalries among the regional countries due to the region's strategic environment and the Afghan issue. It hampered the engagement of regional countries with each other and created space for extra-regional countries interference and power politics. It is hoped that inter-regional political and economic engagement and cooperation will be boosted many folds once it connects smoothly. As a result, economic activity will be boosted, and the socio-economic situations of the people will improve. The people of the whole region suffer from poverty and many other types of socio-economic problems. Furthermore, these linkages will reduce tensions between member countries, increase people-to-people engagement, and allow the exchange of expertise. It will also play an important role in regional peace and stability.

Interdependency

Another important rationale behind the engagement of the two regions is their interdependency. At present, regionalization finds itself very important in terms of economic, political, and strategic partnerships everywhere in the world. In this regard, South Asia and Central Asia also have no exception. Both Pakistan and Central Asia are interdependent. Primarily, Pakistan depends on Central Asia for energy security, trade, desire to become a regional transit route and have regional allies as Pakistan is surrounded from three sides by rivals. While Central Asia is dependent on Pakistan for access to the international market through its ports, diversifying its energy export market, trade and services, and gaining political support. The geostrategic location of Pakistan has also made it hard for these countries to ignore it. Although significant obstacles limit their engagement, Pakistan has a distinct geostrategic advantage over other regional players. In addition, the Gwadar Port, CPEC, QTTA route through China, TAPI gas pipeline and CASA-1000 electricity transmission line, as well as the ongoing rail and road projects through Afghanistan connecting Central Asia to the Arabian Sea, gave Pakistan good opportunities to consolidate its engagement and get benefits from the potentials of the region. These joint projects have also significantly increased the interdependency of the two regions and their importance to each other.

Strategies of Pakistan in Central Asia to Pursue its Interests

Pakistan has been following a policy called "Vision Central Asia " to pursue its interests in Central Asia" since 1991. It has five pillars. First, political relations; second, trade relations; third, energy security and connectivity; fourth, security and defence; and fifth, people-to-people connections (Prime Minister's Office Pakistan, 2021). To pursue its objectives in Central Asia, Pakistan uses different strategies, depending on the context. Fundamentally, it entails selecting political or economic strategies and their combinations while dealing with these countries. As Pakistan is using multiple strategies while pursuing its interests in Central Asia, the economic engagement strategy is comparatively more successful and better working. Central Asian Republics are more prone to expand their economic relations with their extended peripheral regions like Pakistan, and they also need it. The political circumstances and contemporary geo-economics compelled them to extend their economic engagement with their South Asian neighbours.

Islamabad saw religion as crucial for creating and deepening connections with CARs. Because most Muslims in Central Asia are Sunni Muslims, it is assumed that they would necessarily tilt toward Pakistan. Pakistan's strong adherence to Islamic ideology remained a fundamental feature of its policy, and it is continued but is not workable in Central Asia. It has shaped Pakistan's foreign policy from the start. Islamabad employed the religious card; however, this tactic was unsuccessful; in fact, it pushed CARs away from Pakistan to some extent as the leaders of these countries wanted to confine Islam to the spiritual domain of the people's lives than political matters of the state. The establishment of these new Muslim countries was an opportunity to create a broad geographical alliance based on a shared religious identity that stretched from the Black Sea in the west to the Arabian Sea in the south. Pakistan's drive to strengthen its influence and power is related to its aspiration to lead the Islamic bloc. This idea has long influenced the minds of its policymakers, even though it has never materialized. The idea continues to influence the geo-strategic plans of the country. The region was seen as paving the way for a regional Muslim bloc in the 1990s by uniting the newly formed five Muslim nations in Central Asia, plus Turkey, Afghanistan, and Iran. This geo-political partnership was regarded to be crucial in safeguarding the interests of Pakistan in the region.

In Central Asia, Islamabad has also used multilateral strategies such as the Economic Cooperation Organization. As a result, all these new republics and Afghanistan were accepted into the ECO. This strategy was also a key element of using its religious card to bring these countries into own camp. Pakistan tried to strengthen its links with Central Asia via the ECO. Pakistan hoped to develop economic

and trade links with these countries by expanding its membership. However, the organisation was unable to achieve this goal.

Pakistan's other regional approach was to utilize the shared cultural identities while establishing its stake in Central Asia. Although the religious belief of Pakistan is Arabian, the adopted culture in Pakistan is Central Asian, not Arabian by its origin. The Central Asian dynasties and invaders greatly impact Pakistani culture and social norms (Javaid & Naseem, 2014). The old Silk Route played a crucial role in this cultural integration. Central Asia had significant cultural, religious, and economic ties with the territory that is now Pakistan. After their independence, Pakistan re-established its historical, religious, cultural, and economic ties with them in order to develop a strong and mutually beneficial relationship with them. Pakistan sought to improve its relationship with them by using cultural links. Although these nations have a common history and culture, they disagree on ethnic concerns, border issues, economic considerations, and foreign policy approaches. Though such ties may not ensure long-term cooperation, they do help to deepen the two areas overall ties. The long-term relationship needs a shared set of interests and mutual interdependence between the two regions, which may be achieved via joint projects such as the TAPI gas pipeline, TAP-500 and CASA-1000, and strong commercial ties.

Likewise, Pakistan also pursued the construction of rail, road, and energy pipeline strategies to fulfil its regional objectives. The importance of the country for Central Asia must be viewed in the context of the whole pipeline politics. It is the shortest transit route for the region, enabling it to export its products to the international market. But, due to the instability in Afghanistan, the construction and operation of these rail and road links and pipelines remain a question mark. Despite the risks, Pakistan continues to follow these initiatives and collaborate with CARs in building a transit route, which will undoubtedly materialise once Afghanistan is stable. Despite severe implementation challenges, it continues striving to sign various agreements with these nations as part of its endeavour to import energy resources, establish energy pipelines, and serve as a transit trade hub.

With these goals in mind, Pakistan joins every effort deemed beneficial to restore peace and a friendly government in Afghanistan. After the United States occupation of Afghanistan, new alliances and regional arrangements emerged. Central Asia has become a critical strategic zone for the United States. As Pakistan had supported the US in its war on terror, the US assisted Pakistan in improving relations with Central Asian Republics. Also, we supported the energy projects such as the TAPI gas pipeline. We CASA-1000 on political bases in order to derail the Iran-Pakistan gas pipeline and decrease the dependency of CARs on Russia by diversifying their energy export market. These were the most significant initiatives taken only for backing Islamabad's objectives in Central Asia, but it is already over with the US withdrawal from Afghanistan in August 2021. Now, Pakistan and Central Asian Republics need to find ways and means to uphold their mutual projects and complete them as soon as possible.

Conclusion

Central Asia and Pakistan are very important to each other from many perspectives. Their geo-economics, geo-political and geo-strategic positions have further increased their relevance. The active engagement of Pakistan in the region soon after the disintegration of the USSR and the emergence of Central Asian Republics has been motivated by different economic, political and strategic reasons. Pakistan has long routed significant cultural, religious, and economic ties with Central Asia. After the rise of the Central Asian Republics in 1991, Pakistan took due notice of the economic, political, and strategic opportunities created and sought to re-establish the centuries-old cultural and religious ties, and economic links in order to create complex interdependence in the region and to have strong mutually beneficial relations with these five countries. But despite interdependence, good working relationships with CARs, historic links, religious affiliations, and geographic closeness, the relations are yet to be improved to the potential level, and Pakistan is still not successful to fulfil its interests and take full benefits from the opportunities the region presents. Unfortunately, the geographic hindrance, Afghan issue, New Great Game, terrorism,

Indian influence in the region and lack of infrastructure are the important challenges among others that are faced by Pakistan in its engagement and achieving its interests in Central Asia.

Although significant obstacles limit Pakistan's interests and engagement in Central Asia, the country has a distinct geo-strategic advantage over other regional players. In addition, the Gwadar Port, CPEC, QTTA route through China, TAPI gas pipeline and CASA-1000 electricity transmission line, and the ongoing rail and road projects through Afghanistan connecting Central Asia to the Arabian Sea gave Pakistan good opportunities to get benefits from the potential of the region. In the near past, the normalization of ties with Russia, improvement in Sino-Pakistan relations, and the formulation of cooperative partnerships with Turkey and Iran have also facilitated Pakistan's interests in Central Asia.

Recommendations

1. Pakistan must strengthen its diplomatic and political ties with CARs. It will greatly help Pakistan fulfil its interests and strengthen its regional engagement. In this regard, both individual and collective initiatives will be helpful.
2. Additional measures in the fields of trade, people-to-people connections, tourism, collaboration in the field of education and research, rail and road construction, defence relations, and cultural activities to further develop their bilateral ties.
3. Pakistan must develop a dynamic and non-aligned foreign policy to seek multi-dimensional opportunities for getting maximum benefits from this natural resources-rich region. The cornerstones of Pakistan's approach should be cooperation and constructive engagement.
4. Being key players in Central Asia, the involvement of Turkey and Iran are also a matter of consideration for Pakistan. Both countries are Muslim, and Islamabad maintains friendly relations with them. Their involvement in Central Asia should not be seen adversely but as an opportunity. Pakistan should try to make good working relationships with these two countries in Central Asia.
5. Pakistan must formulate a clear foreign policy and vision toward the region in the changing regional security dimensions after the US withdrawal from Afghanistan. To make itself relevant in the Central Asian circle, Pakistan must better use its geo-strategic position to strengthen the interdependence of the two regions. It requires a new engagement goal that goes beyond the conferences and memorandums of understanding, which produce no tangible results on the ground.
6. CARs are improving their defence systems and troops, while Pakistan already has enough expertise in this regard. Pakistan should extend all possible support and assistance to them in improving their defence systems, reorganizing their troops, training in the training schools of the Pakistan army, and conducting regular joint military exercises.

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