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AFGHANISTAN VICTIM OF REGIONAL POWERS POLITICS AND COMPETITIONS

A modern day great game is playing out in inner Asia once again. Like the great game of the nineteenth century, it centers on Afghanistan, a land that falls outside every state, sphere of influence and has always been intensely hostile to foreigners, making it a perfect playing fields. China, India, Russia, Iran, and Pakistan are the major regional powers embroiled in competition in and around Afghanistan.

The great game construct offers much to our understanding of Afghanistan and the factors that will likely drive the competition there. This paper articulate the major regional powers primary national interests in Afghanistan and how those interests can be expected to play out in the context of the interests of major actors that are engaged in Afghanistan.

Key words: regional power, national interests, Afghanistan's neighbors, U.S. and NATO.

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**Ауғанстан – өңірлік жаңа саясаттың құрбаны
және ондағы бәсекелестік**

Заманауи үлкен ойын қайтадан ішкі Азияда ойналуда. Он тоғызыншы ғасырдың ұлы ойыны сияқты, ол Ауғанстанға, әр мемлекеттің шегінен тыс, ықпал ету саласына бағытталған және әрдайым шетелдіктерге қатысты қатты дұшпандылығын білдіруі оны тамаша ойын алаңы етеді. Қытай, Үндістан, Ресей, Иран және Пәкістан Ауғанстанда және оның айналасында бәсекелестікке тартылған негізгі өңірлік державалар болып табылады.

Ойынның керемет құрылымы біздің Ауғанстан мен ондағы бәсекелестікті ынталандыратын факторларды түсінуімізге көмектеседі. Бұл мақала Ауғанстандағы негізгі аймақтық державалардың негізгі ұлттық мүдделерін және бұл мүдделерді Ауғанстанға қатысы бар негізгі қатысушылардың мүдделері тұрғысынан қалай күтуге болатындығын тұжырымдайды.

Түйін сөздер: аймақтық күштер, ұлттық мүдделер, Ауғанстанның көршілері, АҚШ және НАТО.

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**Афганистан – жертва регионально-силовой
политики и конкуренции**

Современная великая игра снова разыгрывается во внутренней Азии. Как и великая игра девятнадцатого века, она сосредоточена на Афганистане, стране, которая выходит за пределы каждого государства, сфере влияния и всегда была крайне враждебной по отношению к иностранцам, что делает ее идеальным игровым полем. Китай, Индия, Россия, Иран и Пакистан являются основными региональными державами, вовлеченными в конкуренцию в Афганистане и вокруг него.

Великолепная игровая конструкция помогает нам воспринимать тех факторов стимулирующих нашего Афганистана и их конкурентов. В этой статье сформулированы

основные национальные интересы основных региональных держав в Афганистане и то, как эти интересы можно ожидать в контексте интересов главных действующих лиц, вовлеченных в Афганистан.

Ключевые слова: региональные силы, национальные интересы, соседи Афганистана, США и НАТО.

Introduction

Most analysts have realized that the war in Afghanistan cannot be fully understood in isolation. President Bush's Global War on Terror, generated much debate. By invading and putting boots on the ground in Afghanistan, the U.S. and NATO automatically became entangled in the "most perilous" region in the world. According to President Bill Clinton's assessments. There is no way now to stop the impact of the stakeholders' conflicting interests. This region was the victim of the "great game" between two imperial powers in the nineteenth century, and then again during the Cold War, and still suffers from their bitter legacies. Afghanistan forms a buffer between Central Asia and South Asia, regions which have been plagued by intra and inter-state disputes since the end of their respective colonial eras. Capturing or killing Bin-Laden might be the most important goal for the U.S. in Afghanistan; however, there is no denying the fact that the U.S., like other regional and international actors, also has strategic interests in this region.

This paper will touch on the conflicting interests of Afghanistan's neighbors and other important actors to highlight the negative impact of power politics on this conflict. Each of Afghanistan's neighbors has ethnic ties with Afghans, through which these neighbors have built spheres of influence in the country over the centuries. Without the help of and accommodation by these actors, the U.S. can forget about any positive outcome from this protracted war. In February 2009, General David Petraeus rightly said that "in fact, those seeking to help Afghanistan need to widen the aperture even farther, to encompass at least the Central Asian states, India, and even China and Russia"

This paper will review the conflicting interests of Pakistan, Iran, India, China, and Russia in Afghanistan and Central Asia. While discussing these states we will also consider the U.S.'s interests in them, which will provide readers a fair idea about the ongoing power politics in the region, apart from just the in Afghanistan.

Pakistan

After gaining independence, Pakistan's two major strategic goals involved Afghanistan: establishing friendly relations with Afghanistan and preventing a Kabul-Delhi alliance. However, Afghanistan's leadership had reservations about Pakistan. Foremost, many leaders in the regime doubted that Pakistan would be able to survive as a sovereign nation-state, given its complex dynamics. Afghanistan had reason to resist friendly relations with Pakistan since a failed Pakistani state would allow Afghanistan to seize some of Pakistan's territory.

In an attempt to take advantage of a young Pakistani state, the Afghans sought to exploit the newly formed government by renouncing the Durand Line, a British-drawn Pakistani-Afghan border agreement, and pursuing the creation of an independent Pashtun nation. Despite attempts to erase the Durand Line, the Afghans had no legitimate claim to reserve the international agreement, and the boundary still exists. Afghanistan's desire for an independent "Pashtunistan" gained little traction, with Pakistan balking at Afghanistan's claim for this independent state. Omer Sharifi, a chair at the American institute of Afghan affairs, notes that Pakistan believed "Afghanistan's concern for the unity of Pashtuns was not genuine because it did not include the Pashtuns (Pashtunistan) on its side of the line" (Budihas, 2011: 4). In essence, Afghanistan wanted to give the Pashtuns their own nation at the expense of Pakistan without giving up any of its own sovereign Pashtun territory for this independent Pashtun nation. The Pakistanis government, however, contended that because Pakistani Pashtuns chose to be Pakistanis in the 1947 Peshawar Referendum, the Pashtun population's majority vote was included in the new Islamic Nation of Pakistan. This majority vote referred to the Pashtun people who were living within Pakistani territory and not those Pashtuns in Afghanistan. Throughout the last seven decades, the Durand Line and the Pashtun population have added to the friction between the two nations.

Despite this tension, the relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan fluctuated between a civil friendship and a tenuous peace between partition and the 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan. Pakistan focused on maintaining and preventing a “Kabul-Delhi nexus” that would threaten its stability and growth (Khawar Hussain, 9). Until 1979 economic, religious and ethnic similarities between the Afghan and Pakistani neighbors provided a cooperative exchange and gradually improved their relationship (Ibid. 25). But Pakistan continued to worry that an Afghan-Indian alliance would lead to a two-front war against it, culminating in its ultimate demise and the division of the nation’s territory divided between the two neighboring countries.

The 1979 Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, however, rather than the feared Kabul-Delhi alliance, shaped Pakistan into what it is today. Stephen Tanner, links the Soviet Union’s invasion of Afghanistan to the Soviet-Afghan Friendship Treaty of 1921, an agreement which made the Russians believe they had a legitimate right to influence their southern neighbor (Tanner, 2002: 221). Ex-Pakistani Foreign Minister Abdul Sattar illuminated the strategic consequences of the Soviet invasion:

A Soviet military intervention provoked a deep sense of alarm in Pakistan. Suddenly the buffer disappeared and as the Soviet rulers consolidate their control in Afghanistan, they used it as a springboard to reach a warm water port on the Arabian Sea. Pakistan could not afford to acquiesce in the Soviet intervention, nor could it confront a superpower (Abdul Sattar, 1997: 462-463).

Pakistan faced a number of challenges in warding off a potential communist neighbor. Immediately upon the Soviet invasion, 3.2 million Afghan refugees fled across the border into Pakistan. Pakistan had to learn how to train and resource an Afghan Guerrilla movement in order to extricate the Soviet invaders and their puppet government from Afghanistan. The United States (U.S.) came to Pakistan’s assistance in hopes of preventing the creation of a communist Afghanistan. Thus, the Soviet invasion led to a partnership between the U.S. and Pakistan (Weinbaun, 1991: 497).

Major repercussion of the Afghan war included a destabilized central government, an increase in warlordism, a drastic rise in religious militancy and a major boost in international narco-trafficking. At the end of the Soviet war in Afghanistan, Pakistan’s primary strategic goal was the installation of a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul (Khawar Hussain, 44).

However, after the Najibullah Regime fell in 1992, warlordism prevailed in Afghanistan. Pakistan

recognized that in order to see a pro-Pakistani government in Kabul, it would have to shift its strategic approach. This anarchical environment in Afghanistan contributed to the country’s increasingly negative influences on Pakistan. In the last four years of the Najibullah regime, the rise of a Pakistani-friendly Afghan Pashtun Taliban force under Mullah Omar seemed the logical choice for bringing stability to Afghanistan and providing Pakistan a strategic alliance. Pakistan’s military provided the Taliban with the requisite resources and training needed to subjugate Afghanistan. Additionally, Pakistani religious leaders provided the Taliban with additional resources, money and recruits through its global Islamic networks (Ibid, 52-53).

Despite help from Pakistan, the Taliban struggled militarily with former warlords, who later evolved into the Northern Alliance Coalition. The Taliban’s enforcement of strict Sharia laws and its brutal treatment of the civilian populace brought it negative international media attention, resulting in increased pressure on countries – specifically Pakistan- not to support the Taliban (Rashid, 2000: 75-87). When al Qaeda attacked the U.S. on 11/9/2001, Pakistan was at a crossroads in its official sponsorship of the Taliban and face widespread international repercussions. Pakistan officially chose to cease its support of the Taliban. However, there still remained warranted suspicion of Pakistan’s unofficial support of the Taliban-particularly as evidenced by safe havens for Taliban members within Pakistan (Zahid Hussain, 2007: 44-50).

Since NATO forces in Afghanistan initiated Operation Enduring Freedom, Pakistan’s relationship with its neighbor has followed a troubled trajectory that has further complicated its own political structure and strained its economic well-being to the brink of catastrophic financial collapse. According to Kamal Matinuddin, Pakistan’s key objectives in Afghanistan before the NATO invasion had been:

- the creation of a durable peace with an Afghan government that is pro-Pakistan;
- the repatriation of Afghan refugees from Pakistani soil;
- access into Central Asian markets; and
- a safe route for oil and gas pipeline from Turkmenistan to the Arabian Sea (Kamal Matinuddin. 1999: 141).

However, with the NATO invasion, these goals became loftier, in part because the Pakistan government did not expect the Taliban issue to affect it-and its international status-as greatly it has. Currently, Pakistan’s failure to achieve these

strategic goals through an enduring partnership with Afghanistan results from a number of culminating factors that are intertwined with its western neighbor.

The relationship between Afghanistan and Pakistan is complex and controversial. Historic differences rub shoulders with recent and more pressing disputes. Pakistan's problematic relationship with India, its willingness to sponsor terrorism and its tendency to flip between military dictatorship and weak and corrupt civilian rule, continue to make Pakistan unattractive as a neighbor. The Pakistani intelligence service still appear to be supporting the U.S. and the Afghan Taliban in a high risk 'double game'. Pakistan would prefer a Pashtun-dominated and passive client state to its west, but Afghanistan clearly has no immediate desire to fill this role. This has been a source of a major friction between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pakistan's interventions in today and future will remain self-interested at best and malign at worst (Foxley, 2010: 3-4).

Iran

With the Iranian revolution and then the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979, Iran's objectives in Afghanistan changed. The U.S. hostage crisis of 1980 in Tehran transformed two former allies into enemies. Although Iran staunchly condemned the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, it still maintained amiable relations with the USSR. During the Soviet occupation, Iran's policy was confined to creating an "ideological sphere of influence" among the 20% Shi'ite population in Afghanistan. Since then, Iran has had a security-centered foreign policy of protecting and expanding its interests, and neutralizing the perceived threat from the U.S., a threat Tehran regards as existential. A stable Afghanistan, with Herat as a buffer zone, and a friendly government in Kabul is in Iran's interests. Throughout its occupation, the Soviets kept a "hands-off" policy toward the Shi'ite population in Afghanistan, a concession to the Khomeini regime. Consequently, there was no resistance from this sect of Muslims against the Soviets in Afghanistan.

At the international conference prior to the Soviet withdrawal, Washington and Moscow pledged non-interference in Afghanistan. Unfortunately, their pledges created a dangerous vacuum, sucking Pakistan, India, Iran and Saudi Arabia into proxy warfare during the post-Soviet period (Mohsin, 2002:235-239). Saudi Arabia sought expansion of *Wahabism* in Afghanistan and the Central Asia Regions, while Pakistan sought a Pashtun-

dominated government which would accept the Durand Line as a border and allow this to become a lucrative bridge connecting the Central Asian Countries with Arabian Sea. Such developments would also provide Pakistan with "strategic depth" against its archrival, India.

Iran's and India's objectives clashed with Pakistan's and Saudi Arabia's. Because of this, Afghanistan remained area for proxy war battles between 1989 and 1996. Even before the Soviet withdrawal, Ali Akbar Hashemi-Rafsanjani announced in 1987 in Moscow that "we are prepared to assist you, so that after departure there will be no U.S. domination in Afghanistan". Tehran, subsequently worked to expand its "political sphere of influence" by encouraging Shi'ite groups and non-Pashtun speaking groups (e.g. Dari) to form the Hezb-e-Wahdat party in 1990, which later allied itself with the NA (north alliance) (and with both Tajik commander Ahmad Shah Masud and Uzbek commander Rashid Dostum) (Ibid, 2002:240-241).

The Taliban takeover of Kabul in 1996 with Pakistani and Saudi assistance delivered a severe blow to Iran in Afghanistan; Iran openly supported the NA. The NA continued to prove a challenge for the Taliban since it maintained its sovereignty in the Panjshir valley. Although the U.S. refrained from openly supporting the Taliban in order to avoid further damaging relations with Russia and Iran, the U.S. signaled its tacit support to Pakistan and Saudi Arabia (Rashid, 2001: 241). Meanwhile, Pakistan announced development of Gwadar port in 2000, Iran started work on its port in Chabahar with Indian assistance: the aim is for this to provide Central Asia with access to warm waters. India is also building a road from Chabahar, running parallel to the Pakistan-Iran border before entering Afghanistan, on its way to the Central Asia Countries (Haider, 2005: 96).

Clearly, the U.S. does not want Iran to benefit from achieving the shortest pipeline between Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan to Arabian Sea (Rashid, 2001: 155) – and not when UNOCAL (American oil company) and DELTA (Saudi oil company), along with India and Pakistan, would be major beneficiaries of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) Pipelines project instead (Mohsin, 2002:243). Knowing this, it then serves Iran's and Russia's purposes to keep the region unstable by backing an anti-Taliban alliance so that U.S. pipelines planned to run through Afghanistan and Pakistan are never built (Rashid, 2001: 179).

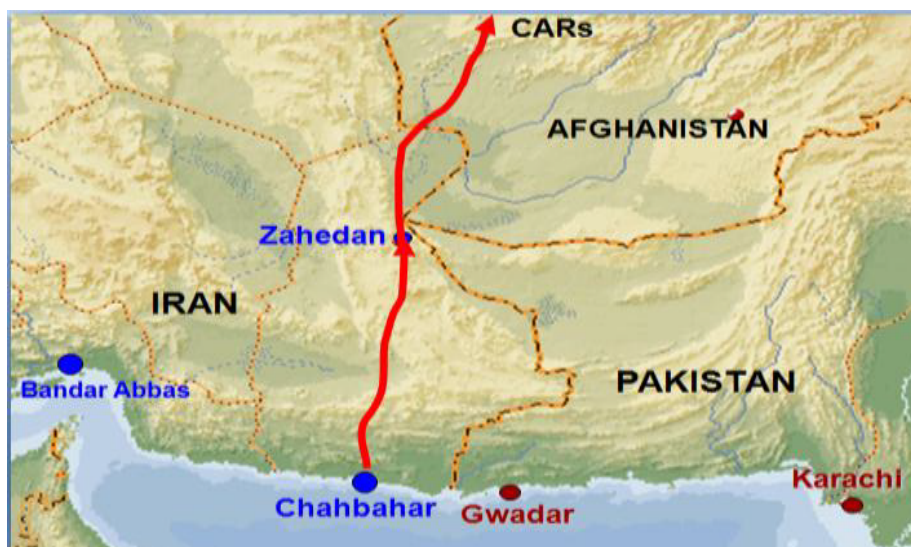


Figure 1 – Chabahar port and construction of road by India to Afghanistan

The dismantling of the Taliban regime by the U.S. in the aftermath of 9/11/2001 amounted to an unintended favor to Iran from its enemy. Ironically, U.S. Policies helped Iran to regain its regional power status by removing Iran's major threats in its immediate neighborhood: namely, the Taliban and Saddam Hussain regimes (Mohsin, 2002:247). After the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iran's focus shifted from Afghanistan to Iraq. Within a short span of time, Iran extended its sphere of influence in Iraq. Today, Iran possess better levers for bargaining with the U.S. than it did in 2001- being in the middle of two theaters in which America is embroiled in protracted insurgencies. Iran has considerable influence in both these theaters, and in the region. Iran's unflinching stance on its nuclear program can be seen as one consequence of these developments, which have emboldened Iran to stay the course given U.S. vulnerabilities and U.S.'s deteriorating international standing. Tellingly, China has refused to support any tougher actions against Iran over its nuclear program. Although Secretary Clinton warned China about "economic insecurity and diplomatic isolation" (Afrasiabi, 2010), Beijing is itself upset about the U.S. decision to sell \$6.4 billion worth of arms to Taiwan. Consequently, the U.S. may not get the support it needs from the UN Security Council for tougher action against Iran from either China or Russia.

As Western pressure has built over Iran's nuclear program, the U.S. has noted Iran's increasing support to the Taliban (Bruno, 2009). Iran has the ability to pull Hezbollah's strings in Lebanon against

Israel, raise Shi'ite resistance in Iraq, and continue providing assistance to the Taliban in Afghanistan. While the U.S. hopes to involve Iran in a dialogue on Afghanistan, the U.S. itself is allegedly involved in supporting a militant group called "Jundullah" in Iran, which has sanctuaries in neighboring Pakistan's Baluchistan province (Sahimi, 2010). Iran's suspicions have created further a rift between both neighbors. Iran also accuse the U.S. and UK of sponsoring the opposition led post-presidential election protests in Tehran.

The absence of Iran from the London conference of February 28, 2010 on Afghanistan should not be taken lightly, since it is an important stake holder with considerable influence in Afghanistan. For as long as the U.S. is present on the ground in Iraq and Afghanistan, the possibility of an Israel or joint U.S.-Israel strike against Iran's nuclear sites remains low due to the U.S.'s extremely vulnerable position in both theaters of war and Iran's improved position in the region, as well as its relations with Russia and China.

India

Indian foreign policy is based on being an "undisputed champion of all no-nonsense realists, a monster of cunning and bluntness". Or so wrote Kautilya, an ancient Indian in his Arthashastra, or science of politics, in 300 B.C.E. (Boesche, 2002: ix) Kautilya's recent equivalent is Machiavelli. In Kautilya's analysis of international relations, a leader must assume that "all neighboring states

are enemies, whereas, by contrast, any state on the opposite side of the neighboring state is a potential ally” (Ibid, 3). Or, the enemy of my enemy is my best friend. A close analysis of India’s relations with its immediate neighbors confirms Indian faith in the practice of this age old political philosophy.

During the Soviet occupation of Afghanistan, India, a champion of the Non-Aligned Movement maintained a neutral position. However, in hindsight, we can say India backed the Soviet occupation in order to retain its influence in Afghanistan and to assure it would continue to receive supply of military hardware from its major supplier, the USSR. This support was also a result of U.S. and Pakistan working together against the Soviets in Afghanistan. In the course of this, the U.S. overlooked Pakistan’s nuclear program and resumed military and financial aid to Pakistan. Unfortunately, 9/11/2001 helped re-constitute closer Pakistan-U.S. relations, a development that India resents.

In view of South Asian turbulent history and India’s political philosophy, its principal goal in Afghanistan after 9/11 has been a pro-India government that will protect Delhi’s interests. India would like to deny the return of the Taliban or any pro-Pakistan government to Kabul in order to keep Pakistan under constant threat from two fronts. India also seeks to deny the use of Afghanistan as a base for terrorism in India. Finally, India seeks access to the Central Asia Countries for economic and security reasons.

After the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan, the Jihadists’ felt emboldened as victors; having defeated a superpower in Afghanistan. The U.S. came under increasing pressure from India in 1992-1993 to declare Pakistan a state sponsor of terrorism (. India accused Pakistan of Shifting the Jihadists’ bases from Pakistan to Afghanistan under the Mujahedeen allies and later the Taliban. Mullah Omar announced in 1998 that “we support the Jihad in Kashmir”. He also accepted that certain Afghans were fighting against the Indian occupation forces voluntarily (Rashid, 2001: 186).. India sought to deny this ‘strategic depth’ to Pakistan in Afghanistan. The hijacking of an Indian passenger plane in 1999, and its landing at Kandahar airport, exacerbated Indian fears about Afghanistan’s role in India’s security paradigm. India had to release Masood Azhar (leader of Jaish-e-Muhammad) and Omar Sheikh (Daniel Pearl’s kidnapper) with the hostages. Both reportedly fled to Pakistan (Musharraf, 2006: 225).

With the collapse of the Soviet Union, India gradually began to seek better relations with the U.S. India Also declared Central Asia to be “our

near abroad” in 1997, after proclaiming its ambition to become a global power (Sharma, 2009: 2). India’s overarching goals in Central Asia are to: Secure a diverse energy base in competition with China; keep a check on the radical Islamist threat; check drug trafficking, a major source of terrorist financing; use “India’s commercial potential in the region to counter Pakistan’s attempts of blunting the Indian presence through its geostrategic location” (Ibid, 1). For instance, India is engaged in a 1680km-long pipeline project that will link it with Turkmenistan through Afghanistan and Pakistan. The Indian state-owned, Videsh Oil Company has also invested in Kazakhstan, a country that has large quantities of enriched uranium (Ibid, 4). This is significant, especially after India received its NSG waiver as a result of Indo-U.S. civilian nuclear cooperation.

It is worth noting that India, unlike Iran, has long refused to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty. However, despite this, the Bush administration went ahead with a civil nuclear deal with India in an effort to open India to American defense companies (Lockheed Martin alone hopes to do \$15 billion worth of business within five years), (Mishra, 2010).

Also, Tajikistan, an important CAR, function as a critical channel for funneling support to the NA in Afghanistan for India, Iran, and Russia (India provided \$8 million to the NA in 2001), ((Sharma, 2009: 6). Another Indian strategic arrangement with Tajikistan is acquisition of its first foreign “outpost” at Ayni airbase, where India has stationed a squadron of MiG29s. This enables India to respond to threats emanating from Afghanistan, Central Asia, and Pakistan (Ibid, 7). From Pakistan’s perspectives, India’s construction of the Road from the Iranian port of Chabahar to Afghanistan increases its influence in Afghanistan. With its military base in Tajikistan, India is achieving a “strategic encirclement” of Pakistan, and to some extent of China, too.

In the post-Taliban period, India has heavily invested in development work in Afghanistan to protect its goals there and in the CARs. India’s pledged assistance to Afghanistan is over \$1.2 billion in a variety of sectors. The Indian government has delivered projects well in time and with consistence. While India is thus viewed as a reliable partner, Pakistan has serious concerns about India’s RAW activities in Baluchistan and the NWFP provinces in Pakistan (Ahmed. 2010: 2).

Mr. Karl Indurfurth, a former senior U.S. diplomat, advised in January 2008 that “Kabul should address Pakistan’s concerns on India, and its allies should urge Kabul to officially accept the Durand Line as the border between the two

South Asian neighbors” (Ibid, 3). Even General McChrystal’s report, ‘Commander’s Initial Assessment,’ dated 30 August 2009 makes the critical point: “While Indian activities largely benefit the Afghan People, increasing Indian influence in Afghanistan is likely to exacerbate regional tensions and Pakistani countermeasures in Afghanistan or India”. Interestingly, in a joint statement issued after a meeting between the Indian and Pakistani Prime Ministers at NAM summit at Sharm-el-Sheikh, Egypt, on 16 July 2009, India agreed to share information about terrorism in Baluchistan (Ahmed. 2010: 5). India’s Prime Minister, Mr. Manmohan Singh, stirred up heated reactions from his Congress Party and Hindu nationalists (the Bahartia Janata Party) over this statement –seen as a confession of India’s involvement in Pakistan.

China

Observing calmly; secure our position; cope with affairs calmly; hide our capacities and bide our time; be good at maintaining a low profile; and never claim leadership (U.S. Congress, 2008: 8). Deng Xiaoping

China’s interests in the region are mainly: to have a pro-China regime in Kabul that does not allow the export of Islamist ideology to China; to maintain a strategic relationship with Pakistan, which serves China’s interests in the CARs and South Asia, and protects its Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) in the Indian Ocean; and to support a counter to Indian and U.S. influence in its neighborhood. China showed little interest in Afghanistan previously. However, with Afghanistan’s openness to foreign investment after the removal of the Taliban regime and with its own growing energy needs, China has invested \$3,5 billion in the Aynak copper fields – the biggest direct foreign investment in Afghanistan’s history (Norling, 2009). As China is often said to be the U.S.’s closest near peer competitor, China’s increasing involvement in Afghanistan conflicts with U.S. interests in the region.

China’s ‘wild west’ province, Xinjiang, share an insignificant stretch of border with Afghanistan. Altogether, Xinjiang province is bounded by Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and India. The Muslim Uighur community has been struggling for greater autonomy from the Han-dominated Chinese central government for decades. Xinjiang remains indispensable to China because of its abundance of natural resources and its location with regard to the CARs (Haider, 2005: 523). The Muslim majority Uighurs have been systemically

reduced from 90% of Xinjiang’s population in 1945 to 45-50% today due to increased Han settlements (Ibid, 525). With the building of the Karakorum highway, linking Xinjiang province with the northern areas of Pakistan, China’s fears of greater radicalization of Uighurs have also increased. Pakistan has taken all measures in its power to allay Chinese fears about any support from extremist political Islamist parties in Pakistan.

The Karakorum highway has both economic and military strategic significance. According to India, construction of this road is “a military sinister movement directed against India (Ibid, 523). Perhaps India says this because China is such a reliable partner of Pakistan’s, having provided considerable military hardware and assisted Pakistan in development of its nuclear and missile technology. China has always been supportive of Pakistan’s stand on Kashmir and provides considerable political support to Pakistan in all international forums. Sino-Indian relations have been tense for two reasons: the territorial disputes over Aksai Chin (Kashmir), and Arunachal Pradesh (90000 sq km), and Indian support to the exiled Dali Lama regime of Tibet.

Among the major reasons for strained relations between the U.S. and China are: Taiwan, the status of Dali Lama, North Korea, and China’s record human rights-as per U.S. perceptions. China is an emerging superpower, which automatically puts it on a potential confrontation path with the U.S. The U.S. “Nuclear Posture Review” in March 2002, and U.S. Congress’s “Report of U.S.-China Security Review Commission” in July 2002, concluded that China’s economic and military growth would pose a serious national security threat to the U.S., and suggested “rolling back” bilateral cooperation, especially in trade and high technology (Oleksandar, 2003: 9).

As China grows, secure access to markets and diverse energy resources are essential to it maintaining and sustaining its growth. Against this backdrop is the need to secure the SLOCs in the Indian Ocean. China currently consumes 7.58 million barrels of oil a day and is the world’s second largest consumer of oil after the U.S. (BY 2015 this will increase to 10-12 million barrels per day), (Ibid, 10). Eighty percent of the oil China needs passes through the Malacca straits, fifty percent of which comes from the Middle East (Persian Gulf), (Ibid, 10-12). China feels that its SLOCs can be all too conveniently threatened by U.S. and Indian dominance of the Indian Ocean, as well as by the U.S. naval presence in the South China Sea. For their part, the U.S. and India suspect China of

pursuing a “string of pearls” strategy, which aims to secure ports along the rim of the Indian Ocean in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and Bangladesh in order to counter the vulnerability of its SLOCs. The Gwadar port in Pakistan and the port in Myanmar

can be linked to China’s Xinjiang and Yunnan provinces, respectively, through pipelines that will further minimize China’s dependence on the flow of oil through the Indian Ocean (Johnston, 2008: 27-50).

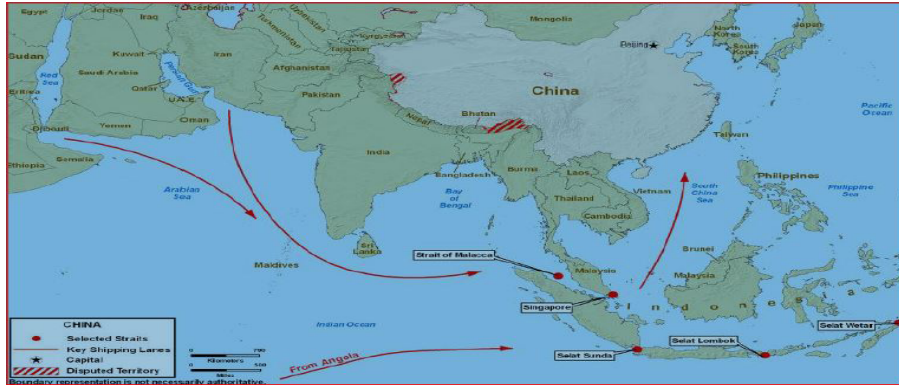


Figure 2 – China’s critical sea lanes and disputed territory with India
 (Downloaded from DoD’s, Military Power of the People’s Republic of China, 12)

To keep its options for alternative energy supplies open, china has shored up its overland sources from Kazakhstan (via a pipeline), Russia (via rail, with plans for a pipeline), and Turkmenistan (via pipeline), (Denmark and Patel, 2009: 27). China cannot totally rely on oil from

E CARs and Russia because the overland pipelines will be passing through Xinjiang province where there is the Uighur movement, and because relations between Russia and China are “fraught with cross-currents of competition, suspicion, and Russian energy policy paralysis” (Ibid, 28)0. Since Russia continues to influence the CARs from every single, China cannot put all its egges into one basket.

Pakistan envisaged developing the Gwadar port as an outlet to the Central Asian energy resources after the CARs’ independence. During President Musharaf’s tenure, Pakistan signed an agreement with China to develop Gwadar, for which China agreed to finance 80% of the project costs. President Musharaf expressed his gratitude to China by saying, “it is the friendship between China and Pakistan that made my dreams of Gwadar come true. We thank China”. The Gwadar deepwater port has the capacity to become a major shipping hub for Central Asia, China, and the Middle East, as well as for bringing China most of the crude oil it needs (Chu, 2007).

The U.S. and India fear that this is not merely a commercial project, but one which could be easily used and developed for military purposes in the

future. Because of Gwadar’s location, Bluchistan province assumes strategic significance within the overall regional geo-political game (Keplan, 2009). That makes Baluchistan of especial significance to both India and Iran, which further complicates Pakistan’s concerns.

Russia

We cannot help seenig the uproar stirred up in some Western countries over the energy resources of the Caspian. Some seek to exclude Russia from the game and undermines its interests. The so-called pipeline war in the region is part of this game.-Boris Yeltsin (1998), (Rashid, 2001: 156).

Before exploring Russia’s principle interest, it will be prudent to have a look at U.S. interests in this region. When President Bush first met Putin on June 16, 2001, he expressed his feelings that, “Russia and the U.S. are not enemies, they do not threaten each other, and they could be good allies. Russia can be a strong partner; more than people can imagine” (Olexsandar, 2003: 4). After 9/11, these former antagonists grew closer in light of the threat posed by international terrorism. Moscow did not object when the U.S. approached Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan for military bases. Regrettably, the unilateral renunciation of the Anti-Ballistic Missile treaty of 1972 by President Bush on December 13, 2001 did alarm Russia.

The U.S. investment in Afghanistan and its engagement there and in Central Asia represents a long-term endeavor to meet its interests. The major U.S. interests in the region can be summarized as: defense of America and Europe from Islamic terrorism after the 9/11 attacks; the maintenance of access to airspace and territory in Asia; development of alternative energy sources; and promotion of democracy in the CARs and South Asia (Blank, 2007: 312). Consequently, removing the Taliban in 2001 and efforts thereafter to establish a viable and legitimate Afghan government under President Karzai have been critical to helping the U.S. achieve these goals.

Essentially, the U.S. wants to end Russia's monopoly over the distribution of oil and gas from the CARs so that the U.S. and Western firms can compete in the exploration and distribution of these natural resources. The U.S. also seeks to isolate Iran from the CARs by urging states to bypass Iran, and threatening sanctions against those that do not comply with U.S. wishes (Ibid, 313). Two projected

pipelines that bypass Iran and Russia are the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan (BTC) and TAPI. Not surprisingly, the U.S. doesn't object to them.

Today Moscow, Beijing, and Tehran are countering U.S. interests, as they view America's political and military presence as a threat to their security and interests in the region. Prior to 9/11, Russia had serious reservations about NATO's eastward expansion. President Putin had proclaimed that enlargement of NATO was "not necessary" (Oleksandar, 2003: 15). Russia also wary of the U.S. desire to bring the CARs under its influence for all the reasons mentioned above. The Cold War does not seem to have ended entirely as Russia struggles to retain influence over its former states, while denying the same to the U.S. and the West. Russia supported the U.S.'s 'war on terror,' as in return, it received a free hand in Chechnya. Like Iran, Russia with a gained from Taliban's removal. Still, Russia does not wish to have an indefinite American presence in such close proximity.

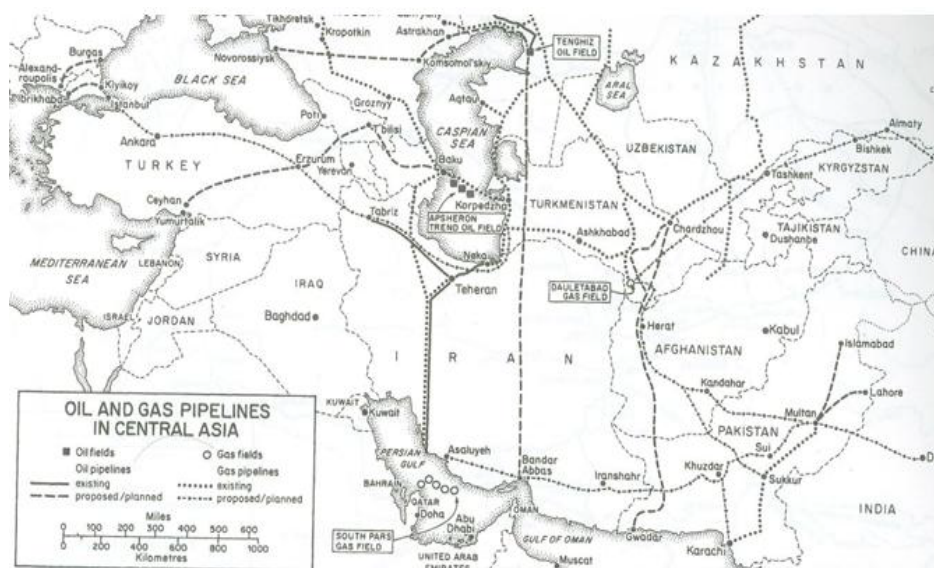


Figure 3 – Existing and projected oil and gas pipelines from the CARs (Copied from Rashid's, Taliban)

In order to check U.S. influence in the region, Moscow has increased its cooperation with China, Iran, and North Korea. Russia has established a "gas cartel" under the guise of an energy club under the auspices of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization forum, with Iran, Algeria, and Qatar also as members. Meanwhile, through the "KazMuniGaz deal" all natural gas produced in the CARs will be controlled by Gazprom, the world's largest extractor

of natural gas. This implies that natural gas from any CARs is bound to transit through Kazakhstan and Russia on its way to market –putting Russia in firm control of these vast resources.

This Russia monopoly over natural gas poses a threat to European energy security, as well as limiting the CARs' freedom. But, for Russia, any outlet for oil and gas from Central Asia on the Arabian Sea or through the Caspian Sea to Turkey would be a

strategic, economic, and political disaster. Russia has shown its resolve to intervene militarily in states if its interests are threatened. Russia's spearheading of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), with the USSR's former states as members, is another effort by Russia to deny these states falling under NATO's shadow, as well as preventing the CARs from providing any military base to the U.S. or NATO without Russia's approval.

For instance, under pressure from Moscow, Uzbekistan ordered the closure of the Karshi-Khanabad (K2) U.S. military base in 2005 (Blank, 2007: 314-317). The American's base at Manas, Kyrgyzstan may also close under similar pressure. In July 2005, the Kyrgyz government demanded an increase in rent to which the U.S. succumbed by pledging an additional \$200 million interest-free loan. General Richard Myers rebuked Russia and China over their pressure on Kyrgyzstan when he said, "it looks to me like two very large countries were trying to bully some smaller countries" (Rashid, 2008: 340-341).

Pakistan seeks the pipeline projects from the CARs, all of which will keep alive U.S., Russian, Indian, Chinese, and Iranian interests – and potential interference. Since Pakistan holds a pivotal geostrategic location with regard to the successful completion of these pipeline projects, it will be subject to these competing interests-in addition to those sparked by the Afghanistan war. Russia has also not forgotten Pakistan's role during the "Afghan Jihad," which led to its disintegration later. This also may be a contributing factor in Pakistan's volatile current situation and a source of destabilization.

Conclusion

From a brief review of the conflicting interests of the important actors in the region, it is clear that peripheral gestures by the U.S. aimed at increasing cooperation will not end the fundamental disagreements that already exist among them. There are serious points of contention that prevent the development of amicable relations among some of these states. What is required, instead, are means of building trust and reciprocity instead of bulldozing along through bilateralism. The support that the U.S. received from friends and foes alike after the 9/11 attacks has largely dissipated due to Washington's myopic concerns. In order to advance genuine cooperation and build stable relations, the U.S. needs to take a leading role in removing, for instance Russian, Chinese, Pakistani, and Iranian

fears about the U.S.'s protracted presence in the region; these fears are genuine if one bears in mind the nature of their past and existing rivalries. From the perspective of most of other regional players, the U.S. does not belong in the region and, thus, its presence is considered to be interference in others' domain.

It will be impossible for the U.S. to sustain its presence in Afghanistan without reasonably accommodating these other states' genuine political, economic, and security concerns. If we include Iraq, too, in the equation, the U.S. is in a bind. So far, its actions have done more harm than good to international relations and to the conflict in Afghanistan. Ironically, the only two states with which the U.S. enjoys good relations in this region are Pakistan and India.

In view of Pakistan's geo-strategic location, the U.S. has little choice but to rely on Pakistan with regard to the Afghanistan war and pursuit of the U.S.'s legitimate interests in Central Asia. Regrettably, the history of U.S.-Pakistan relations has not always been good, and the U.S. has not done all it can to re-cement relations. However, now, for an honorable exit and protection of its interests in the region, the U.S. is in dire need of assistance, which in turn requires cooperation from all the important actors in the region, but especially as it finds itself at this most critical juncture of its protracted campaign.

Throughout this paper, the impact of regional disputes has been highlighted so that readers may understand the dynamic nature of this overlooked aspect of the conflict. A prudent U.S. policy toward the region can facilitate a peaceful resolution of many of these disputes, something the U.S. must strive to achieve if it wants to remain engaged in the region for the long-term. Among other things, as the U.S. encourages India, Pakistan, and Afghanistan to settle their disputes peacefully, either bilaterally or through mediation, it should guarantee them security until such time as the peace process yields effective, demonstrable peace. For its part, too, the U.S. needs to review its policy towards China, Iran, and Russia so that these states do not feel threatened by the U.S.'s long-term presence in the region, or else another Cold War will ruin the peace. In essence, much depends on how far the U.S. is ready to go beyond its current world view in order to take into account the world view of others. Only by adopting a balance foreign policy can the U.S. help ensure a durable peace in this or any other region of the world.

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