

India's Strategic Role in Central Asia: *An Analysis of Bilateral and Multilateral Cooperations and the China Factor*



Image 1.0: Arrival of first Silk Road train in Teheran on the 15th of February 2016¹. The flags on the train represent the nations of China, Iran, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan.

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¹ Source: <https://www.yahoo.com/news/first-silk-road-train-arrives-tehran-china-134703954.html?ref=gs> (Published February 15th 2016; accessed October 6th 2016)

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Preface

The writing process for this master thesis has been difficult. Fortunately the support of family, friends and acquaintances has enabled me to complete my second master thesis. They were willing to listen to my continuous tales about my interest for India and the motivation problems I sometimes had to start writing. I want to thank all of them and in particular my supervisor, Professor P.R. Kanungo. He was able to steer me out of the swamp and onto the dry lands. I required this course direction, because of my significant lack of knowledge about how to write a thesis in the discipline of International Relations. I had no insight in the level of abstraction and the theoretical jargon that was required in writing about India's strategic role in Central Asia. I thus required some time in familiarizing myself with the topic, the discipline and its discussions.

At the same time my background as an anthropology major enabled me to look with a fresh look to certain papers. Some texts for example make a strategic analysis of India's relationships with a certain Central Asian country like Kazakhstan or Turkmenistan. The level of abstraction is quite high and therefore, as an anthropologist, it often seems impossible to make certain statements about the relationship between countries. Observations about a nation's economy or decision making processes sometimes seem far-fetched. Surely such broad and general statements are possible, but an anthropologist is often more involved in the research of small scale social – cultural dynamics. Based on that kind of research it is a generally known fact that institutions and (international) arrangements can be rather fragile and outcomes of human behavior on a large scale to be highly unpredictable. Nevertheless I have tried to stick to (my perception about) the rules of research on such a scale. And perhaps my critical eye as an outsider has contributed to scientific discussions within the discipline of International Relations.

Terms & Abbreviations

16 + 1/CEEC: Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries	EU: European Union
ADB: Asian Development Bank	ESCAP: Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific
AIIB: Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank	GAIL: Gas Authority of India Limited
ALTID: Asia Land Transportation Infrastructure Development	G20: Group of 20 (Biggest Economies in the World)
APEC: Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation	INSTC: International North South Transit Corridor
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations	IPI: Iran Pakistan India
ASSR: Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic	MOU: Memorandum of Understanding
BCIM: Bangladesh China India Myanmar	Nabucco: Proposed pipeline from Europe to Central Asia, backed by the European Union
BIMTEC: Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation	NATO: North Atlantic Treaty Organization
BRICS: Brazil Russia India China South Africa	NDB: New Development Bank
CACGP: Central Asia China Gas Pipeline	NSG: Nuclear Suppliers Group
CAREC: Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation	NSTC: NorthSouth Transport Corridor
CARs: Central Asian Republics	OBOR: One Belt One Road
CASA – 1000: Central Asia South Asia Electricity Transmission and Trade Project	OIC: Organization of Islamic Conference
CECA: Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	ONGC: Oil and Natural Gas Corporation
CICA: Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia	OPEC: Oil Producing and Exporting Countries
CIS: Commonwealth of Independent States	OSCE: Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe
CPEC: China Pakistan Economic Corridor	P5 + 1: Joint Program of Action (U.S. sanctions Iran)
CSTO: Collective Security Treaty Organization	PCEEC: Pakistan China Energy Economic Corridor
CU: Customs Union	PFP: Partnership for Peace Program
EAEU: Eurasian Economic Union	SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
EurAsEC: Eurasian Economic Community	SCO: Shanghai Cooperation Organization
EEU: Eurasian Economic Union	SEZ: Special Economic Zone
	Shanghai-5: Predecessor of SCO (see above)
	SU: Soviet Union
	TAPI: Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India

TPP: Trans Pacific Partnership

TRACECA: Transport Corridor Europe Caucasus Asia

TUTAP: Turkmenistan Uzbekistan Tajikistan Afghanistan Pakistan

USSR: United States of Soviet Russia

Introduction

Central Asia is a region that can be of significant interest to India, not least of all due to its large untapped reserves of natural reserves of hydrocarbons and minerals. Kazakhstan for example has the 11th highest oil reserve in the world (Lee & Gill 2015, 112). This poses for India an interesting potential as it has almost no natural reserves of its own and was therefore also the 4th largest importer of LNG in the world in 2013 (Kulkarni & Nathan 2016, 183). Yet India is not



Image 2.0: Central Asia. The country above Kazakhstan is Russia.
Source: www.google.co.in/maps (accessed October 6th 2016).

the only one interested in the region. Powers like Russia, China, the United States and the European Union have shown an increasing interest in the region with their own multilateral projects, leading some to speak about a revival of the ‘great game’ that occurred in the 19th century between the Russian and British empires (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 188).

Although boundaries are blurred, the region here is considered as consisting of: Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan (see image 2.0 above). India is geographically not connected to this region and also has quite different relationships with each of the countries in size of its trade and political connections. Since recently it also has to consider the emergence of a wealthy China that is increasingly engaging with the region through its OBOR policy (since recently called ‘Belt & Road’), which is seen as a revival of the Silk Road and is partly funded by a \$40 billion dollar fund from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank or BRICS bank (Fallon 2015, 140). In order to understand the significance of this contemporary new ‘great game’ in Central Asia for India’s interests, the goal of this thesis is *to understand India’s strategic role in Central Asia and why certain factors have contributed to the position it remains in today*. This requires multiple perspectives, e.g. an

historical. Yet at first attention will be given to finding a suitable theoretical approach and question for analyzing the role of India's strategic cooperations in the 'politics among nations'.

Theory: Hans Morgenthau

The latter term refers to a theoretical book by Hans Morgenthau, often regarded as the "...father of modern realism (Little 2007, 137)". This theoretical strand within the discipline of International Relations is often seen as being preoccupied with power politics (Lamont 2015, 77). Morgenthau's theoretical stance on international politics has often been interpreted as states acting in anarchy and using (the threat of) force to further their goals or protect their (national) interests (Neacsu 2010, 11). States collaborating in the international domain would be motivated primarily by security, self-interest and competition (Chidley 2014, 155). Due to the limited interpretations of his work in general Morgenthau was, and sometimes still is, regarded as a – moral. This view of him and his work was subsequently used to legitimize certain actions like "... rearmament at both strategic and conventional levels and to rationalize the expansion of the 'struggle for power'... (Neacsu 2010, 16)" in the period of the Cold War.

More recent reinterpretations of Morgenthau's work attempt to show that there is more to Morgenthau's work than at first glance, although some acknowledge that it is also the style and unclear reasoning of Morgenthau's work that has led to his misinterpretation (Neacsu 2010, 18). Researcher Neacsu argues that Morgenthau's concept of power and view on international relations was not about the procurement of material power, but rather the power to create meaning or meaning imposition as power and in difference with the perspective of power as influence (Neacsu 2010, 32). This means that according to Neacsu the center of Morgenthau's theory was formed by the power of ideas, norms, values and meaning. This instead of materialistic power by force or size and thus 'influence'. But does such a (constructivist) view on international relations mean that no attention should be paid any longer to security/threat of force, self-interest or materialistic reasoning as motivating factors within international (power) politics?

An article by researcher Little is more nuanced in its interpretation of Morgenthau's *Politics Among Nations*, by focusing on Morgenthau's concept of the balance of power (Little 2007, 138). According to Little Morgenthau envisioned "... two dynamics that are intimately associated with the balance of power (Little 2007, 139)". Morgenthau describes the first dynamic

as a self-functioning law of states increasing their (materialistic) power base in threat of force of other states. Little shows that Morgenthau does not support or idealize such an anarchic state of international politics. Primarily because this is seen by Morgenthau to have the potential to cause a lot of destruction through such actions (Neacsu 2010, 24). The second dynamic therefore has an ameliorating effect: “Rules and norms supplement or are superimposed onto the relations among states in a way that generate limitations on the ‘mechanics of power politics’ (Little 2007, 140)”. As such these two dynamics constantly change each other. Thus in Morgenthau’s view power is not solely about meaning imposition. Rather Morgenthau acknowledges the possibility of anarchic power politics to dominate international relations when the balance of power, through the mentioned dynamics, shifts.

These shifts that Morgenthau, according to Little, describes are transformations in the realm of international politics. Characteristic of these transformations² is a change in intersubjective beliefs or principles that for example restrict the deconstructive nature of international politics through new game rules or strengthen nationalistic expansion (Little 2007, 158). The balance of power can thus change in time and is recognizable by certain trends. Yet it must be remarked that Morgenthau was also a strong adversary of such trends like ‘political religions’ (Little 2007, 154) or liberalist ideas in the US that seem to want to abolish the political (Scheuerman 2007, 82). Morgenthau was in that sense a strong proponent of seeing ‘the political’ as the center of human nature and was against abolishing the political through a transnational government that “... would rid human experience of those conflicts that are most intense and thus authentically political in nature (Scheuerman 2007, 82)”. This abolishment would entail the supplanting of the political with “... inappropriate forms of legalism and moralism ... [that deny] ... the pluralistic character of human experience (Scheuerman 2007, 83)”.

When looking back to Neacsu’s interpretation of Morgenthau, Morgenthau also shows a strong occupation with the deconstructive nature of power politics and the death of universal values that has led to a somewhat disenchantment with (international) politics (Neacsu 2010, 31). It is something that concerned Morgenthau considerably and on this topic he was thus against

² The first transformation occurred according to Morgenthau in the period of 1789-1919, in which a change developed in Europe from dynastic (royal) politics to international politics and principles developed of national self-determination (Little 2007, 150). A second transformation occurred in the period of 1919-1973, in which states became to be seen as having particular nationalistic ethics that later developed in nationalistic universalism of the two main superpowers in this Cold War period (Little 2007, 154).

liberal internationalization based on universalistic ideas of humanity. On the other side Morgenthau does see the need for homogeneous ideals & shared values in order to organize international politics through the domination of a strong state at a regional scale (Scheuerman 2007, 80). Thus again this shows to a certain extent the importance of meaning imposition in Morgenthau's theory. Morgenthau envisioned a role for a statesman or dominant state. His "... responsible imposition of meaning transcends differences, and leads to order and construction in an otherwise anarchic environment (Neacsu 2010, 183)". However on the latter Scheuerman criticizes Morgenthau, because such domination of a state in a regional collaboration could easily lead to negative consequences for minor states and some forms of supranational organizations can also be based on shared principles without an abolishment of the political (Scheuerman 2007, 85).

Despite the scientific criticism that can be given on his theory, a strong aspect of Morgenthau's work is its all-encompassing nature. It therefore still has saliency for many researchers today for understanding why nations cooperate in a certain manner. Especially because cooperations never occur in a 'neutral' space. There can be competition from other countries or actors, or a country needs to take in factors that might jeopardize its potential to pursue its interests. The political is always a factor, which is why Morgenthau has been given a rather large stage in this introduction. However some of the other critique on his theoretical framework needs to be discussed, as the following theories are a result of this critique.

Theory: Alignment

Morgenthau argues that in power politics cooperations or alliances are made motivated by a threat of security (Little 2007, 139). And so despite Morgenthau's consideration of principles and values, he does not seem to delve deeply into what might motivate nations in other ways. While national interest might certainly be to a degree at the basis of a nation's motivation to collaborate or not, the factor of uncertainty and the need to achieve certain goals might prompt nations to collaborate on the basis of other or more complex interests than just their own security. Chidley discusses a new theoretical framework based on a new conception of interests, which moves away from a binary understanding of interests between states in main stream International Relations theory (Chidley 2014, 154).

This new theoretical framework is based on the constructivist' idea that interests are

diverse and thus need the ordering of preferences, which then leads to a comparison on three different levels: global (standing, esteem), binary (security) and internal (wealth) (Onuf 1989. In: Chidley 2014, 154). These different levels of preferences lead to different kind of international political relationships or collaborations, as these are also different levels of (immediate) concern. Based on this understanding security is no longer a main characteristic or immediate concern. Chidley argues that this new theoretical framework means that cooperations are "... formed in pursuit of co – operation, for the purpose of co – operation, but ... not co – operation in itself (Chidley 2014, 154)". These are called alignments, or Alignment theory.

This theory provides a new way of looking as to why and how nations collaborate in international relations. Originally the concept alignment was posed by Wilkins, who coined the concept and envisioned it as an overarching concept that included four different forms of international collaborations based on the principle/motivation security of which alliance was one (Wilkins 2012, 59). By using the concept alignment coined by Chidley as a basic form of cooperations, other interests at different levels of concern can be envisioned as being a reason for countries to cooperate. Thus also adding other factors to an understanding of international relations, like standing or esteem.

Critique & Theoretical Framework

Still both theories can be criticized. Author Kohno for example attacks the euro centrism of theories from authors like Morgenthau. Kohno asks whether a renewed interest in the (historical) international relations of Asian countries requires different theoretical concepts and/or understandings than those based on Europe (Kohno 2014, 180; Alagappa 2011, 194). Kohno argues, by basing the analysis on (the history of) East – Asia, that there have been other historical transformations that complicate the conceptualization of states as the main units of analysis in the latter area (Kohno 2014, 189). Context is important. A connected critique can also be given on Chidley's framework, who still envisions states as the main units of analysis. It can be questioned whether governments represent an entire country (Schneider 2015) and/or government representatives are the only actors involved in international politics. There might be other (informal) actors influencing the choices of government officials, or relationships between businesses and/or other non – governmental actors that are not a direct result of state policy. Yet I want to pose that IR's level of abstraction remains useful due to the continuing existence of

states and their interaction.

This brings the discussion to the theoretical framework of this master thesis. One segment of its ontology is the selection of states as the main units of analysis, as stated above. Another is the use of the term ‘strategic cooperations’. The use of this term enables a main focus on collaborations between individual countries and their motivation to do so, while not excluding the political from the analysis. A useful definition in this regard is given by political anthropologist Bailey, who defines strategies as rules or codes within a certain normative framework and subsequently defines how such strategic actions can be used to win in a political arena (Bailey 2001, 115). While this master thesis does not aim to analyze the norms or codes within a (geo) political arena, the term ‘strategic’ prompts the non – exclusion of self – interest as a motivation for collaboration or alignment. Thus it focuses on action deemed to achieve a certain goal. Yet as the theory of alignment indicates, there might be different levels of concern and reasons for a nation to cooperate with another nation. Analyzing these different reasons or factors and placing them at a level of concern for a nation is thus the theoretical approach of this master thesis, while also taking into account the actions of other countries.

Research Question

This leads to the following main research question: *How do the strategic cooperations of Central Asian countries with India and/or with other countries have an impact on India’s national interests at different levels?* The term cooperation is deliberately chosen to circumvent any normative implications in the collaborations between countries. Consequently the analytical framework explained in the previous paragraph will form the basis of factors and reasons on which this research question will be answered. Additionally it is assumed that other countries might have an impact on the cooperation between India and CARs, as each country needs to make its own decision about whether a cooperation is in her interest. Thus other countries might have preference above India or the other way around. Next to that, in order to bring more focus in the analysis, the main areas of cooperation that will be discussed are energy, security and trade. The reason being that these topics are in the interest of every country in varying degrees of importance, which enables a holistic approach to the analysis. Finally a preliminary distinction in levels is made by the use of the concepts bilateral and multilateral, because these two distinctions give focus on the size of cooperation in contrast to the levels used by Chidley. Yet the

conceptualization of Chidley will be used in order to discern differing levels of interests for countries in a cooperation.

Methodology

This final section in the introductory chapter of this master thesis was originally intended to be about ‘method’. However after reading up on the discussion about methods and methodology in IR, the title methodology was chosen as “... methodology is ... subsumed within ontology, epistemology and the theoretical arranging of concepts structuring the discussions, while method becomes at best a reflection on the tools for organizing empirical material and practical research design (Aradau & Huysmans 2014, 597)”. The theoretical discussion in the previous chapter thus has provided a structure and guideline for the data collection preceding the analysis and writing in this master thesis. Still this is not enough ground to dismiss a more profound discussion of research practices, which enables readers and other researches to either follow up on this research or dismiss its claims altogether. A preliminary view of academic articles in preparation for this master thesis gave the impression that many IR analyses do not provide their research steps. This observation was later on supported by Mutlu, who consequently calls for “... a frank discussion of research design, methods, and methodological preferences ... [to promote] ... innovation and reproducibility (Mutlu 2015, 931)”.

Although there is some truth in claims that the use of certain (positivist/quantitative) methods is often supported by false claims to objectivity and ‘scientificity’ (Aradau & Huysmans 2014, 613), methods (as in contrast to methodology) are essential to proper research. Most importantly due to two reasons: they enable a clear ordering of research goals and questions and in this way either strengthen or challenge political claims to knowledge (Aradau & Huysmans 2014, 612). The latter means that any method is also related to a certain form of knowledge, which need to be made clear in any research or analysis.

The research for this master thesis is based on the collection of several primary and secondary documentary sources, the bulk of which is made up of secondary sources. This has to do with a lack of access to information and political actors, who might have an interest in concealing decisions and knowledge (Lamont 2015, 80). This is an insurmountable limitation of almost any IR research. This research has strived to overcome this limitation through its research focus, which is therefore not on the political itself, and by applying the principle of triangulation.

A plurality of documents has been chosen, consisting of official documents, media reports & analyses and academic analyses. These documents have then been put together in a single Atlas.Ti file. With the use of this qualitative computer analysis program the content of these document have been first inductively open coded, and secondly been deductively coded with the use of the categories from the first coding session (Lamont 2015, 86). The resulting categories from this content analysis are to a certain degree built on the factors and/or reasons that the authors of the texts used in their strategic analyses or academic works. This will be mentioned in the forthcoming chapters, as well as explained how it relates or applies to this thesis' theoretical framework. Finally some quantitative data, in the form of for example trade figures, has been added to shed light on the significance of certain countries' cooperations and motivations.

India, Central Asia Relations: A Historical Background

An observation of many contemporary news outlets' publications is that they continuously refer to about India's historical relationship with Central Asia. Yet none of these articles seem to specify on what these linkages were and how they might have a lasting impact on the current relationships with India, as mentioning such connections does seem to imply the latter. In the theoretical sections above Kohno already pointed to the significance of understanding historical transformations in different regions of the world (Kohno 2014, 189), in reaction to Eurocentric conceptualizations of international relations. On the other side it might be possible that claims about India's historical relationship with Central Asia are political statements, expressing the need and desire to enlarge or intensify contemporary cooperations between India and Central Asian states. Whatever is the case, understanding India's strategic cooperations with Central Asia requires looking into its history. Precisely because historical developments might to a certain extent influence and/or condition present day circumstances, as well as India's possibilities to engage in strategic cooperations.

Ancient history

In BC times reference was made by the Greeks to a kingdom called Bactria (Dietl 1997, 111). According to Trautmann this region corresponded mostly with present day Afghanistan and was inhabited by Greeks, who later on invaded parts of Western India like the Punjab around the second century BC (Trautmann 2011, 63 – 64). Additionally there appear to have been even earlier interactions between the Indus valley and parts of south Turkmenistan around the second millennia BC (Bongard 1970, 99. In: Kaushik 2010, 325). Other, religious, connections seem to have been Buddhism, which spread through the Silk Road to China and other parts of Asia (Kaushik 2010, 326). A cultural hybrid form of art developed in Gandhara around the first century BC, which was a mix between Hellenistic/Greek forms and Buddhist themes (Trautmann 2011, 64). In the same century the Kushanas were driven from Bactria into India, where they developed an empire of their own (Trautmann 2011, 65). Later on their empire also faded away and made place for others.

Around the turn of BC to AD and into the first century AD one of the first waves of nomadic invasions from Central Asia took place, which was part of a cycle of military invasions into India repeating itself every 500 years or so (Trautmann 2011, 65). In the first century it was

Iranian speaking nomads who entered India. Then in the 5th century it was Huns with a Turkic language who came to India, after which Muslim Turks in the first millennium entered Afghanistan and also started moving towards India (Trautmann 2011, 65). Yet already in the 7th century Arabs moved into Azerbaijan and further into Central Asia, where over a few 100 years Islam was spread (Dietl 1997, 112). In the 13th and 14th century the Mongols entered Central Asia, who also entered the North of India and eventually started an empire in India as the Mughals (Trautmann 2011, 65).

The Mughal and Colonial Period

The Muslim Turks who had entered India in the beginning of the first millennium established a rule in Delhi from around the 12th century and, just like the Mughals (related to the Mongols), had a Turkic language (Trautmann 2011, 142). They were also both Muslims and this was one of the connections between the later dynasties in Central Asia and the Mughal empire. The dynasties or elites in the Ottoman, Safavid and Mughal empires consisted of people with the same religion, who gave patronage to similar cultural traditions (Robinson 2007, 24). The great Mughal period in India lasted from the 16th century, with the ruler Babur, until the beginning of the 18th century with the ruler Aurangzeb's death in 1707 (Trautmann 2011, 154). With the arrival of the British in India the demise of the Mughal Empire in India was set in motion.

In the meanwhile social and political changes in Central Asia had also been going on from around the 16th century, as republics formed in Central Asia of which the names originated from certain ethnic groups (Berg 2016). This means that in this period the majority of the population in for example Tajikistan consisted of Tajik people. At the same time connections with the rest of the Muslim world continued. These states developed until around the beginning of the 19th century into fully fledged independent political territories, which were heterogeneous and functioning societies (Manz 1998, 12). In the 19th century a Russian Tsarist Empire came into being, who lay their eyes on the conquest of the region of Central Asia. From here on a divergence in the development of both India and Central Asia occurred, as India remained part of the British Empire and Central Asia of the Russian Empire due to the so called 'great game' between both empires (Dietl 1997, 112; Morrison 2016). Afghanistan was part of the Russian Empire, although coming sections will pay more attention to that region. Still both regions developed differently due to this split.

This did not mean that there were no connection at all between the two regions. “Even the colonial rivalry between Tsarist Russia and the British Empire could not disrupt the links between the two regions. In the nineteenth and the early twentieth centuries, about 8,000 Indian settlers lived in Central Asia. In terms of their influence, the Indian community occupied a place far more important than any other group of foreign settlers with the exception of the Russians (Kaushik 2010, 326)”. Thus trade and other forms of exchanges occurred between the Indian subcontinent, perhaps strengthened by the Islamic connections between the regions’ rulers. The trade consisted of tea, spices and textile from India and horses, fruits and precious stones from Central Asia in the 19th century (Kaushik 2010, 325).

However within the context of this paper it is also important to look more deeply into the Russian influence on Central Asia in the 20th century, as this still seems to have a role today in the geopolitics of the region. First of all before and shortly during the 1916 revolution in the Russian Empire, which now included Central Asia, citizens in the Central Asian regions of the Russian Empire had an inferior position due to their ethnicity compared to Russian and Ukrainian settlers in the region (Morisson 2016). Moreover the ethnicity situation within Central Asia became even more complex due to migration from several other regions of the Russian Empire, like Armenians and labor migrants from Iran and the Western province of China Xinjiang (Berg 2016). In July 1916 a revolution broke out in Central Asia, which started in the Samarkand province of present day Uzbekistan. (Morrison 2016). Later on revolution also broke out in the rest of Tsarist Russia. After the Soviets gained control of the entire Russian Empire, they drew new borders that cut across the lines of tribes and ethnic groups in order to create the present day five nations (Dietl 1997, 113). “To that extent, the independent states of today have inherited political systems [of the Soviet Union], stakes and cultures dating back decades (Dietl 1997, 113)”.

Some of these stakes concern the presence of Islam that was brought to this region by Arabs in the 7th century. The independent CARs, or Central Asian Republics, that were formed by the Soviets were also partly inspired by an Islamic ideological movement called Jadidism. While its discourse began with the promotion of a nation for all Muslims in Central Asia, it later on developed into a more exclusivist discourse that saw Muslims as primarily Turks (with the exclusion of Tajiks) and language as an indication of ethnicity (Berg 2016). These political active Jadids favoured the creation of ASSRs, or Autonomous Soviet Socialist Republic, and this

led to the creation of certain states like Bukharan and Turkestan in the 1920s. This process of nation formation continued and “...while the broader ideological project of the USSR was indeed that of the fusion of peoples into a *homo sovieticus* [emphasis in text] ... the strategic aim at the time of the founding of the new empire was to break up the large linguistic and cultural blocs founded on language (Turkic) and religion (Islam). In order to do this Stalin advanced the concept of ‘nationality’ (*natsionalnost* [emphasis in text]). Every national political entity had to have its corresponding titular nationality, defined as an ethnic community which preserved an identity founded on language throughout the whole process of its history (Roy 2000, viii)”.

The long quote above shows many important developments in the relation between the SU and the CARs in the second and third decade of the 20th century. First of all this ideology of Stalin influenced the creation of the present day CARs through the creation of nation states that had their place within the Soviet Union, separated on ethnicity and language. Secondly while Islam was first banned by Stalin, it was again readmitted in the 1920s. Partly because of this Islam became part of the nation state identity and image, although it was a local form of being Muslim connected to ethnic identity of the particular CAR (Berg 2016). Thirdly this process also led to the idea that Islam was not in conflict with the ideals of the Soviet Union and that the autonomous states could exist peacefully within the confines of the USSR. This might also be one of the reasons of continuing influence of present day Russia within the CARs.

After Indian Independence

After its independence in 1947 the Indian government pursued a policy of non – alignment towards the global powers in the world in this period of the Cold War (Dietl 1997, 135). This did not mean that it had no relations with the super powers, only that it took no sides in the global ‘cold’ conflict. The first Indian Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, expressed a great interest in Central Asia and wrote about his intentions to visit the region (Kaushik 2010, 326). In 1955 the Indian Prime Minister officially visited the Soviet Union for the first time and during that trip he also made several stops in Central Asia, visiting Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan and other cities within the region (Dietl 1997, 135). This was the beginning of relations between the region in terms of trade and culture, as part of “... broad Indo-Soviet agreements (Dietl 1997, 135)”. This included the setting up of several consulates and cultural exchanges within the region. Yet according to some analysts it was also a motivation for India to not let Central Asia move

towards Pakistan, due to Islamic connections (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 189). At the same time Pakistan did not have strong relations with the Soviet Union, due to their pro – US stance in the Cold War period (Dietl 1997, 135).

After the fall of the Soviet Union

After the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991 the CARs became independent from Russia. This led to certain forms of a revival of Islam in Central Asia. With the opening of the Soviet Union to the rest of the world, Islam became more public: it became reconnected to the rest of the Islamic world and becoming public meant also the reopening of more mosques (Berg 2016). Yet not every CAR has such a strong connection to Islam: Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, neighboring Afghanistan, currently have a stronger Islamic tradition than the more nomadic Kazakhstan (Singh Roy 2002, 53). This also has to do with the different faces of Islam within several CARs, which are competing with each other over dominance and influence. These different traditions are the popular local traditions in each of the CARs, the official traditions financed primarily by Egypt and Turkey and several alternative nationalistic traditions (Singh Roy 2002, 53). Radical Islamic movements that nowadays pose a security threat for countries in the extended neighborhood of Central Asia, like India and Pakistan, as well other countries for example in the West like the United States of America, have spilled over from neighboring Afghanistan (Moore 2007, 283). Some of these Islamic groups were financed in the 90s by the Afghan government primarily in Tajikistan and Uzbekistan (Lee & Gill 2015, 111). For India this still poses security threats in Jammu & Kashmir, while it also poses similar threats for Pakistan in the region of Baluchistan.

However the threat of radical Islam is of course not the only reason that regional and global powers have an interest in Central Asia, as the current new great game about natural resources will show in the coming chapters (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 188). For now it is important to delve deeper into the historical relation between Russia and the CARs before ending this chapter with a focus of India's relationship with Central Asia after the formers' independence, as the CARs' relationship with Russia has implications for India's contemporary strategic cooperations with Central Asia. It is for example important to note that in regards to infrastructure, Central Asian states are dependent on Russia's infrastructure for the transportation of their natural resources (Perveen & Khalil 2015, 357). At the same time because of this several

of the CARs are now looking to develop their natural resources without depending on Russian infrastructure by looking towards India & China (Kulkarni & Nathan 2016, 186).

Russia has strived in the last two decades since the end of the Cold War to keep its influence over its former dependencies, which includes Central Asia. In regards to Central Asia this has been attempted by creating several supranational organization like the CIS, the EEC and the EEU, the CSTO and a CU³ with Belarus and Kazakhstan with varying success (Lee & Gill 2015, 117). Such supranational organizations are often central in the development of Central Asia's economies, as these focus on the development of their natural reserves. In regards to India such organizations have an influence on India's strategic cooperations with Central Asia, especially due to the fact that Russia sees itself as 'first among equals' and the share of the latter's trade with Central Asia being US\$21.7 billion in 2010 (Lee & Gill 2015, 113). Yet while Russia sees itself as Central Asia's main partner, in trade Russia was overcome by China in sheer size in 2010 (Lee & Gill 2015, 113). What this means for India will be discussed later on.

Relations between different CARs and India differ considerably. Tajikistan, which shares borders with Afghanistan, has been an ally of India during the conflict in Afghanistan in the 1990s when India recognized the Northern Alliance government in Afghanistan.⁴ Relations with Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan on the other hand are negligible, historically as well as in regards to contemporary trade with India. However Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan have more significant relationships with India. Turkmenistan has had diplomatic relationships with India since 1993 and relationships since then have developed in a mutual beneficial way: the former has supported India's candidacy to several international fora and in 1999 there were discussions about cooperation in the defense sector, although after that it has been limited to good intentions (Singh Roy 2011, 676). Kazakhstan is seen as a prominent partner for India due to its similarity as a secular and multi – ethnic nation state. Both countries started diplomatic relations anew since the fall of the SU in 1992/1993 and since then there have been a lot of prominent cooperations on different levels on the field of infrastructure, science & technology and many others (Singh Roy 2002, 54). It thus historically has the strongest relationship with India, compared to other CARs.

What this historical chapter does is providing ground for a preliminary analysis of India's strategic cooperations with Central Asia. First of all it shows that there have been long historical

³ See Terms & Abbreviations.

⁴ <https://thewire.in/88943/india-central-asia/> (Published December 23rd 2016; accessed January 12th 2017)

connections between India, Central Asia and Russia. Secondly the ethnic divisions made by the Russian empire and the emergence of Islam in the region early on still have their impact on the current security situation in Central Asia. This only seems to have strengthened since the breakup of the USSR, although the ethnic and political divisions made by the Russians have formed the current nations of Central Asia to a significant extent. Perhaps this is an aspect of power as meaning imposition in the light of Morgenthau's theory, which in the historical situation of Central Asia can refer to the domination of Russia or the USSR through its ethnic and political divisions. In this way this aspect of Morgenthau's theory provides a universalistic understanding of this region's international relations. Regarding India its cooperations with Central Asia have historically been mediated through Russian or the USSR, while after the fall of the SU its cooperations have been motivated partly for security reasons in relation to its neighbor Pakistan and the bilateral mistrust between the two neighbors. Security is thus still is an important (historical) concern for India, both at a binary and global level of concern (Onuf 1989. In: Chidley 2014, 154), although the concern is mostly regional. The coming chapters will also discuss other factors in the development of India's relationship with Central Asia since the history presented in this chapter, showing that a focus on security still is too simplistic.

Areas of Mutual Strategic Collaborations: Trade, Energy, Security

By some Central Asia is referred to as the heart of Asia (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 187), referring both to its natural resources and its centrality as a connecting hub between Europe and Asia. The previous historical chapter showcased the importance of Central Asia in the light of security for India. To a certain extent this chapter will continue along those lines, focusing on the topics of energy, trade and security. It can be argued that such a focus entails a somewhat ‘realist’ perspective, seeing internal relations only as a realm of competition condemned in the theoretical sections of this thesis. This chapter will show that within the wider context of Central Asian cooperations, security is not the only motivation for countries to cooperate or not. Yet energy, trade and (military) security are important sectors of interests for countries, in order to improve their own wellbeing and functioning. Therefore the focus on these topics will be discussed at two different levels: bilateral and multilateral. And although the focus is on the interests of both India and CARs, this chapter will show that it is inevitable to compare the current situation without taking into consideration the presence of other countries. Those countries might have more to offer to CARs at the bilateral or multilateral level, which will also be supported by the following figures.

Bilateral

Trade

Trade, while consisting of many sectors, gives from a bilateral perspective a manageable overview of the significance of the cooperation between two countries. Import and export of goods between India and Central Asia differ per country, as seen in Table 1.0 below.⁵

Country	Export to India	Main goods	Import from India	Main goods
Kazakhstan	352.93	Mineral fuels, salts	151.91	Pharm. products, coffee/tea
Kyrgyzstan	1.79	Vegetables, fruits	25.11	Pharm. products, textiles
Tajikistan	0.01	Aluminum, ores	22.26	Pharm. products, meat
Uzbekistan	45.26	Vegetables, fertilizer	94.64	Nuclear appliances, Pharm
Turkmenistan	46.97	Chemicals, cotton	68.53	Pharm. products, meat

Table 1.0: Import & Export between India and the five Central Asian countries in million US\$, 2015 – 2016.

⁵ <http://commerce.gov.in/EIDB.aspx> (Updated January 19th 2017; accessed January 19th 2017)

The few observations that can be drawn from these figures on themselves is that export to India is diverse, while import from India consists mainly of Pharmaceutical products. This has not changed since 2007 (Moore 2007, 282). Yet compared with more figures from other time periods, these figures become more interesting. Export to Kyrgyzstan for example amounted to 25.11 million US\$ in the period of 2015 – 2016, with a decline of 33.49% compared to the period of 2014 – 2015. It is important to note that export and trade of India with all the CARs also dropped in comparison to previous periods, a claim supported by the website of the Indian government. And compared to a country like China overall trade of India with Central Asia is minimal, as export from Kazakhstan to China amounted to 5.483 billion US \$ in 2015.⁶ Could this resurgence of China be a reason for India's contemporary decline in trade, or are there more recent other reasons for this? What has India done to increase its strategic cooperations with CARs?

Bilateral talks

With its biggest trading partner Kazakhstan India has worked together on the fields of IT & Pharmaceuticals through several joint ventures and a science and technology conference in 2001 (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 191; Singh Roy 2002, 54). With Turkmenistan there have been some high level meetings, although one of the few investments of an Indian company in Turkmenistan was stopped due to low potential for profit (Kalkarni & Nathan 2016, 188). There also has been monetary support from India to Tajikistan in 1995 to set up a joint venture⁷. India has also expressed interest to set up software training centers in Kyrgyzstan (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 191) and there have been talks in August 2006 between both governments on a range of issues⁸. Similar talks are going on with Uzbekistan and rail construction have been carried out towards Uzbekistan as part of the INSTC (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 192; also see section on multilateral cooperations). There seems to be a lot of talking, while the benefits seem to stay uncertain or minimal.

Bilateral cooperations on regional security

⁶ <http://globaledege.msu.edu/countries/kazakhstan/tradestats> (Published 2015; accessed January 20th 2017)

⁷ <https://thewire.in/88943/india-central-asia/> (Published December 23rd 2016; accessed January 12th 2017)

⁸ www.theasianage.com (Published July 17th 2006; accessed January 20th 2017)

A focus on India's bilateral cooperations towards regional security might change the picture. The only example of a direct bilateral cooperation to be publicly found is with Tajikistan and the deployment of 100 Indian military troops near Tajikistan's capital of Dushanbe, which is now under consideration to be extended with the deployment of Indian military aircraft.⁹ The latter was in the guise of the war against terrorism, although India's engagement in military enlargement in the region is seen as to counter its rival Pakistan (Kavalski 2012, 101). From a historic viewpoint, after fighting in Afghanistan, people from different countries in the world entered Kashmir as in the 1990s the conflict there rose to significant heights. Among the Arabs and people from the Chechen Republic were also people from Uzbekistan who had fought against the Russians and now saw in Kashmir a new reason to find against oppression from India (Guha 2007, 753). This continues nowadays and has escalated continuously, leading to the deployment of more than one million Indian troops.¹⁰ At the same time this figure might be a political overstatement, due to its Pakistani government source. Nevertheless this security situation is a major binary motivation for bilateral alignment between India and CARs.

Bilateral cooperations on energy

For both India and CARs energy is a major motivation to cooperate, as it is in the interest of CARs to diversify their economies in this way and in multilateral cooperations.¹¹ A rare example on this scale is the role of Indian state owned company ONGC (Oil and Natural Gas Commission), which took over a company with stakes in oil fields and a part of an exploration opportunity around the Caspian Sea (Lee & Gill 2015, 113; Kavalski 2012, 101). Already in 1997 the same company had acquired the right to drill exploratory for 5 years in another region in Kazakhstan. This company had also invested in a region in Turkmenistan, but as noted above it turned out that there was not enough potential at that site (Kulkarni & Nathan 2016, 188). In 2015 exploratory drilling began in the region around the Caspian Sea (Stobdan 2016, 14), but with mixed results. In another project in which ONGC was involved, the stakes given to the company were taken away and given to a Chinese company by the Kazakhstani government. While there can be several reasons for this, it is perhaps telling that the ONGC turned away

⁹ <https://thewire.in/88943/india-central-asia/> (Published December 23rd 2016; accessed January 12th 2017)

¹⁰ <http://www.dawn.com/news/1299621> (Published December 1st 2016; accessed January 24th 2017)

¹¹ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/central-asias-lukewarm-pivot-to-china/> (Published August 16th 2016; accessed January 23rd 2017)

another offer of a stake in an oilfield by the Kazakhstani government (Stobdan 2016, 17). It may point to some unwillingness or lack of operational power from India to engage in such projects, next to the possibility that the Chinese offered more money.

More reasons provided for this difference is that China shares a border with several of the CARs, among which Kazakhstan. India historically does not. Another is that China's economy is considerably bigger than India's, with a GDP of 21.27 trillion US \$ compared to India's GDP of 8.721 trillion US \$ in 2016.¹² This gives the Chinese government more options, although a related analysis is being provided by Lee & Gill. They argue that, due to several market reforms, the Indian economy is controlled mostly by the private sector and "... given the relatively small presence of the government in the economy, it cannot provide its own state-owned enterprises charged with investing in overseas resources with the same level of cheap capital that is available to Chinese state-owned enterprises. Further, unlike China, India is a consumption-driven economy rather than an export-led one, and the private sector has less risky opportunities to invest at home or elsewhere around the world than those offered in relatively unstable Central Asian states (Lee & Gill 2015, 113)".

This explanation shows that for India bilateral cooperations ~~trade~~ are a concern of internal wealth, which at the same time is also a binary concern of security seen from the perspective of alignment theory. Security in the sense that other regional players, like China, are more important partners for CAR's than India and thus threaten India's interests. Therefore in terms of trade the following quote of Dietl from 1997 concerning the position of India (and Pakistan) in Central Asian geopolitics could still hold sway today: "Both are only minor players with weak hands. And the game is picking up as the major players are moving closer (Dietl 1997, 143)". Yet the story does not end here, as India has over the years also been engaged in multilateral strategic cooperations.

Multilateral

Multilateral cooperations on energy

¹² <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/in.html> (Updated January 12th 2017; accessed January 20th 2017)

The most significant collaboration of India with CARs is on the field of energy. India's economy is growing and forecasts of the International Energy Agency predict that in 2040 India's demand for oil will rise with 90% and the overall energy demand would need to rise with 900 Gigawatt.¹³ Therefore the region of Central Asia provides opportunities for India to continue its predicted growth path and sustain its economy, due to the former's energy resources of hydrocarbons. It is predicted that Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan contain around 40% of the world's natural reserves of oil and gas (Haas & Putten 2007; In: Qadir & Rehman 2016, 127). A study by BP showcased proved reserves of 30 thousand million barrels in Kazakhstan and 0.6 in both Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan¹⁴. The strategic collaborations that India and CARs engage in on this topic, are several multilateral cooperations.

One of these projects is called TAPI, which stands for Turkmenistan Afghanistan Pakistan India and concerns the transport of gas. In this way such supplier countries and transit countries can be helped to come out of their state of being cash strapped (Kulkarni & Nathan 2016, 189), especially after the time of the Soviet Union and their reliance on Russia. At the same time the project would be of considerable interest for India, as it is projected that the project will be able to supply India with one – sixth of its current gas demand (Kulkarni & Nathan 2016, 187). The project was first initialized in 1995 and although the project's organization slowed down around the year 2002 due to deteriorating relations between the United States and the Taliban in Afghanistan, the project is now back on the table after an intergovernmental deal was signed in 2010 between the involved countries and the 7.6 US\$' project backing by the ADB (Lee & Gill 2015, 115). Furthermore there now is a consortium leader for the financing of the project by the company Turkmenistan Gas and shareholder and investment agreements have been signed respectively in December 2015 and April 2016.¹⁵

So despite the (initial) concerns about security in the transit regions of the pipeline, in particular Afghanistan and Pakistan, and distrust between India and Pakistan it seems to be possible to be slightly optimistic about the success of this project. Although this might change, as a new law by the Turkmenistan government restricts international companies to acquire stakes in

¹³ https://www.iea.org/publications/freepublications/publication/IndiaEnergyOutlook_WEO2015.pdf (Published in 2015; accessed January 20th 2017)

¹⁴ <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/pdf/energy-economics/statistical-review-2016/bp-statistical-review-of-world-energy-2016-full-report.pdf> (Published in June 2016; accessed January 20th 2017)

¹⁵ <https://www.adb.org/news/speeches/special-address-15th-central-asia-regional-economic-cooperation-ministerial-conference> (Published October 26th 2016; accessed January 23rd 2017)

Turkmenistan companies (Kulkarni & Nathan 2016, 188). At the same time there are the United States sanctions towards Iran, although some of them have been lifted in the previous year due to improving diplomatic relations between the United States and Iran.¹⁶ The initiative of India also shows the level of interest for India, which primarily is one of internal wealth. At the binary level there's the concern of security, as the project itself will transgress through dangerous territory. At the global level there's the esteem between the involved countries, as well as the standing of countries with countries that were not directly involved in the project. So while it was in the self-interest of India and other countries to continue the project, some trust or mutual good standing was needed between the countries to continue the project. The binary fear of a security threat was overcome and was not a motivator for countries not to cooperate.

Multilateral cooperation on trade

The INSTC or International North-South Transport Corridor is an agreement on trade signed between Russia, India and Iran in 2000 (Lee & Gill 2015, 114). While the project initially did not directly involve any CARs, Iran in particular is by some analysts seen as a gateway to Central Asia by effectively circumventing the security risk areas of Afghanistan and Pakistan (Sing Roy 2012, 957). Pakistan has also often blocked India's overland access to Central Asia, thus diverting to Iran has also become a necessity (Moore 2007, 281). This is a significant project and involves the creation of rail networks and several port projects on the West – coast of India, as well in Chabahar on the South – coast of Iran near the border with Pakistan. “This corridor is basically to connect Mumbai with St Petersburg, via Tehran and Moscow. Mumbai will be linked with Bandar Abbas Port of Iran by maritime transport, after that it will move along road and rail networks to connect Bandar Abbas Port with Caspian Sea ports of Bandar Anzali and Bandar Amirabad via Tehran. From Caspian Sea it will be shipped to Russian Port (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 192)”.

While the project first developed slowly, India restarted talks in 2012 with all countries involved: Russia, India, Iran, Azerbaijan, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkey, Ukraine, Belarus, Oman, Syria and Bulgaria (Lee & Gill 2015, 114). The project has significant benefits, as it will be faster (25 – 45 days instead of 45 – 60 days through the Suez Canal) and 30% cheaper (Singh Roy 2011, 669). The project can be of particular internal concern for all

¹⁶ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/central-asias-lukewarm-pivot-to-china/> (Published August 16th 2016; accessed January 24th 2017)

countries involved and circumvents the bilateral concern of security in the region. Yet at the multilateral scale level the project is in competition with the Gawadar project of China and Pakistan. It remains a question whether the global standing of the involved countries in each of the projects will play a role in their success, as well as whether the involved countries binary interests of security will be a factor for the project's success. The next chapter on China will continue to discuss this more extensively.

India's strategic role in Central Asia

From the previous section it has become clear that security is a factor of limitation that influences the cooperations between India and CARs at both the bilateral and multilateral scale. A rare example of multilateral cooperation on security itself was a joint exercise in counter – insurgency between India, Uzbekistan and Mongolia (Moore 2007, 285). There are other supranational fora like the SCO that have a regional security purpose, but China's role in that organization means that this will be discussed in the next chapter. For now the above sections have shown that India's strategic cooperations with CARs do not come into fruition at the bilateral scale, as there are several barriers that limit India's potential. The initiative taken by India in both TAPI and INSTC is thus a strategic reaction to its limitations at the bilateral scale. It is also interesting to note that the binary security concern of India towards Pakistan was set aside in the TAPI project, probably because of the preferred concern of internal wealth for India on the topic of energy

From a more political perspective, in light of the discussion on Morgenthau in the theoretical sections, several authors have pointed to the value of connectivity as a guiding principle or value for India and other countries to achieve their (common or complementary) goals or interests (Lee & Gill 2015, 111; Sing Roy 2002, 60; Zafar 2015, 2; Brooks 2016, 176). The strategic cooperation between India, Pakistan and other countries in TAPI and INSTC could be an example of this. In this way the cooperation between India and CARs could be rather beneficial for India's interest. A closer look in the next short paragraph on the official publications of cooperations between India and Kazakhstan, provides more insight in this political factor.

In a content analysis of publicly accessible press statements and documents concerning the relation between India & Kazakhstan on the websites of both the countries' foreign

ministries, some interesting observations could be made. In a speech by Narendra Modi, the Indian prime minister began stressing out the several projects in which India was involved in order to show its commitment to Central Asia in general and what bound India to Central Asia in general. Through the lines the Prime Minister seemed to express the idea and meaning that Central Asia could only prosper when it was connected to its neighbors, yet in particular not only by focusing on one or two paths of connection. While not specifically mentioning China, the Prime Minister implicitly gave critique on competition within Asia through focusing on different connection paths despite it all being in the light of “ ... all of Asia [seeking] the revival of the glorious ancient Silk Road”.¹⁷

What this tells us is that India is aware of its minor position, as it aims to dictate another way of doing things within the international politics around Central India. It tries to impose a new meaning, while its actual influence is limited (Neacsu 2010, 32). This might mean a move away from the Morgenthau’ idea about the dominant statesman (Neacsu 2010, 183), and a move to the possibility of shared principles like connectivity through international cooperations (Scheuerman 2007, 85). On the other side India’s strategic political statement could also prove fruitless in the light of a more dominant China or Russia in the region of Central Asia. These regional players might to a certain extent simply have dominant influence by their size and other countries’ dependency, although domination through principles or values remains to be seen region. Investigating such principles would require an extensive discourse analysis, which is not within the approach of this thesis. Rather the next chapter will continue to describe cooperations and the factors that influence them.

¹⁷<https://www.mea.gov.in/SpeechesStatements.htm?dtl/25436/address+by+prime+minister+at+nazarbayev+university+astana+kazakhstan> (Published July 7th 2015; Accessed February 23rd 2017.)

The China Factor and its impact on India – Central Asia Relations

Reading the news since the election of the new president of the United States, China is sometimes portrayed as positioning itself as the new world leader. In Central Asia China's emergence is visible in multiple ways, not in the least through its involvement in several high stake multilateral projects with India's neighbor Pakistan and several other CARs: CASA – 1000 CACGP, TUTAP, and CPEC¹⁸. India is not (directly) involved in any of these projects and the sheer multitude of the projects should be of strategic concern to India and its minor position. On the bilateral level concerning trade China is also bigger than India, shown in Table 2.0 below.¹⁹

Country	Overall trade with China
Kazakhstan	20
Kyrgyzstan	5
Tajikistan	1
Turkmenistan	5
Uzbekistan	4

Table 2.0: Overall trade between China and CARs in billion US\$.

While it was already noted that this is significantly more than India's and Russia's trade with the region, it is not only in trade that China is big. Bilateral collaborations occur on several fields: China signed 25 agreements in 2015 to start several projects concerning manufacturing and the processing of resources with Kazakhstan worth 23 billion US \$, moving away from only a focus on energy and resources in its cooperation with Central Asia.²⁰ Investments in trade infrastructure are also on the table between China and Kazakhstan, through the realization of several SEZ's and rail links between Xinjiang and several Kazakh cities in 2016.²¹ Yet despite the significance of China's presence in Central Asia, this chapter aims to give a more nuanced view of China and its impact on India's interests in Central Asia. In particular by taking into account the presence of other countries in several multilateral cooperations, as such a focus on

¹⁸ See Terms and Abbreviations.

¹⁹ <http://www.china-briefing.com/news/2017/01/11/china-in-2017-increasing-trade-alliances-with-eurasia.html> (Published January 11th 2017; accessed January 25th 2017)

²⁰ <http://astanatimes.com/2015/09/china-kazakhstan-to-intensify-bilateral-collaboration/> (Published September 4th 2015; accessed January 25th 2017)

²¹ http://english.gov.cn/news/international_exchanges/2016/11/03/content_281475481948332.htm (Published November 3rd 2016; accessed January 25th 2017)

the multilateral presence of China and its partners reveals the impact of China on India's strategic cooperations within Central Asia.

Bilateral cooperations on energy & security

With other Central Asian countries China does not have the same bilateral relations as with Kazakhstan, but these are also in development. With Tajikistan China is currently in negotiation about further cooperation on the field of security and defense, with the realization of a Joint (military) Staff Department in 2016.²² In August 2016 both Turkmenistan and China pledged to extend their cooperation on energy & trade and other areas,²³ showing a slower development in regards to Kazakhstan. Nevertheless both countries are of interest to China, due to their significant natural resources. This does not necessarily hold true for Tajikistan and perhaps therefore the two countries only work together on security. Similar talks, compared to Turkmenistan, have been held in May 2016 with Uzbekistan.²⁴ Talks have also been held with Kyrgyzstan concerning 70.4 million US \$ investments in the fields of industry, transport and agriculture.²⁵

Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan seem to hold less strategic interest for China, as shown by the comparably lower scale of investments. A reason for this might be the lack of natural resources in these two countries, compared to the other three CARs. This also shows China's self – interest the region, which is not necessarily different from India's interest in Central Asia for the same internal motivation. However China's large presence in the region is watched with suspicion by CARs, who according to some analysts do not want to be bound solely to China for its economic development²⁶. This might have to do with the possible future economic dominance of China over Central Asia, as this could lead to significant (possible) influence of China in the affairs of the CARs. Again such suspicion might be of interest to India at the multilateral scale, as the former suspicion towards China is a global and binary concern (Chidley 2014, 154) for these countries to cooperate with India in multilateral projects.

²² http://europe.chinadaily.com.cn/world/2016-03/01/content_23691761.htm (Published March 1st 2016; accessed January 25th 2017)

²³ http://english.gov.cn/state_council/vice_premiers/2016/08/23/content_281475424020111.htm (Published August 23rd 2016; accessed January 25th 2017)

²⁴ http://english.gov.cn/news/top_news/2016/05/24/content_281475356208524.htm (Published May 24th 2016; accessed January 25th 2017)

²⁵ <http://akipress.com/news:588097/> (Published January 25th 2017; accessed January 25th 2017)

²⁶ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/central-asias-lukewarm-pivot-to-china/> (published August 16th 2016; accessed January 23rd 2017)

China's multilateral presence

Regional Security: SCO and other countries

A context in which the possible influence or impact of this suspicion through politics can be analyzed, is through the role of the SCO. This multilateral organization, formerly known as the Shanghai – 5 was founded in 2001 (Singh Roy 2002, 61). It consists of “... six member states (China, Russia, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan). Next to that there are two acceding states (Pakistan & India), four observer states (Afghanistan, Belarus, Iran and Mongolia), six dialogue partners (Armenia, Azerbaijan, Cambodia, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Turkey) and three guest attendants (ASEAN, CIS and Turkmenistan) (Qadir & Rehman 2016, 118)”. India has over the years attempted to be allowed into this relatively new international platform and has been supported by both Kazakhstan (Adnan & Fatima 2015, 191) and Russia, in order to counter the influence of China in Central Asia according to professor Iwashita (Center for East Asia Policy Studies, 2016), which now is being realized. The size of the SCO is significant through the size of the population that it then represents²⁷. Additionally the SCO, as an international forum, is seen as a place for countries to curtail the influence of China in Central Asia. But what is the role and political strength of the SCO in Central Asia, in particular regarding the topics of energy, trade and security?

The SCO was originally founded by China to improve the security situation of the region. In the light of this purpose it is necessary to look more specifically at the role of Russia in CA through their multilateral organizations, like the CSTO and the EEU. Both were set up to keep the CARs in Russia's sphere of influence, but Uzbekistan left the Russian led security organization CSTO in 2012 to join the CSTO²⁸. For Russia this might be seen as a sign of its diminishing role in Central Asia, and a growing influence of China. Also because some analysts see the SCO as a NATO for the region, while the military presence of the United States in Afghanistan has diminished over the years (Lee & Gill 2015, 122). On the other side there have not been many actual collaborations between SCO member states with the goal to improve the security situation in the region of Central Asia, as Central Asian member states have not been

²⁷ <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/shanghai-cooperation-organisation-paper-tiger> (Published September 16th 2016; accessed January 19th 2017).

²⁸ <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/shanghai-cooperation-organisation-paper-tiger> (Published September 16th 2016; accessed January 19th 2017).

willing to allow other states to intervene in its domestic affairs through SCO cooperation²⁹. In this way the SCO might on this topic be toothless, which at the geopolitical scale has prompted the United States to maintain its role in Afghanistan despite the SCO discomfort with their presence (Norling & Swanström 2007, 430). And it remains to be seen whether the new Trump administration will discontinue this line as promised, or will honor the pentagon's request for more troops³⁰.

In this security situation Pakistan cannot be left out of the equation, in the perspective of their position as India's nemesis and an important regional ally of the United States (and China nowadays). Historically Pakistan has been a military partner of the USA. Perhaps because the Pentagon prefers to deal with military dictators instead of democracies (Guha 2007, 824), for example when dealing with terrorists in the Northern regions of Pakistan. Though relationships between India and United States changed for the better after the fall of the Soviet Union, as the United States began to handle both countries in an equal manner (Guha 2007, 832). Nowadays for example the United States is one of the largest trading partner of India with an export of 44.1 Billion USD³¹. Additionally the relationship between the United States and Pakistan has become more strained, while security cooperation remains³². The latter is in the global interest of United States, in order to maintain a presence in the region and have some influence on the trade & energy projects in the region discussed in the next section.

Trade: SCO, Russia and other countries

While the security situation in Afghanistan is still fragile, as is also shown by Pakistan's recent closure of its border with the country³³, the SCO as organization has not much influence on it and this therefore gives room to other powers like the USA to jump in this gap. Such security is crucial factor to the success of the different trade and pipeline projects. In this economic sphere the SCO provides nowadays a forum where bilateral trade agreements can be discussed between members and observer countries, which over the years has led to a growth of the economies of

²⁹ <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/shanghai-cooperation-organisation-paper-tiger> (Published September 26th 2016; Accessed February 28th 2017).

³⁰ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/10/opinion/afghanistan-is-now-trumps-war.html> (Published March 10th 2017; Accessed April 17th 2017).

³¹ <http://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/ind/> (Published *unknown*; Accessed April 17th 2017).

³² <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/04/16/world/asia/us-afghanistan-talks-hard-line-pakistan.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FAfghanistan> (Published April 16th; Accessed April 17th 2017).

³³ <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/07/world/asia/pakistan-afghanistan-border.html?rref=collection%2Ftimestopic%2FAfghanistan> (Published March 7th 2017; Accessed April 17th 2017).

member states and export between them (Norling & Swanström 2007, 435). However cooperation or talks on projects that may be of interest to more than two countries did not occur in 2007. This also explains Norling & Swanström's assumption that the inclusion of India & Pakistan in the SCO could lead to more conflict about such discussions due to their diverging interests (Norling & Swanström 2007, 431). Power politics thus would be the best way to describe the current geopolitics in the region, there being only bilateral cooperations based on binary interests.

Such power politics also could give strength to the Russian led EEU, which has the goal to increase economic interaction between Russia, CARs and other countries in the region. Analysts Lee & Gill envision a possibility that the EEU would replace the SCO as a multilateral organization platform (Lee & Gill 2015, 122), because of the reasons presented above and actions by China that would lead to an increase of cheap Chinese goods in the CA economy. Again this shows that CARs are wary of Chinese influence in the region. For India these power politics between Russian and Chinese led multilateral organizations could mean that India could strategically cooperate with Russia, in order to curtail the influence of China in the region. This is also shown by the support of Russia to India to join the EEU through the CECA (Lee & Gill 2015, 113, which was also supported by Kazakhstan.

However Russia has shown interest to connect its own regional economic projects like the INSTC (as discussed earlier) with Chinese plans^{34,35}, which also shows some form of willingness towards political and economic alignment of interests. Earlier China also seemed not eager to allow Russia have an influence on its plans towards Central Asia, however this seems to have changed when in June 2016 the EEU decided together with China to align its trade projects³⁶. This begs the question what this means for India's interest in the region, in regards to its involvement and interests in the multilateral projects INSTC, IPI, and TAPI. It would depend on the success of these projects whether India's interests would be fulfilled, which necessitates looking at the success of China led multilateral projects that include Pakistan.

OBOR & CPEC

³⁴ <http://www.css.ethz.ch/en/services/digital-library/articles/article.html/735d7c9c-0f8e-4934-a17d-2279e376b305> (Published September 8th 2016; Accessed February 28th 2017).

³⁵ <https://reconnectingasia.csis.org/analysis/competing-visions/> (Published *unknown*; Accessed February 28th 2017).

³⁶ <https://sputniknews.com/politics/201610271046800505-russia-china-cooperation-eurasia/> (Published October 27th 2016; Accessed February 28th 2017).

Pakistan has a central role in CPEC, most importantly because it transgresses through its territory. CPEC consists of several transport and energy projects at a combined value of 46 billion US\$³⁷ and transgresses through territory that is contested by India. It will link Central Asia, through China, with the Pakistan harbor of Gawadar in the Indian Ocean. For China this project, also known as PCEEC, provides an additional option of accessing its necessary oil supply in contrast to the difficulties it faces in the straits of Malacca (Shaikh et al. 2016, 253). Of course there are security concerns about a project which transgresses through a volatile region, yet not only due the possibility of sabotage due to terrorism. On one side there are analysts who suspect the Indian government of trying to do harm to CPEC through their intelligence agencies (Hassan Khan 2016, 1), while on the other side there are analysts who see an opportunity for India to invest in CPEC and in this way have influence in Central Asia and Pakistan³⁸.

CPEC itself is seen by some analysts as a flagship project of OBOR³⁹, which necessitates explaining what OBOR is. The first thing to understand about OBOR or Belt & Road, is that it is more a collection of ideas or long term strategic policy than any concrete plans (Thakur 2015, 1; Fallon 2015, 142). It is the Chinese strategy for Eurasia/Central Asia to bring economic development to the region(s) (Fallon 2015, 140). In this way any agreements of China with Central Asian countries, as well as neighbors of the region, can be seen as part of this large policy. Some analysts make a comparison with the Marshall plan of the period after the Second World War, which led to the economic development of several countries in Europe and instigated growth of the United States, that is now being doing in a similar manner through OBOR by drawing Central Asian (and also APEC) countries away from Russia and the United States respectively⁴⁰. In this light it seems strange that the Trump administration has disengaged from the TPP from a geopolitical perspective⁴¹. Just like the Marshall plan it can be seen as a move towards regional domination or influence, which as noted is the manner in which some CARs look to China.

³⁷ http://www.idsa.in/idsacomments/china-one-road-one-belt-initiative_msanwal_290916 (Published on September 29th 2016; Accessed February 25th 2017).

³⁸ <http://thebricspost.com/india-and-obor-its-not-complicated/#.WA-BeIN9670> (Published on October 16th 2016; Accessed February 25th 2016).

³⁹ <http://thebricspost.com/india-and-obor-its-not-complicated/#.WA-BeIN9670> (Published October 16th 2016; Accessed February 25th 2016).

⁴⁰ <https://www.hongkongfp.com/2016/10/15/hidden-strategic-goals-one-belt-one-road-marshall-plan/> (Published on October 15th 2016; Accessed December 25th 2017)

⁴¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/jan/23/donald-trump-first-orders-trans-pacific-partnership-tpp> (Published January 23rd 2017; Accessed April 4th 2017).

Trade, Energy and competition: Chabahar & Gawadar

For India China's engagement with Pakistan through CPEC can be seen as move toward regional economic domination. However this project cannot be seen in isolation from other projects in which India is involved. INSTC has the same goals as CPEC and both are about establishing trade routes to connect with Central Asia: For India this can be established by connecting to and investing in the Iranian port of Chabahar, while China is attempting this by connecting to and investing in the Pakistan port of Gawadar. Both projects show potential, although in different ways. First of all in INSTC more CARs are involved then in CPEC, which can be a benefit or limitation for INSTC. On one side it is a limitation as, discussed in the previous chapter, more partners means more discussion and delay of the project. Secondly construction of several aspects of CPEC has in the meantime already commenced⁴², while INSTC is still being planned. At the same time investments in CPEC are much larger then INSTC, which runs in the millions instead of billions for CPEC by China (Lee & Gill 2015, 115).

Finally from a wider political perspective on the CARs and Afghanistan, both projects also know limitations or advantages. First of all Turkmenistan is strategically placed and connected to the rest of the CARs, as well as to Iran and the markets of Europe. It is also involved in the INSTC trade projects and the energy pipeline projects TAPI and IPI that are planned to run through Pakistan and Afghanistan to India. It is thus at a critical juncture in geopolitical connections and has expressed willingness to engage with Russia and Iran instead of China (Singh Roy 2011, 665). An important reason for this is its infrastructural dependency on Russia, although it has strived over the years to lessen its dependency on Russia and has even expressed opposition to Russia's involvement in TAPI (Lee & Gill 2015, 116). The latter might be a move to lessen Russian domination, but it could be a barrier to the long term success of both TAPI and INSTC. Secondly Afghanistan is critical to the success of TAPI and IPI, while it will also be connected to INSTC from the Iranian port of Chabahar and it is involved in CPEC as well. This in order to connect to the Middle East. While the stakes for both projects might be raised because of Afghanistan's involvement, Perveen & Khalil argue that "...geographic tilt is more inclined towards Chabahar [INSTC] as it is more feasible for transit trade to the oil producing Arab and African countries, whereas, Gawadar [CPEC] serves to be a lynchpin

⁴² <http://www.thedailystar.net/frontpage/xi-out-get-region-silk-order-1297771> (Published October 12th 2016; Accessed February 25th 2017).

towards Southeast Asia, China, as well as Asia Pacific (Perveen & Khalil 2015, 356)". In this light the actions of the EEU to align its projects with China seem therefore strategically logical.

India & China: Adversaries and/or Potential for Alignment?

Whether India will then maintain its strategic role in these projects remains to be seen. China's role is significant in several international/regional and bilateral cooperations, which impact India's interests in the region of Central Asia. At first China has simply more to offer to CARs in the size of investments. Secondly India's involvement in several regional/multilateral fora can lead to an improvement of its interests through the competition between the larger players in the region, although these might be willing to connect or align their efforts instead of providing support for the interests of a minor player like India. Projects that India is engaged in, are also dependent on the cooperation of countries that might have more interests in working with projects of China. Then there is the political perspective in which countries might try to circumvent the influence of China, in which the global standing of a country can play a role in determining whether to cooperate or not with the country. Yet this seems mostly to impact the options for India in not working with Pakistan.

India has several options in order to pursue its interests and this does not necessarily have to be in competition with China. In 2010 Kaushik already hinted to the option of negotiating reopening the old Chang-Chenmo route through the disputed Aksai-chin territory near the province of Sikkim in India with China to Central Asia (Kaushik 2010, 328; Singh Roy 2002, 60), although it might depend on politics as to whether such potential will be pursued. While there are other projects in which India and China actually do collaborate, like BIMSTEC or BCIM as an aspect of China's Belt & Road policy east of India, in Central Asia both countries pursue other strategic cooperations. For India it remains the question whether this will pay off. India might perhaps be wise to follow the advice of one analyst, who suggests to invest in these projects of China to at least gain some influence in Central Asia (Juhos 2015, 478).

Conclusion

As has become clear from the broad analysis above, understanding India's strategic role in Central Asia requires to take into consideration different perspectives and factors. Combined these factors provide an holistic answer that explains why India is in such a minor political position today, as well as the strategic options it has pursued to further pursue its interests. One of these factors is the presence and political importance of other countries besides the CARs, who have their own interests and concerns. These include Russia, China, the USA and smaller players like Pakistan, Afghanistan and Iran, who all have their own interests to strategically cooperate with one another. For the CARs in general it is a significant level of concern to improve their internal wealth by diversifying their economies, which can be achieved by strategically aligning themselves with other countries. Yet such cooperations at the binary level of concern must to a certain extent be certain or secure, which is influenced by the global standing of the alignment partner. In this way the conceptual framework of Chidley is flawed, because different levels of concern continuously influence the cooperations between countries.

Consequently the above cooperations influence the strategic cooperations and interests of India, as CARs might envision that a strategic cooperation with another country could serve their interests better than a cooperation with India. In this case it is China, who has more economic strength than India. At the same time this factor is more complex, as it also involves a move of China towards economic and perhaps political domination. Yet Russia cannot be left out of the equation, as it still has a certain form of economic domination through the dependency of CARs on its infrastructure. The latter is also influenced by historical developments, which impact India's interests for example through limited access to Central Asia. However for Russia, as well as other countries involved, a political transformation is going on that influence all strategic cooperations in the region. It is not simply that China and Russia remain at loggerheads with each other, but it seems that the multilateral organizations they lead do not necessarily want to compete with each other.

Thus in light of Morgenthau's theory domination does exist and certainly influences the strategic cooperations between countries, but it also seems that there might a value of connectivity that influences or dominates the strategic cooperations between countries. Meaning imposition does occur and is an aspect of the power relations between the countries in Central Asia and beyond, but it seems that this only occurs at a higher level of multilateral cooperation.

For example between projects like the INSTC and CPEC. At the bilateral level it seems that there are mostly alignments between countries, which are influenced by suspicion towards other countries. In Chidley's theorem this is seen as a global interest concern, referring to the standing of certain countries. Such suspicion, in this case towards China and its actions, influences certain CARs like Turkmenistan to invest time in multilateral projects like INSTC and TAPI.

However at the bilateral level of cooperations between India and CARs this suspicion does not seem to help India. A factor in this regard is also that India simply cannot muster the economic strength to increase strategic cooperations with CARs. This has prompted CARs to work with other countries and India to focus its strategic cooperations on multilateral projects like INSTC. But it remains to be seen whether these projects will pay off. One positive element is that Pakistan has been ready to work with India, despite their mutual (historical) mistrust. Still it might indeed be a good strategic choice for India not to oppose its powerful neighbor too much⁴³, as India still remains a minor player in the politics of nations in Central Asia.

⁴³ <http://www.firstpost.com/india/india-china-strategic-dialogue-keep-calm-and-talk-on-let-the-dragon-play-the-big-brother-for-now-3296834.html> (Published February 22nd 2017; Accessed March 3rd 2017).

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