

Contemporary Rivalry in Central Asia: Challenges and Opportunities

Orta Asya'da Çağdaş Rekabet: Fırsatlar ve Zorluklar

Adem Çakır¹ 



ABSTRACT

Due to its unique geographic position, Central Asia has been at the center of power struggles for centuries. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union the region once again became the focal point of strategic assessments. Although the region had been endowed with rich energy resources, young Central Asian Republics (CARs) had faced multiple challenges ranging from poor infrastructure and lack of human resources to weak governance. Since their independence international environment has also undergone unforeseen changes as it moves from unipolarity towards multipolarity. Global powers, such as the USA, China, Russia, the EU; and regional powers such as Turkey, India, Iran, and Pakistan have been involved in the region, adding to the complexity of the equation. Despite numerous problems, Central Asia's rich energy resources, common historical, religious, ethnic heritage and economic connectivity projects provide variety of opportunities for the region. In this context, with a view on the geo-politic/geo-strategic and geo-economic significance of Central Asia, the study investigates challenges and opportunities for the region.

The structure of study has been based on four main chapters. After the introduction, in the second chapter, geo-political, geo-strategic and geo-economic importance of the region has been explained with supporting historical and numerical data. In the third chapter, interests of global and regional players have been analyzed in order to identify converging and diverging interests of the respective players. The fourth chapter is allocated to describing challenges the region is facing, and exploring opportunities the CARs may have. In the fifth chapter, the findings of study have been summarized, and some projections have been put forward regarding future of the region. The study is finalized with the conclusion section, which identifies the five main outcomes out of the study: the presence of multiple opportunities for peace and prosperity of the region, the importance of Central Asia, the importance of the peace efforts in Afghanistan, the availability of multiple factors for cooperation among CARs, and the significance of BRI for the region.

Keywords: Central Asia, CARs, geo-political rivalry, economic connectivity

ÖZ

Özel coğrafi konumu nedeniyle Orta Asya yüzyıllardır güç mücadelelerinin merkezinde olmuştur. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından bölge tekrar stratejik değerlendirmelerin odak noktası haline gelmiştir. Her ne kadar bölge

¹Corresponding author/Sorumlu yazar:

Adem Çakır (Researcher, PhD),
Tekirdağ, Turkey.
E-mail: ademcakir2011@gmail.com
ORCID: 0000-0002-8099-8880

Submitted/Başvuru: 02.01.2020

Revision Requested/Revizyon Talebi:
04.02.2020

Last Revision Received/Son Revizyon:
29.02.2020

Accepted/Kabul: 02.03.2020

Published Online/Online Yayın: 30.03.2020

Citation/Atf: Çakır, Adem. "Contemporary Rivalry in Central Asia: Challenges and Opportunities.", *Avrasya İncelemeleri Dergisi - Journal of Eurasian Inquiries* 9, 1 (2020): 75-94. <https://doi.org/10.26650/jes.2020.005>

zengin enerji kaynaklarına sahip olsa da, genç Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri yetersiz alt yapıdan insan gücü eksikliğine ve zayıf yönetimlere kadar çeşitli sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri'nin bağımsızlıklarını kazanmalarının ardından uluslararası ortam tek kutupluluktan çok kutupluluğa doğru ilerlerken, beklenmedik değişimler meydana gelmiştir. ABD, Çin, Rusya, AB gibi küresel güçler ile Türkiye, Hindistan, İran ve Pakistan gibi bölgesel güçlerin bölgeye müdahil olması denklemi karmaşıklaştırmıştır. Mevcut çeşitli problemlere rağmen, zengin enerji kaynakları; ortak tarihi, dini, etnik miras; ve ekonomik bağlantılılık projeleri Orta Asya için çok değişik fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Bu kapsamda, çalışmada, Orta Asya'nın jeo-politik/jeo-stratejik ve jeo-ekonomik önemi göz önünde bulundurularak bölgedeki zorluklar ve fırsatlar araştırılmaktadır.

Çalışma giriş ve sonuç bölümleri hariç olmak üzere dört ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. Girişten sonraki ikinci bölümde bölgenin jeopolitik, jeostratejik ve jeoekonomik önemi tarihi ve rakamsal verilerle desteklenerek ortaya konulmuştur. Üçüncü bölümde, küresel ve bölgesel oyuncuların çıkarları örtüşen ve ayrışan çıkarları tespit etmek amacı doğrultusunda analiz edilmiştir. Dördüncü bölümde bölgenin karşılaştığı zorluklar ve muhtemel fırsatlar belirlenmiştir. Beşinci bölüm çalışmanın bulgularının özetlendiği ve bölgenin geleceği ile ilgili çeşitli öngörülerin yapıldığı bölümdür. Çalışma beş ana tespit yapıldığı sonuç bölümüyle nihayetlenmektedir. Belirlenen beş temel tespit şunlardır: Mevcut zorluklara rağmen bölgede barış ve refahın sağlanması için çok sayıda fırsat bulunmaktadır; Afganistan'da barış sağlanması bölge için hayati önemdedir; Orta Asya devletleri arasındaki işbirliğini kolaylaştıracak çok sayıda faktör bulunmaktadır; Yol ve Kuşak Projesi bölge için oyun değiştirici niteliktedir.

Anahtar kelimeler: Orta Asya, Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri, jeo-politik rekabet, ekonomik bağlantı

GENİŞLETİLMİŞ ÖZET

Özel coğrafi konumu nedeniyle Orta Asya yüzyıllardır güç mücadelelerinin merkezinde olmuştur. Sovyetler Birliği'nin dağılmasının ardından bölge tekrar stratejik değerlendirmelerin odak noktası haline gelmiştir. Her ne kadar bölge zengin enerji kaynaklarına sahip olsa da, genç Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri yetersiz alt yapıdan insan gücü eksikliğine ve zayıf yönetimlere kadar çeşitli sorunlarla karşı karşıya kalmıştır. Orta Asya Cumhuriyetleri'nin bağımsızlıklarını kazanmalarının ardından uluslararası ortam tek kutupluluktan çok kutupluluğa doğru ilerlerken, beklenmedik değişimler meydana gelmiştir. ABD, Çin, Rusya, AB gibi küresel güçler ile Türkiye, Hindistan, İran ve Pakistan gibi bölgesel güçlerin bölgeye müdahil olması denklemi karmaşıklaştırmıştır. Mevcut çeşitli problemlere rağmen, zengin enerji kaynakları; ortak tarihi, dini, etnik miras; ve ekonomik bağlantılılık projeleri Orta Asya için çok değişik fırsatlar sunmaktadır. Bu kapsamda, çalışmada Orta Asya'nın jeo-politik/jeo-stratejik ve jeo-ekonomik önemi göz önünde bulundurularak bölgedeki zorluklar ve fırsatlar araştırılmaktadır.

Çalışma giriş ve sonuç bölümleri hariç olmak üzere dört ana bölümden oluşmaktadır. Girişten sonraki ikinci bölümde bölgenin jeopolitik, jeostratejik ve jeoekonomik önemi tarihi ve rakamsal verilerle desteklenerek ortaya konulmuştur.

Üçüncü bölümde, küresel ve bölgesel oyuncuların çıkarları örtüşen ve ayrışan çıkarları tespit etmek amacı doğrultusunda analiz edilmiştir. Buna göre; bölgedeki çıkar mücadelesi yürüten ülkelerin çıkarlarının politik, ekonomik ve güvenlik alanlarında yoğunlaştığı görülmektedir. Politik alanda Rusya ve Çin'in ağırlıklı olarak örtüşen çıkarlarının ABD ve

Hindistan'ın örtüşen çıkarlarından ayrıştığı görülmektedir. Rusya, İran ve Türkiye ise ayrışan çıkarlara sahiptir. İki Güney Asya ülkesi Pakistan ve Hindistan da bölgede birbirlerinin etkilerini dengelemeye çalışmaktadır. Ekonomik alandaki mücadelede Çin'in belirgin bir ağırlığı görülmektedir. Özellikle Yol ve Kuşak Projesi kapsamındaki yatırımların Çin'in bölgedeki etkinliğini daha da artıracığı anlaşılmaktadır. Enerji alanında her ülkenin bölge enerji kaynaklarına ulaşmak ve diğer coğrafyalara ulaştırma çabasında olduğu görülmektedir. Güvenlik alanında yürütülen işbirliği çabalarına rağmen Afganistan'daki istikrarsız durum ve Çin'in Uygur bölgesine yönelik hassasiyetinin ülkelerin tutumunda belirleyici olduğu görülmektedir.

Dördüncü bölümde bölgenin karşılaştığı zorluklar ve muhtemel fırsatlar belirlenmiştir. Bölgedeki ülkelerin karşılaştığı temel sorunların şu ana başlıklar altında toplandığı tespit edilmiştir: Yetersiz alt yapı; nitelikli insan gücü eksikliği; yaygın yolsuzluk; su kaynaklarının yetersizliği; uyuşturucu ve insan kaçakçılığı; aşırı uç akımlar ve terörizm; Afganistan'daki istikrarsızlık. Mevcut problemlere rağmen bölgenin öz kaynakları ile uluslararası ortamın mevcut durumunun bölgenin refah ve istikrarı için çeşitli fırsatlar sunduğu görülmüştür. Bu kapsamda; bölgenin enerji kaynakları, hidro elektrik enerji fazlalığı, Yol ve Kuşak Projesi kapsamındaki yatırımlar, bölge içi ve dışı ülkelerin bölgeye yönelik ilgisi, bölge ülkelerinin tarihi, dini, etnik ve kültürel yakınlığı ile Afganistan'daki barış sürecinin önemli fırsatlar sunduğu görülmüştür.

Beşinci bölüm çalışmanın bulgularının özetlendiği ve bölgenin geleceği ile ilgili çeşitli öngörülerin yapıldığı bölümdür. Buna göre; Rusya ve özellikle Çin'in bölgedeki baskın aktörler olacağı, ABD'nin etkinliği azalmakla birlikte bölgedeki varlığını devam ettirmeye isteyeceği öngörülmektedir. İran ve Türkiye'nin bölgedeki etkinliklerini devam ettirmeye gayret edecekleri özellikle Türkiye'nin enerji projeleri kapsamında etkin olma gayretinde olacağı değerlendirilmektedir. Pakistan'ın ekonomik dayanıklılık konusundaki çabalarını artırabileceği buna karşın Hindistan'ın Çin ve Pakistan etkisini dengeleme gayretinde olacağı öngörülmektedir. Bölge ülkeleriyle ilgili olarak yapılan öngörüler ise şu şekildedir. Mevcut olumsuz etkenlere rağmen bölgenin bazı özellikleri bölgesel gelişim için uygun koşulları sağlamaktadır. Bağımsızlıklarını kazandıktan sonra, Tacikistan ve Kırgızistan hariç, güçlü liderlerin de etkisiyle iç istikrarsızlık yaşamamışlardır. Bu bağlamda ülkeler arasında da yüksek yoğunluklu bir silahlı çatışma yaşanmamıştır. Ayrıca, her ne kadar bölgede bir çok ülkenin birbiriyle rekabet eden çıkarları bulunmakla birlikte bölgenin istikrar ve gelişimini tüm bölge dışı ülkeler ortak çıkarları olarak görmektedirler. Bu değerlendirmeler ışığında, bölgesel ve küresel koşulların Orta Asya ülkelerinin siyasal, ekonomik ve toplumsal gelişmelerini devam ettirmek için uygun olduğu, enerji kaynakları ve ekonomik dayanıklılık projelerinin bu amacı kolaylaştırabileceği değerlendirilmiştir.

Çalışma beş ana tespitin yapıldığı sonuç bölümüyle nihayetlendirilmektedir. Belirlenen beş temel tespit şunlardır: Mevcut zorluklara rağmen bölgede barış ve refahın sağlanması için

çok sayıda fırsat bulunmaktadır; Afganistan’da barış sağlanması bölge için hayati önemdedir; Orta Asya devletleri arasındaki işbirliğini kolaylaştıracak çok sayıda faktör bulunmaktadır; Yol ve Kuşak Projesi bölge için oyun değiştirici niteliktedir.

Introduction

Central Asia has been at the center of power struggles for centuries. It is the birthplace of the biggest land empire in history; it is the place characterized by strategists as the “heartland” of the World Island, and it is the same geography on which the “Great Game” was staged.

By the end of the bipolar world, the region came under the spotlight again. The defunct USSR transitioned to the Russian Federation bringing about new states. Even though the region was endowed with rich energy resources, the newborn states faced numerous challenges ranging from poor infrastructure and lack of human resources to a weak governance that hampered the recuperation of the young states. Moreover, the competing ambitions of regional and global powers on the region complicated the equation, splitting the focuses of Central Asian Republics (CARs) on diverging goals.

In the 28 years since the CARs’ independence, remarkable developments have taken place at the domestic, regional and global levels which are worthy of consideration. Despite improvements in some areas, CARs are still struggling with various social, political and economic problems. Afghanistan emerged as a very big security challenge and destabilizing factor. The international environment has also undergone unpredicted changes as it moves from unipolarity towards multipolarity; Russia is not hesitant anymore to apply hard power to achieve its ambitions, China is emerging as a new superpower, the USA is shifting its focus to the Pacific with the aim of containing China; the other countries are also calibrating their stances while the power contest keeps on going.

In light of the latest developments, this study investigates the aspirations of regional and global powers in Central Asia and, with a view on challenges and opportunities, discusses the prospects for the countries of the region.

1. Geo-Political / Geo-Strategic / Geo-Economic Significance of Central Asia

Central Asia is the geographic region which contains Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, and Turkmenistan. It is surrounded by the Caspian Sea in the west, China in the east, Afghanistan and Iran in the south and Russia in the north. It covers a total area of 4,004,451 square kilometers. The terrain of the region has diverse variations made of semiarid steppe grasslands in the north, plains in the west, desert regions in the center and south, river valleys and oases in the south, and mountain ranges in the eastern and southern parts. In total, 68.633.447 people reside in the region. The region has a total GDP of 260,869 billion USA dollars.

Historically, due to its hard terrain with mountains and deserts, the region had stood as a barrier before the great empires of ancient and medieval eras beyond which they could not expand. During the 18th century, Central Asia separated the Russian and Chinese Empires, and during the 19th century, the British and Russian Empires, until the latter conquered the region in the 1880s¹.

1 Michael Kort, *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics* (New York: Facts On File, Inc., 2004), 3-4.

Central Asia's unique geographic position has been manifested in several geo-politic theories. Mackinder, in his most renowned "Heartland Theory", claims that the "pivot area", which includes all of Siberia and much of Central Asia, is essential to command the World-Island, and subsequently to command the world². Spykman countered Mackinder by proposing the "Rimland Theory", in which he argued that in order to control the World Island, Eurasia should be checked all along the rimland. Standing between the Christian Orthodox populated areas in the North and the Chinese population in the East, according to Huntington, Central Asia bears the potential of conflict between civilizations³.

Being in the "pivot area", the region has always been on the agenda of the geo-strategic powers. During the 19th Century, Central Asia had been the subject of the power contest between the Russian and the British empires. Widely known as the "Great Game", in this power struggle, the British Empire tried to have control over Central Asia in order to obtain a buffer area before British India; whereas, Russia aimed to expand its Empire and influence in the region. Towards the end of the 20th century, the USSR occupied the southern neighbor of Central Asia, Afghanistan, in order to secure a pro-Soviet regime in Kabul. The invasion sparked a decade long Afghan resistance, which would be supported by the USA. Although Central Asia was part of the USSR at that time, a proxy war between two Cold War rivals had demonstrated the strategic importance of the region, which would establish an ideological border between the blocs. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, the region once again found itself in the middle of a contest, in which a variety of global and regional powers had a stake. The difference of the contemporary era rivalry from the precedents are the higher number of powers and the numerous motivational factors.

Besides its geopolitical / geostrategic significance, energy is another factor which contributes to the CARs geo-economic importance. The region is endowed with huge reserves of natural resources. Being contiguous to the hydrocarbon rich Caspian Sea, specifically Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan are rich with natural resources of gas and oil. Kazakhstan has 3.9 billion barrels of proved oil reserves, which is 1.7% of total world reserves⁴. Turkmenistan has 19.5 trillion cubic meters of proven natural gas reserves, which is 9.9% of total world reserves⁵. Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan do not have rich hydrocarbon reserves as the others do. They mostly rely on hydroelectric power as their main energy source. The region has big mineral deposits of coal, iron, copper, lead, phosphates, magnesium, zinc, gold, silver, uranium,

2 Zbigniew Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard* (New York: Basic Books, 1997), 38.

3 Samuel P. Huntington, "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.

4 Türkmenistan and Uzbekistan have 0,6 billion barrels of proved oil reserves. Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy. 21 November 2019. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf> : 14.

5 Uzbekistan has 1.2 trillion cubic meters and Kazakhstan has 1 trillion cubic meters of proved natural gas reserves. Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy. 21 November 2019. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf> : 15.

and a variety of others as well. These energy and mineral resources portend huge economic opportunities for the region.

Taking into consideration the energy demand of China's rapidly growing economy, Russia's desire for a monopoly over the energy resources, Europe's requirement for source country diversification, and Pakistan and India's growing energy needs, energy and mineral deposit rich Central Asia could easily be regarded as a playground for geo-economics contest.

The trade route which is known as the Silk Road, that connected the Chinese civilization of East Asia with the civilizations of the Mediterranean, passed through the southern section of Central Asia. Once again, the region's key position at the center of a transportation network which allows the movement of goods, raw materials and energy in the interior lines of communication is being utilized by China's Belt & Road Initiative (BRI), which will greatly increase the geo-economic significance of the region.

Right after collapse of the Soviet Union, the inclusion of all the Central Asian states in the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), is another indicator of the economic significance of Central Asia for the regional countries.

2. Convergences / Divergences of Global & Regional Powers

2.1. Interests of Global Powers in Central Asia Region

2.1.1. USA

Former USA security adviser for President Brzezinski claims that "America's global primacy is directly dependent on how long and how effectively its preponderance on the Eurasian continent is sustained"⁶. In this context, because of the CARs central location in the Eurasia land mass, America's main objective in the region has been to prevent any single power gaining of this geopolitical space and to ensure other international actors' financial and economic access to region⁷.

USA considers Russia's influence and hegemonic efforts in the region against its strategic interests. After the disintegration of Soviet Union it tried newly independent states lean towards western type political system and free market economy. By doing so it aimed to open up the region's economy to the western world, boost economic growth and consequently to balance Russian's control on the economy and resources of the region. In order for this strategy to succeed the USA promoted structural and institutional reforms on democratic procedures, civil rights, judiciary and social justice. Furthermore, it searched to control the energy resources by providing alternative routes for pipelines instead of Russian owned routes, and facilitating contracts for its energy companies. The legacy of Soviet economic system, which

6 Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 30.

7 Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 148-149.

had integrated regional economies by preventing the CARs to develop independently, and its geographical proximity to Russia were two important obstacles for the USA to achieve post-Cold War objectives in the region. Moreover the Color Revolutions which took place in Georgia, Ukraine and the Central Asian state of Kyrgyzstan alarmed the CARs and caused them to act cautiously towards the USA⁸. In this sense the USA has achieved limited success in containing Russia's influence in the region.

After 9/11, CARs along with Russia cooperated with the USA on War on Terror. CARs' cooperation was critical for the War on Terror because having a big Muslim populations they were target for terrorist activities and had potential ground for religious extremism. Supply routes for US troops were passing through the CARs. Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan had allowed the USA to establish military bases. Having these bases were important for the USA's operations in Afghanistan and to sustain its footprint in the region. The USA had relocated the bases upon request from host countries which was a serious setback for the USA's ambitions in the region. Despite diminishing presence in the region the USA sustains its influence and continues to work with CARs in the areas of human trafficking, drug and narcotics, arms sale, religious extremism and terrorism. Recently developed C5+1 format is latest example of the USA's continuing interests in the region.

Central Asian States are integral part of China's BRI. China's growing influence with BRI is against the USA interests who seeks containment of China in the region. However, the USA's strategic shift to Pacific taken in to account the USA wouldn't be willing to allocate much resources into the region.

2.1.2. European Union (EU)

After disintegration of the USSR, even though with little success, EU countries supported efforts which would encourage the CARs to transition to western type political and economic system. EU still funds projects which would contribute to strengthening of institutions on democracy, rule of law, human right and free market economy. EU also attaches importance to the region and develops cooperation in fighting against threats such as religious radicalism, terrorism proliferation of WMD, illegal migration and drug trafficking.

EU's geographical discontinuity with region poses as an obstacle to further economic cooperation and to reach energy resources of the region. Therefore EU also looks forward to benefiting from enhanced connectivity with region in the form China's BRI.

2.1.3. Russia

Following demise of communism for a brief period Russia struggled with internal social, economic and political problems and tried to accommodate Western oriented policies. "Near

8 Hooman Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*. (California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009), 17-18.

abroad” policy which was announced in 1993 was the first indicator of Russia’s primacy policy towards region. After Yevgeny Prikimov assumed office of Foreign Ministry in 1996, multilateralism, opposition to the USA global hegemony and cooperation between regional actors had been Russia’s foreign policy characteristics in the region. Under Putin’s presidency, succeeding years Russia more overtly assumed policies of dominance in the region. Russia applies both hard and soft policy tools in order to achieve its political, economic and security interests.

One of Russia’s early indication of regional influence policy has been evidenced by formation of regional organizations such as the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organisation (CSTO) and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU). Most of CARs are members of these organizations. Russia and all CARs, excluding Turkmenistan, are members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)⁹ as well. The SCO is one of the venues in which Russia works with China in order to enhance regional security and to confront the USA influence.

Russia pursues its economic interest in the region through seeking monopolization in exploration, exploitation, development and transportation of the region’s energy resources. Russia’s role in the export of Turkmen gas and Kazakh oil is an example of this kind of policies. In fact, the Soviet legacy of infrastructure and its geographical location offers Russia great advantages to transport the region’s oil and gas to global markets. Nevertheless, with the introduction of new routes from the region to new outlets such as via Turkey, Iran and Pakistan Russia’s monopoly has started to gradually wane¹⁰.

CARs are also important for Russia’s security concerns. It holds military bases in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan in order to sustain the stabilization in the region and to prevent outside powers’ influence. Additionally, current authoritarian political system in the CARs allows Russia’s leverage while it prevents Western influence. Russia also cooperates with the CARs in the fight against terrorism. Having a considerable amount of Muslim population, Russia is sensitive about containing the spread of radicalism. Furthermore, protecting the rights of Russian minorities in the CARs has always been among foreign policy priorities of Russia. Especially Kazakhstan, with 6846 km. length of border and with 19.3% ethnic Russians, occupies a special place in the Russian foreign policy.

2.1.4. China

Having a length of 3322 km. border with three of the CARs, China has direct access to the region¹¹. In this sense, the geographical proximity provides China a great advantage for its economic, political and security interests.

9 Members of CARs in regional organizations, **CIS**: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan; **CSTO**: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan; **EAEU**: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan; **SCO**: Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan.

10 Zahid Anwar, “Development of Infrastructural Linkages between Pakistan and Central Asia”, *Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, 26, no.1 (January-June 2011): 111.

11 China-Kazakhstan: 1.782,75 km.; China-Kyrgyzstan: 1063 km.; China-Tajikistan: 477 km.

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) was introduced by China in 2013 in order to enhance regional and global connectivity with the aim of improving regional economic integration. The BRI aims to enhance integration by creating economic corridors that would connect mainland China with the Central, Western, Southern parts of Asia, Africa and Europe. With the BRI, China aims to achieve a shift in the economic focus from east to west, which will boost the economic growth in the region. China's huge infrastructure, communication and technology investments in the region shows its influence as well as ambitions¹². Being in the center of the Eurasian land mass, CARs play a central role in the BRI.

The CARs energy resources are well poised to supply the energy requirement of the rapidly growing Chinese economy. China is pursuing a policy of building pipelines and acquiring energy projects in the region. It built the Kazakhstan-China oil pipeline and also struck oil projects deals with Kazakhstan. The China-Turkmen gas pipeline project, which started early in 2009, later on expanded to connect with other Central Asian states. China's demand for the energy resources of the region helps them to diversify routes connecting them to the outer region. Since they provide alternative routes for the CARs' energy resources, Russia and China have diverging interests in the region.

The Uyghur population in the Xinjiang province has ethnic and religious affinities with the people of Central Asia. In this sense, China's security interest in the region is centered on containing internal discontent and nationalist elements in the Xinjiang province while ensuring safety and security on its western borders especially against extremist infiltration. China aims to prevent extra regional powers from destabilizing the western borders. China also uses its influence in SCO in order to ensure its security interests. SCO facilitates cooperation between the CARs, Russia and China. The cooperation between China and Russia helps regional stability and balances the USA influence as well¹³.

2.2. Interests of Regional Powers In The Region

2.2.1. India

India, with its nuclear arsenal and rapidly growing economy, is a big regional power with global ambitions. It considers China as a rival to itself, and it cooperates with the USA in its China containment policy. India also pursues a policy of countering the Pakistani influence in the region.

India considers Central Asia as its "extended neighborhood". Even if India's main interests in the region can be considered as economic driven, China's increasing presence led India to formulate the "Connect Central Asia Policy", which is a more comprehensive approach

12 Servet Rauf, "Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Central Asia: Causes and Effects." *Strategic Studies* 37, no.4 (Winter 2017): 161.

13 Rauf, "Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Central Asia", 160.

covering “political, security, economic, and cultural connections”¹⁴. Since India does not have borders with the region, it has the disadvantage of access to the region. In order to enhance relations with CARs, the Indian Prime Minister visited the region in 2015¹⁵.

India pledged to invest money in projects which include upgrading Iran’s Chabahar port and constructing a railway from the port through Iran to Turkmenistan. This project would allow India to bypass Pakistan and Afghanistan, and also would reduce its dependency on China to connect Central Asia. The TAPI project, which was planned to transport Turkmenistan gas to South Asia, has been slow due to the situation in Afghanistan¹⁶ (The Economist 2019).

2.2.2. Iran

Iran is in geographical proximity to the region, and has cultural, ethnic and religious ties with the CARs. Iran has a 1.148 km. length of border with Turkmenistan. It is one of five littoral states of the Caspian Sea, along with Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan. Controlling its northeast border and ensuring stability in the region could be considered the primary security objectives for Iran.

Close ethnic, religious and historical ties put Tajikistan in Iran’s sphere of influence. However, USA and Russia have common interests not allowing Tajikistan to fall under the orbit of Iran, which they have been successful with so far. Economic setbacks caused by US sanctions is another factor limiting Iran’s influence in the region.

Iran provides a transportation route to the CARs oil and gas supplies. Nonetheless, it stands as a competitor in this domain as well. Iran has competing interests on the cultural and historical domains with Turkey and Russia, whereas, it has common security interests with both countries.

2.2.3. Turkey

Turkey has strong historical, cultural, religious and ethnic affinities with the region. After the fall of the Soviet Union, it tried to increase its footprint by developing economic, cultural and political ties. Turkey’s efforts as a democratic, secular role model country have been supported by Western countries as well. In this sense, Turkey’s efforts to enhance its influence clash with Russia, who sees the region as “near abroad”, and Iran, who has cultural, historical ambitions in the region, whereas, it is in line with the USA and Western countries’ interests.

Turkey’s geography provides an alternative route for transportation of energy resources of the Caspian Sea and Central Asia to the Middle Eastern, African and European markets.

14 Martand Jha, “India’s Connect Central Asia Policy”, *The Diplomat*, 02 December 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/indias-connect-central-asia-policy-2/>.

15 The Economist Online Page, “At the periphery: India in Central Asia”, *The Economist*, 04 January 2019. <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=747505258&Country=India&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International+relations&oid=1437529527&aid=1>.

16 The Economist Online Page, “At the periphery: India in Central Asia”.

Turkey uses its geographical advantage to meet its domestic energy needs and to become an energy transportation hub for Europe, Africa and the Middle East. Turkey has competing interests with Russia and Iran, by serving as alternative transport routes for the region's energy resources. On the one hand, it cooperates with them to meet energy demands for itself and the World markets.

In addition to energy resources, Turkey is also standing as a gateway for the CARs to transport their other commodities to the Middle East, Africa and Europe. The Baku-Tiflis-Kars railway, which started to operate in 2017, considerably expedited the flow of trade from Russia, China and Central Asia¹⁷.

2.2.4. Pakistan

Even if Pakistan does not share a border with Central Asian states, its geographical as well as historical and cultural proximity provides the bases for a variety of common interests. Pakistan's geographical location offers an outlet for the landlocked the CARs economy. The Karachi, Qasim and Gwadar (developing) ports open up the region to the Arabian Sea and further to world market. Through the respective transportation lines connected to the Gwadar Port, CPEC is expected to enhance the regional connectivity of the Central Asian region to the world and to boost trade and economic growth in the region.

While Pakistan can be a transit corridor for the CARs' energy resources to reach outer markets, it can also meet its own domestic needs from the region. TAPI, which was initiated in 2015 to meet the energy requirements of the regional countries still awaits progress in its Afghanistan and Pakistan sections.

Pakistan's cooperation in China's BRI and its efforts to increase regional connectivity with Central Asia are against India's interests in the region, who has competing interests with both countries. Iran and Russia have diverging interests with Pakistan in the sense that they provide alternative energy and trade routes.

2.3. Converging & Diverging Interests of Global & Regional Powers in the Region

While geo-political, geo-strategic, and geo-economic interests of various powers in the region diverge in some areas, they converge on other specific areas. After having reviewed the interests of each actor, convergences and divergences have been categorized under three main areas: the political, economic and security domains.

2.3.1. Political Domain

- a. The USA, Russia, China and partially India can be considered as strategic powers in the region. Russia and China are cooperating against the USA's influence in the

17 HaberTurk Home Page, "Baku-Tiflis-Kars Demiryolu Hattında İki Yılda 275 Bin Ton Yük Taşındı, *HaberTürk*, 27 Ekim 2019. <https://www.haberturk.com/baku-tiflis-kars-demiryolu-hatti-nda-iki-yilda-275-bin-ton-yuk-tasindi-2534819-ekonomi>.

region, on the other hand, India supports the USA's efforts in the containment of China. Consequently, while Russia and China's interests converge, their interests diverge with the USA and India's converging interests.

- b.** Russia, Turkey and Iran pursue a policy of influence in the region. Each of these countries' interests diverge in this aspect. Additionally, the EU and the USA support Turkey's efforts as a secular, democratic role model country, whereas, they are against the Iranian and Russian influence.
- c.** Pakistan has a relative advantage in the region due to its geographical proximity and cultural and religious ties. Pakistan's prospects of regional influence diverge from India's efforts of being more active in the region.

2.3.2. Economics

- a.** China has huge infrastructure and developmental investments in the region. Russia supports China's BRI initiative. The EU attaches importance to an increased connectivity with region. Whereas, China's growing economic influence in the region is against the USA's interest. Therefore, Russia, China and the EU have converging interests in the regional economic connectivity and development, on the other hand, the USA's interests diverge from China and Russia.
- b.** When it comes to energy;
 - (1) China wishes to obtain easy access to the region's energy resources,
 - (2) Russia aims to have a monopoly over the resources, and desires to be the main route to the World,
 - (3) Pakistan and India look for sources for their growing domestic needs,
 - (4) Europe seeks for diverse source countries for its requirements,
 - (5) Turkey and Iran desire to be alternative transportation routes for the CARs' energy resources. Therefore, in Eastern Central Asia; China, Pakistan, India have converging interests on the energy domain, on the other hand, Russia's energy interests diverge from those countries. Similarly, in Western Central Asia; Europe, Turkey and Iran have converging interests against Russia's diverging interests. Since they provide alternative routes to the region, Iran and Turkey's interests diverge as well.

2.3.3. Security

- a.** All regional and global powers attach the utmost importance to the stability of the region. They cooperate on the fields of fighting against terrorism, religious extremism, drug trafficking and illegal immigration. Especially, Central Asian countries and China, Russia, Pakistan and India work together for that purpose under SCO.
- b.** Nevertheless some political, historical, cultural and ethnic affiliations hamper efforts of cooperation for the stabilization and security of the region. The USA's extended

presence in Afghanistan could be considered as one main cause of radicalization in the region. It aims to bring the Western oriented political regime throughout the region. The USA's effort is supported by the EU and Turkey. On the other hand, China and Russia are against any regime enforcement by extra regional countries. Specifically China is very sensitive toward exploitation aimed at the Xinjiang region. Nonetheless, neither Russia nor China are willing to deploy resources to stabilize the region, but they cooperate for regional security under the framework of SCO. Therefore, it can be claimed that the USA, the EU and Turkey's interests converge on this domain, whereas their interests diverge from China and Russia's converging interests. Similarly, Pakistan and India's security interests diverge specifically regarding the stability of Afghanistan.

3. Current Challenges and Future Aspiration

3.1. Challenges for the Region

- a. After gaining independence from the former USSR, Central Asian states faced numerous problems. Having lived under Soviet rule for so many years, they are still struggling to stand on their feet. Specifically, the USSR's style of connecting Soviet states in a way that republics rely on each other on the production of certain commodities has been one of the main challenges for the newly born Republics. During the Communist era, the region was the poorest part of the Soviet Union¹⁸. Insufficient infrastructure and transportation network which were mostly biased towards Russia were main impediments for inter-regional trade and development of the economy. In addition to underdeveloped economy and poor infrastructure, weak government institutions and widespread corruption have been among other problems which newly independent states have had to deal with. These problems have created a convenient environment for public unrest, internal conflict and exploitation by terrorist groups¹⁹.
- b. While the involvement of regional and transregional countries in the CARs' affairs helped their development on certain issues, competing interests complicated problems on other fronts. The ruling elite, who are mostly former Soviet bureaucrats, use foreign powers' involvement on regional problems such as the "War on Terror" and "Color Revolutions" as pretexts to justify their coercive and authoritarian rule²⁰. Hence, the political and economic systems in the region are a mix of capitalism and socialism, which retain some characteristics of the Soviet type totalitarianism²¹.
- c. After gaining independence, all the CARs witnessed a rise of national consciousness and awakening. Even if most of the ruling elite were educated in a Soviet type system,

18 Kort, *Nations in Transition*, vi.

19 Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, xvii.

20 Rauf, "Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Central Asia", 162.

21 Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, xvii.

they adopted policies which would promote national identity and cultural harmony in an effort to distance themselves from the Soviet period. One characteristic example of this policy was replacing the Cyrillic alphabet with the Latin alphabet. Nevertheless, geographical proximity and shared history with Russia has complicated the nation building efforts in those countries. Having a smaller Russian minority and a relatively homogenous big population, Uzbekistan is considered the prime candidate for regional leadership. Kazakhstan is most vulnerable to Russian influence due to its more than 6000 km. length of border, and almost 20 percent of Russian population²².

- d. The unsettled, and not yet stabilized, economic and political system hampers the socio-economic development of regional states. The centralized economic model of the Soviet period is still struggling to transition to a free market economy. Insufficient human capital contributes to a slow development in every aspect. Even if gas and oil helps growth in the Turkmenistan, Kazakhstan and partially Uzbekistan's economies, a single product leaves those states open to sudden fluctuations²³.
- e. Political instability in Afghanistan has a huge impact on security as well as on the economic development of the Central Asian states. The long conflict in Afghanistan bears the potential of spilling over to neighboring Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan²⁴. The security threat posed along the routes in Afghanistan is one of the important factors that reduces the volume of trade and economic activity in the region. TAPI is one concrete example of a delayed project due to the political situation in Afghanistan.
- f. Activities of terrorist organizations is one of the serious challenges for the region. Having borders with Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, and geographically close to Kyrgyzstan, they are susceptible to cross border terrorist activities. All having a high percentage of Muslim population, these countries pose easy targets for the exploitation of religious extremism. In this aspect, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan stand more vulnerable due to their relatively poor socio-economic conditions and weak governmental institutions. Foreign powers' presence in the region can be considered as a contributing factor in the radicalization of the region²⁵. Even though they do not pose a serious threat, the Islamic Movement of Uzbekistan (IMU) and Hizb ut-Tahrir are two main groups operating in the Ferghana Valley²⁶. Moreover, high levels of participation from Central Asian States, specifically from Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan, in terrorist groups fighting in Syria, demonstrate the region's liability to religious radicalism.

22 Brzezinski, *The Grand Chessboard*, 130.

23 Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 13.

24 Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 4-5.

25 Rauf in his article claims that "The Taliban, Islamic movement of Uzbekistan (IMU), Islamic Renaissance Party of Tajikistan (IRPT) and Hizb-u-Tahrir are considering foreign powers a threat to Islam" (Rauf, "Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Central Asia", 162).

26 IMU is active in Uzbekistan, while Hizb ut-Tahrir is active both in Tajikistan (Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, 15-16).

- g. Although regional rivalries and territorial disputes might not be considered as imminent threats for the regional instability, unresolved disagreements between Uzbekistan and Tajikistan, and between Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan on the Ferghana Valley; border disputes between Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan; and separatist Uzbeks' demands in Tajikistan, all have the potential to escalate²⁷.
- h. Drug and human trafficking is another problem that threatens society and the economy of CARs. Especially, the poorly protected Tajikistan border is susceptible to drug smuggling rather than Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan.
- i. Water scarcity is another challenge confronting CARs, the root causes of which go back to the Soviet era. Extended years of wrong agriculture policies, usage of vast open areas for nuclear testing and droughts caused by climate change have left thousands hectares of land to the deserts annually. The gradual reduction of the level of water in the Aral Sea is a striking example of the deteriorating ecology. The necessity to share the scarce water resources also creates problems among the regional countries. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan's desire to use the water resources for energy generation conflicts with Uzbekistan's purpose of using them for agricultural needs.

3.2. Opportunities for the Region

- a. While there are multiple challenges, there are numerous opportunities for the region as well. Rich energy resources are one area that the CARs could benefit from for regional development and prosperity of the region.
- b. In addition to hydrocarbon resources, the region has significant seasonal electricity surpluses. This capacity can be utilized to meet the energy demands of South Asia's expanding economies²⁸.
- c. China's BRI provides an opportunity for region to connect regional economies to the outer world through trade corridors and infrastructure.
- d. The geostrategic location of the region draws strategic interests of global and regional powers on the CARs. Although it could be considered as a challenge, the power contestation in the region could be considered as an opportunity for stability, security and prosperity in the region.
- e. The common religious, ethnic and cultural character of the region is another factor that might promote regional cooperation. This has been already demonstrated by the early emergence of regional organizations which promises further improvement.
- f. Although there seems to be no imminent development, the prospect of the reconciliation process in Afghanistan, bears the potential of enhancing regional connectivity.

27 Peimani, *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*, xviii-ix, 16.

28 Anwar, "Development of Infrastructural Linkages between Pakistan and Central Asia", 112.

4. Analysis / Way Forward

4.1. Global and Regional Powers.

- a. The analysis of the regional and global powers' interests has demonstrated that there are multiple factors in the strategic calculations of the powers in the region. In addition to the geo-political and geographical significance, which is relevant for all actors in the region, other factors which are deemed to be affecting the considerations of regional and global powers are;
- (1) Rich energy and mineral resources,
 - (2) Historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties,
 - (3) Political stability and security,
 - (4) Minorities,
 - (5) Regional / Economic connectivity.
- b. The examination of regional and global powers' policies in the region has revealed that some of the factors are more dominant than others. In this regard, the following primary interests of the actors have been identified.
- (1) USA and EU: Political stability and security,
 - (2) Russia: Political stability, security of the region; Russian minorities.
 - (3) China: Rich energy and mineral resources; Political stability and security; Regional / Economic connectivity.
 - (4) Turkey and Iran: Historical, ethnic, cultural and religious ties; rich energy and mineral resources.
 - (5) Pakistan and India: Rich energy and mineral resources; regional / economic connectivity.
- c. Finally, after an appraisal of the regional and global powers' interests with regard to primary interests, the following projections can be asserted.
- (1) Russia and China are considered to be dominant powers in the region while the US would continue to retain its influence, and the EU would support efforts for democratic and economic development.
 - (2) Iran and Turkey are expected to seek more opportunities in pursuit of furthering their ethnic and cultural ties. Turkey would specifically look for new pipeline projects.
 - (3) Pakistan is expected to pursue the completion of regional connectivity projects, while India would look for an enhanced influence in order to balance China and to hinder Pakistan's efforts.

4.2. The CARs

- a. The analysis of Central Asian States' challenges has demonstrated that they have been struggling with problems mostly inherited from the Soviet period. It is reckoned that

the foremost problem of the region is the development of sustainable political and economic systems which would provide welfare and prosperity for the region. Even though they were able to progress on some areas, there are various problems they need to address such as,

- (1) poor infrastructure,
- (2) lack of human capital,
- (3) widespread corruption,
- (4) water scarcity,
- (5) drug and human trafficking,
- (6) extremism and terrorism,
- (7) instability in Afghanistan.

- b. Despite these problems, it is regarded that several factors provide favorable conditions to take advantage of the opportunities which were previously mentioned. First of all, since their independence, other than Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, they did not undergo internal political instability mainly due to strong leaders. Although there have been regional disputes, there have not been any big scale armed conflicts. Lastly, even though regional and global powers have competing interests, they have common interests in the development and stability of the region.
- c. As a result of these considerations, it can be claimed that current global and regional situations present a suitable environment for the CARs to continue their national building efforts and their economic developments, for which they could utilize their rich energy and mineral resources, and regional economic connectivity projects.

5. Conclusion

As it has been throughout history, the unique geographic location and the energy and mineral resources of Central Asia attract geo-political and geostrategic interests of the regional and global powers. Despite multiple challenges, numerous opportunities promise peace and prosperity for the region.

All the Central Asian countries share a common cultural and historical heritage. Except for Tajikistan, they use the same language, and come from the same ethnic origin, which provides a suitable environment for regional cooperation. This unique character of the region could be leveraged to promote security, prosperity and stability in the region.

It is considered that Afghanistan will continue to remain biggest challenge for stability, security and economic development of the CARs and Pakistan. In addition to the USA, involvement of other strategic powers in peace efforts, such as Russia and China, could expedite the resolution of conflicts, and bring peace and prosperity to the region.

Even though there are multiple powers contesting for different aspects of their national

interests, geo-economics could be regarded as the dominant factor of contemporary rivalry. The region's rich energy and mineral resources, combined with China's huge investment capacity, are promising for the further development of the region. In this sense, BRI would be the most significant infrastructure and development project, which would connect West China to the Central Asia, and further open up the region to the Middle East, the Arabian Sea, Africa and Europe. As the regional interconnectivity and integration are enhanced, along with trade and economy, prosperity and development would be boosted.

Peer-review: Externally peer-reviewed.

Conflict of Interest: The author has no conflict of interest to declare.

Grant Support: The author declared that this study has received no financial support.

Hakem Değerlendirmesi: Dış bağımsız.

Çıkar Çatışması: Yazar çıkar çatışması bildirmemiştir.

Finansal Destek: Yazar bu çalışma için finansal destek almadığını beyan etmiştir.

References

- ANWAR, Zahid. "Development of Infrastructural Linkages between Pakistan and Central Asia", *A Research Journal of South Asian Studies*, 26, no.1 (January-June 2011): 103-115.
- BEEHNER, Lionel. "U.S. Military Bases in Central Asia", *Council on Foreign Relations*, 26 July 2005. <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/asia-us-military-bases-central-asia>.
- BRADSHER, Keith. "Chinese Company to Buy Kazakh Oil Interests for \$4 Billion", *The New York Times*, 22 August 2005. <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/08/22/business/worldbusiness/chinese-company-to-buy-kazakh-oil-interests-for-4.html>.
- BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew. *The Grand Chessboard*. New York: Basic Books, 1997.
- BP STATISTICAL REVIEW OF WORLD ENERGY, 21 November 2019. <https://www.bp.com/content/dam/bp/business-sites/en/global/corporate/pdfs/energy-economics/statistical-review/bp-stats-review-2019-full-report.pdf>.
- Encyclopedia Britannica. *Heartland*, 21 November 2019. <https://www.britannica.com/place/heartland>.
- FARCHY, Jack and KYNGE, James. "Map: Connecting central Asia", *Financial Times*, 10 May 2016. <https://www.ft.com/content/ee5cf40a-15e5-11e6-9d98-00386a18e39d>.
- GORDEYEVA, Mariyya. "China buys into giant Kazakh oilfield for \$5 billion", *Reuters*, 07 September 2013. <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-oil-kashagan-china/china-buys-into-giant-kazakh-oilfield-for-5-billion-idUSBRE98606620130907>.
- HABERTURK HOME PAGE. "Baku-Tiflis-Kars Demiryolu Hattında İki Yılda 275 Bin Ton Yük Taşındı", *HaberTürk*, 27 Ekim 2019. <https://www.haberturk.com/baku-tiflis-kars-demiryolu-hatti-nda-iki-yilda-275-bin-ton-yuk-tasindi-2534819-ekonomi>.
- HUNTINGTON, Samuel P. "The Clash of Civilizations?", *Foreign Affairs* 72, no.3 (Summer 1993): 22-49.
- JHA, Martand. "India's Connect Central Asia Policy", *The Diplomat*, 02 December 2016. <https://thediplomat.com/2016/12/indias-connect-central-asia-policy-2/>

- KHETRAN, Mir Sherbaz. "Economic Connectivity: Pakistan, China, West Asia and Central Asia." *Strategic Studies* 36, no.4 (Winter 2016): 61-76.
- KORT, Michael. *Nations in Transition: Central Asian Republics*. New York: Facts On File, Inc, 2004.
- KOZHOKIN, Evgeny. "Geopolitical Importance of Central Asia: Russian View", *Strategic Analysis* 33, no.4 (July 2009): 478-482.
- MUNIR, Muhammad and SHAFIQ, Muhammad. "Geostrategic Significance of Wakhan Corridor for Afghanistan, China and Pakistan", *Margalla Papers*. (2018): 203-215.
- PILLALAMARRI, Akhilesh. "The United States Just Closed Its Last Base in Central Asia", *The Diplomat*, 10 June 2014. <https://thediplomat.com/2014/06/the-united-states-just-closed-its-last-base-in-central-asia/>.
- PEIMANI, Hooman. *Conflict and Security in Central Asia and the Caucasus*. California: ABC-CLIO, LLC, 2009.
- RAUF, Servet. "Changing Geopolitical Dynamics in Central Asia: Causes and Effects." *Strategic Studies* 37, no.4 (Winter 2017): 149-165.
- SNYDER, Jed C. *After Empire: The Emerging Geopolitics of Central Asia*. Washington, DC: NDU Press, eds 1995.
- THE ECONOMIST Online Page. "At the periphery: India in Central Asia", *The Economist*, 04 January 2019. <http://country.eiu.com/article.aspx?articleid=747505258&Country=India&topic=Politics&subtopic=Forecast&subsubtopic=International+relations&oid=1437529527&aid=1>.
- US DEPARTMENT OF STATE Web Page. *C5+1 Fact Sheet*, 22 September 2017. <https://www.state.gov/c51-fact-sheet/>.