

"Tajikistan: A Factor in India's Security Calculus"

Dilip Kumar Maurya

Research Scholar

Dept. of Defence & Strategic Studies

University of Allahabad,

Allahabad (U.P.)

India

Abstract

Central Asia is becoming a region of great interest to India. All the states are faced with various kinds of problems and the challenges are to work for peace and stability in the region. Tajikistan is one such country where its relations with India have found supreme expression in the sphere of economic, culture, defence and terrorism. The author in the article discusses all the issues in detail which affects the bilateral relations between India and Tajikistan. In analyzing the relations it is seen the problem is quite an internal problem and it is related to drugs and terrorism. In future, if both the countries want to play positive role then they will have to fight against it which has not only disturbed the power politics of the region but also of the globe.

Key Words: border dispute, ethnic problem, Pakistan occupied Kashmir, Strategic Partnership, Joint Commission of Trade, scientific and technical cooperation, SCO, WTO, hydropower plant, ICCR scholarship, northern alliance.

Introduction:

Central Asia is a region of great strategic importance. The region has to face various problems such as border disputes, ethnic tensions, political upheaval etc. The security agenda of the Central Asian republics has been shifted now a day. Currently, Central Asia region pose different kinds of challenges for India's foreign and security policies. That's why the region assumes is significance for India. Further, any instance of instability in region will have a significant impact on the stability and security not only in India but the entire South Asian region as well. For India, Central Asian republics clearly fit in within its border security horizon. In the perspective it will be proper to discuss Indo-Tajikistan's relations.

Challenges in Central Asia:

In general the spread of weapons is a deep concern in the Central Asian security environment. It is said that Central Asia is a hotbed of arms proliferation. The security forces are the primary holders of small arms in the region. The 9/11 war on the terror gave a boost to the entry of arms and weapons into the Central Asian region. Influx of arms in Central Asian region can hamper international security paradigm which includes India as well Central Asia which was traditionally a drug-producing region. Today, all the five states of Central Asian region are the sites for the production transformation, and consumption of drugs. The long-running war on terror in Afghanistan has seen the rapid spreads of drug trafficking and small arms proliferation to most of the neighbouring Central Asian republics. Central Asia shares a 2,400 km long border with Afghanistan market and is believed to be trafficked through the five Central Asian states/ Several major drug trafficking routes being in Afghanistan and enter Central Asian countries. Kazakhstan¹ also provides three main drug trafficking routes from Tajikistan. Some groups from Afghanistan and Pakistan threaten the stability in the region of Central Asia as drug trafficking is a significant source of their finances. The illicit drug trafficking passes via Afghanistan to Central Asia. India is more vulnerable to the illicit drug trade as Pakistan is in near proximity to both of the regions.

Since the beginning, the Central Asian region has been a region of peoples with diverse races and cultures.² Three of the Central Asian republics i.e. Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan support Northern Alliance because of ethnic considerations. Unlike India, Central Asian states may identify with any of the identities-religious, ethnic, tribal, territorial or linguistic.³ It could pose a threat to India.

Tajikistan's Geo-Strategic Position:

Tajikistan's is important for India because in geo-strategic position. It shares borders with China, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, and Kyrgyzstan and is also well connected with Pakistan occupied Kashmir (PoK). So far India's regional security calculus is concerned, Tajikistan occupies a significant place, particularly in the context of Afghanistan and Pakistan. The infiltration of militants into Tajikistan can have grave security challenges for India due to its proximity to PoK and then it can affect the security of Kashmir.

Indo-Tajikistan Bilateral Relations:

Relations between India and Tajikistan have been close and cordial. Moreover exchange of high level visits between the two countries have improved bilateral relations. From bilateral relations both the countries have signed "Strategic Partnership." This was done during the visit of President Rahmon to India in 2012. The partnership includes cooperation

in a wide spectrum of areas, including political, economic, education, health, human resource development, defence, counterterrorism, science and technology, culture and tourism.

India-Tajikistan relations have been further strengthened with the recent visit of Shri. Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, to Tajikistan (July 12-13, 2015). It was Modi's on the last leg of his Central Asian visit. During the visit Prime Minister Modi held wide ranging talks with President Emomali Rohmon to step up cooperation in the spheres of defence connectivity and counter-terrorism.⁴

India and Tajikistan have established several bilateral Consultative Mechanisms such as Foreign Office Consultations, Joint Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation, Joint Working Group on Combating International Terrorism, Joint Working Group on Defence Cooperation etc. for developing and expanding cooperation between the two countries. India and Tajikistan actively cooperate with each other under the aegis of Multilateral Forum, including SCO and the UN organizations. Tajikistan has supported India's candidature for permanent membership of UNSC. On the other hand, India had extended complete support to Tajikistan's accession to the WTO.

Trade

Bilateral trade with Tajikistan is not upto the mark and is well below the potential. Trade is hampered due to lack of direct trade route between India and Tajikistan. But what trade these countries do are beneficial to them. The major items of India's export are pharmaceutical, tea, coffee, chemicals, textile & clothing and machinery and the major imports from Tajikistan are aluminum, cotton, dry fruits, vegetables, organic chemicals and essential oils.⁵ Bilateral Trade figure are given as follows:

Total Trade Value in US \$ Million

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
15.50	22.21	34.18	32.56	41.33	30.14	48.02	55.13	58.09

Exports from India to Tajikistan Value in US \$ Million

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
7.45	12.40	16.71	15.71	18.31	21.28	35.16	54.27	53.71

Imports to from Tajikistan

Value in US \$ Million

2006-07	2007-08	2008-09	2009-10	2010-11	2011-12	2012-13	2013-14	2014-15
8.05	9.81	17.47	16.85	23.02	8.86	12.86	0.86	4.39

The adverse climate condition in Tajikistan has severely affected the economic growth. To overcome the crisis, India gave a grant of US \$ 2 million to Tajikistan (US \$ 1 million as cash assistance and US \$ 1 million in kind like power cables, generators and pump sets). In June 2009, US \$ 200, 000 cash assistance was give by India to overcome damage caused by floods in April-May, 2009. After the flashfloods in Kulyab province on 7 May 2010, India provided US \$ 200,000 on humanitarian ground. After the outbreak of Polio in southwest Tajikistan, India provided 2mn doses of oral polio vaccine through UNICEF in November, 2010. On 28 December, 2013, Government of India provided a high quality ambulance to the Governor of Khorog city of the GornoBadakshanAutonumos Region (Pamirs).³

Private Investments and Projects:

Indian private investments in Tajikistan include a 5 star hotel "Sheraton" in Dushanbe. It was constructed by CHL. An Indian company KEC/RPG completed the construction of 116 km long power transmission line from Sangtuda-1 Hydropower plant to the Afghan border in October 2010. On a commercial contract, BHEL supplied a 7 MW generator to Tajik company "Pamir Energy" in 2011. In 2014, an Indian Company, M/s Kalpataru bagged a contract worth approx \$22 million for construction of electric transmission lines under Asian Development Bank financing.

MoUs and Agreements:

During the visit of President Rahmon to India in September 2012, he announced new development projects including: an IT Centre of Excellence; an e-network, including tele-education and tele-medicine; medical centers; language laboratories; an Entrepreneurship Development Institute; supply of agricultural machinery; and the implementation of a package of small development projects (SDPs). Six agreements were also inked.⁶ Another agreement was signed between Tajikistan's Ministry of Energy and Industry and India's Ministry of textiles. The purpose was to enhance trade and economic relations in the fields of textiles, clothing and fashion including research and development, investment cooperation and the promotion of export of textiles in each other's market.

Cultural Relations:

Programme of cooperation (POC) was signed between their Ministers of Culture for the year 2012-2015. This was done to facilitate exchange of material in culture and art, specialist, promotion of cultural heritage, performing art groups art exhibitions and holding of days of culture in each other's country.

Programme of Cooperation between the two governments. In the field of education, the two countries facilitated close contact with various educational institutions including enhanced exchange of scholars, teachers and conducting joint research as well. Till date, 953 slots for ITEC and 339 ICCR scholarships have been utilized by Tajik candidates to study in India. Tajikistan is one of the largest beneficiaries of the ITEC programme. ITEC training slots were increased from 100 to 150 during the visit President Rahmon to India in September 2012. The number of Indian nationals in Tajikistan is approx 400, out of which 300 are students in the Dushanbe Medical College.

In the field of Sports, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) provides a framework of cooperation in the field of sports and youth development and participation in youth festivals, etc. There was a cooperation between the two countries in the field in Social and labour relations. Agreement was signed between India's Ministry of Health and Family Welfare and Tajikistan's Ministry of Health. It provided exchange of information and experts in health, training, attending international meetings and also setting up diagnostic Centre, training of medical professionals and promotion of medical tourism to India. In the cultural sphere, the bilateral relations are vibrant. The friendly relations with former Soviet Union positively influenced the attitudes of Tajik people towards India and its culture, which continues to manifest in the popularity of Indian movies, dance, music and yoga in Tajikistan.

Defence Relations:

India and Tajikistan face serious threats and challenges in the region. Hence, there is much and greater opportunity for cooperation to address the regional security issues of extremism and terrorism. India's effort for a stronger global role and its competition with Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan has over the past two decades pushed India towards closer engagement with Central Asia. Tajikistan has thus, become important for India's because it is the main point of entry into the region because of Dushanbe's proximity and a special relationship with Kabul.

The Indian government close cooperation with Dushanbe goes back to late 1990's when both countries supported the anti-Taliban resistance forces, the Northern Alliance, in Afghanistan. Tajikistan provided Indian military advisers with access to the ethnic Tajik leadership of the Northern Alliance. Until 2002, Dushanbe hosted a medical facility set up by

the Indian army to treat injured anti-Taliban resistance fighters at the Farkhor airfield, on Tajikistan's southern border with Afghanistan. India also used the airfield to supply the Northern Alliance with military equipment, munitions and intelligence, and to repair its combat helicopters.⁷

Security relations between India and Tajikistan have been further strengthened when the two countries signed a bilateral defence agreement in 2002. Based on that deal, New Delhi refurbished a Soviet-built airfield at Ayni, 15 miles (25 kilometers) west of Dushanbe. The renovation, which cost India over \$70 million, included upgrading the runway, construction of the traffic control tower, hangars, and administrative buildings. India specialists handed over the refurbished facility to the Tajik defence ministry in 2010.⁸

On the other hand, India's support in upgrading the Ayni airfield has aroused widespread speculation that India intended to use the facility as its first ever foreign military base.⁹ The Indian Defence Ministry reportedly planned to deploy MiG-29 (NATO name : Fulcrum) fighters jets and Mi-17 multi-purpose helicopters at the airbase. The deployment of elements of the Indian air force in Tajikistan made perfect sense as this would improve New Delhi's response capability to potential crises in Afghanistan and Pakistan, and also help it to become a major player in energy-rich Central Asia. However, neither India nor Dushanbe has ever confirmed India's interest in establishing airbase at Ayni. Many analysts believe that Dushanbe refused to host an Indian air base under pressure from Moscow, China and Pakistan.¹⁰

India's ties with the Tajik military is not only restricted to revamping the airfield. But in 2003, India- Tajikistan conducted the first joint military exercise. India's has provided to the Tajik defence ministry which includes two Mi-8 helicopters along with critical spare parts, trucks and other vehicles about 10,000 uniforms, and computers. In addition, hundreds of Tajik military cadets and officers have been trained at India's National Defence Academy since 1998. India also funded the refurbishment of the Tajik Military Institute in Dushanbe.

Conclusion:

South Asia is one of the priority partners of the Central Asian countries. It is also an important region in the international security system. Security in South Asian region depends on India and her relations Tajikistan. Peace, stability and security in Tajikistan is of principal importance to India. The factors like menace of illicit drug trafficking, Islamic fundamentalism, terrorism, China's growing influence in the region etc. pose serious implications on India's security.

Afghanistan is a concern for India which cannot be separated while linking it with Tajikistan security. It is a part of the Central Asian geopolitical position. India and Central Asian countries should pool forces to address the problem of Afghanistan. Tajikistan lacks experiences as well as expertise to tackle with the problem of terrorism and Islamic extremism. India's experience and knowledge will be beneficial for the country as the region itself facing the same problem. India has set up Joint Working Groups (JWG) to deal with Islamic extremism and counter terrorism with four states of Central Asia i.e. Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan so that peace and prosperity can prevail in both countries.

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