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Building Central Asian and South Asian cooperation on Energy Security: Investigating the role of China as a Core State in Shanghai Cooperation Organization

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Abstract

The pursuit of energy security has been a primary goal of many South Asian and Central Asian states. Several projects, including the TAPI Gas Pipeline, the IP Gas Pipeline, and the Central Asia-South Asia Power Project (CASA-1000), were signed to meet this demand. These projects, however, did not succeed due to ongoing political turmoil in Afghanistan, growing inter-state conflicts in the region, lack of funds, and the US sanctions against Iran. In this desperate situation, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) has emerged as a ray of hope, opening new channels of cooperation between South Asian and Central Asian states. The SCO can play an important role in energy security, and China, as a core member, has assumed a pivotal role in the organization's success. The recent geopolitical shifts, particularly the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and the new detente between Saudi Arabia and Iran, are probably going to make it possible for China to establish, within the framework of its cooperative leadership, the kind of environment that would allow several Central Asian and South Asian nations to pursue cooperation on energy security. Through the lens of regional integration theory, this article investigates "What role China can play in strengthening the cooperation between Central Asian and South Asian states on energy security under the banner of SCO?" This qualitative analysis is based on the secondary sources and published literature in the field.

Key Words: Energy security, Core state, SCO, Central Asia and South Asia

Introduction

The preeminence of regional cooperation happened primarily in the economic realm during the cold war era. The economic characteristics have always been the motivating factors behind the regional integration. The states develop the regional cooperative frameworks to pursue their interests. The prospects of a regional integration scheme depend profoundly on

states' power. Thus, it is essentially the powerful states who become backers of regionalism. The regional institutions function as arenas for powerful states to pursue their interests. They consume their economic bulks to "offer side-payments or package deals" to pursue their interests. Equally, such powerful states employ "non-engagement as a threat" to realize their vested interests (Panke, 2019). These powerful regional states employ strategy of offering side-payment to less privileged states to keep them aligned on their vested itinerary including energy cooperation. In a regional integration order, the outlooks of a core or leading state that is, mostly economically powerful state, has been accredited as a centripetal force of regional integration.

Energy security has become one of the crucial foreign policy objectives of the states both, at the regional and global levels. Cross-border energy trade is a strategic issue yielding substantial potential for regional cooperation. In this trade, the pipelines become efficient means of transporting hydrocarbon resources. New corridors of power and trade are built by energy producing and energy consuming states. The significance of the oil and gas pipelines has been amplified in areas like Central Asia and South Asia being energy rich and energy starved regions respectively. The projects and plans like TAPI Gas Pipeline, IP Gas Pipeline and CASA 1000 Electricity corroborate premise of connectivity of the regions like South Asia and Central Asia under the domain of energy security. The states of these regions have been struggling to achieve energy security through bilateral and multilateral efforts. Factors like instability of Afghanistan, lack of finances, inter-state conflicts, and the US sanctions on Iran inhibited efforts of the states to achieve energy security so far (Rehman& Mushtaq, 2020).

Several of the states of South Asia and Central Asia have joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization being led by China. The member states of the SCO belonging to the said regions consider the role of China in the SCO quite imperative, particularly in the domain of energy security. China is in position of financing projects and plans of energy security for the states of these regions. Recently, it has created rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia (arch- rivals of Middle East) through its diplomatic maneuvers. On this basis, it can be stated confidently that China will bring warring actors of Afghanistan on the negotiation table to create stability in the region.

This paper contains four sections. The first section deals with the framework related to dispositions and approaches of core states towards regional cooperative arrangements. This section applies that particular framework on the roles of Germany and Indonesia in EU and ASEAN respectively. The next section evaluates nexus of South Asia and Central Asia in the domain of energy security. Keeping in view the conceptual framework, the third section critically examines the role of China in the SCO ensuring energy security to Central Asia and South Asia. The last section completes this article.

Conceptual Framework

In regional integration, all states do not operate equally and successfully. The more powerful and better equipped states employ regional organization efficiently. The regional institutions, normally, provide greater authority and legitimacy to its powerful member. Thus, the powerful state can tackle potential negative side-effects hampering measures of regional cooperation. That powerful state assumes position of core or leading member in a regional cooperative arrangement. Core state employs more bearing than the small states in a particular regional integration scheme. Such state derives its sway from economic assets, military

capability, and geographical location. The phenomenon, like formation of institution or advancement of particular policies, can transpire on the forum of regional organization if financed by core state (Murray, 2015). The thrust of a core state is so influential that the regional integration is either augmented or impeded because of its role.

Germany, Indonesia, and Brazil have been acknowledged as core members of the EU, ASEAN, and MERCOUSR respectively (Fawcett, p, 45-46). Writers like Walter Mattli, Robert Gilpin, Louise Fawcett, Andrew Hurrell, Diana Panke, and Alexander Libman share similar views germane to the role of core states. They consider role of a core state as determining factor of a regional cooperative mechanism. Robert Gilpin reinforces role of economically powerful member. According to him, "the core sets and enforces the rules of economic exchange and development" (Gilpin, 2001). Walter Mattli analyzed the roles of leading countries in a regional cooperative setting. For the success of a regional organization, according to him, it is imperative on leading members to promote policies like coordination, financing of the organization, funding of the joint projects, and managing of conflicts arising out of distribution of finances. He further argued that animosity between leading members caused collapse of the regional integration scheme (Mattli, 1999). Thus, it is not hegemony rather it is benevolent disposition required on the part of the leading members in a regional cooperative structure.

Benevolent leadership indicates high degree of commitment, consideration, distribution of material costs, provision of benefits, and incorporating of weak states' interests in regional cooperative arrangements. (Prys 2010: 489). A regional power is largely accepted as a legitimate core member of regional cooperative arrangements on the basis of this type of behavior. A regional integration scheme functions when trust and reconciliation have been developed by leading state and small states (Hulse, 2016). The region that enjoys high degree of regional integration provides opportunities to the small states to gain influence and protection of national interests (Panke, 2019).

Philomena Murray considers trust as an indispensable driver of regional integration. The leading state takes initiative to build trust and reconciliation among the member states during the preliminary stages of regional integration. Robert Putnam argues, "Trust lubricates cooperation … and cooperation itself breeds trust" (Murray, 2015, p. 54). Thus, fear and suspicion dismantle reconciliatory processes in a regional organization. Antagonistic narratives undercut prospects of regional settings. Reconciliation converges interests of competing actors on the forum of regional organizations. The convergence of interests between Germany and France in EU and settling of political disputes between Indonesia and Malaysia in ASEAN validates this premise that cooperative leadership takes initiative to infuse spirit of trust on the forum of regional organizations. The European Act causing regional integration in Europe had been outcome of the convergence of national interests among the core states of that time like Germany, France, and Britain (O'Brien, 1995). Equally, a common agricultural policy initiated the formation of the European Economic Community in 1957. Under this policy, France was given access to the German market for its agricultural exports. In return, France opened its market for the German industrial goods (Matthews, 2015, p. 149). Likewise, The Franco-German Treaty of Peace and Cooperation was signed in 1963and it expedited regional connectivity in Europe. It reflects approaches of the European leaders based on prudence and reconciliation (Ahmar, 2021).

Financial offerings and obliging leadership are also knotted policy measures of regional cooperative arrangements. Provision of major financial substance to run the regional

organization and providing of funding to different regional projects in order to align weak regional partners towards integration have been recognized as primary responsibilities of the economically powerful members. The weak states, normally, partake in vibrant regional organizations to pursue their foreign policy goals. However, they have to depend upon powerful states for the successful role of regional organization. Germany accepts the maximum fiscal requirements of the EU because it is the largest economy of Europe on the basis of GDP (Kurecic, 2017). The formation of the European Monetary Union and countering of the Euro zone crisis reveal vibrant roles of France and Germany. Again, it authenticates the cooperative leadership role of core members in strengthening regional integration. On the occasion of formation of the EU, Germany gave up the Deutsche Mark (DM) for the sake of euro. Thus, German economic policy became European policy. According to the EU Website, the euro is the decisive icon of European integration.

Among the developing countries, the case of ASEAN reflects excellent demonstration of the premise of cooperative leadership (Rehman & Mushtaq, 2021). During 1960s, the Indonesian foreign policy resulted into political risks and international isolation. Indonesia took initiative to dismantle its image of aggressive and irresponsible state. Projecting image of stable East Asia and Indonesia was indispensable to attract foreign capital. The Indonesian leader Sukarno started hostile policy towards Malaysia. With the arrival of Major-General, Suharto, Indonesia initiated a process of rapprochement with Malaysia. He introduced new foreign policy discourse to be called New Order. Suharto and his colleagues reversed Sukarno's foreign policy orientation (Haftel, 2010).

The conceptual framework and its application on the EU and ASEAN exemplify worth of premise of the 'role of core state' developed here. Before proceeding to analyze the Chinese role as a core member of the SCO it is obligatory to comprehend dynamics of energy security on the one hand and plans connecting the regions of South Asia and Central Asia on the other hand.

Energy Security for Central Asia and South Asia

Different factors contribute rationale on interconnection of South Asia and Central Asia in the area of energy cooperation. In South Asia, 16% of its population is living below the poverty line. Its intra- regional trade is 5%. Contrary to it, well integrated regions like Europe and East Asia have 60% and 25% intra- regional trade respectively (Chauhan, 2o16). Likewise,20% of South Asian region's population is still without electricity access (Gupta, 2021).

Potential of Central Asian Sates Renewable and non – renewable sources of Energy

Country	Natural Gas Reserves (Trillion Cubic Feet)	Oil Reserves (thousand million barrel)	Coal Reserves (billion tons)	Hydro power (tetra watt hour /year)	Wind power (gigawatt)
Iran	1130.7	155.6	-	-	-
Turkmenistan	688.1	0.6	-	24	10
Uzbekistan	42.7	0.6	1.375	88.5	1.6
Kazakhstan	93.7	30.0	25.6	199	354
Kyrgyzstan	-	-	1.3	163	1.5
Tajikistan	-	-	4.5	527	2

Sources: Oil and gas reserves have been taken from Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2020 and Sources of coal, hydro power and wind power have been taken from Advancing Energy Security in Central Asia report by © 2022 Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe

The above given table clarifies potential of the Central Asian states in renewable and non- renewable sources of energy. Here it is imperative to comprehend conceptual dimensions of energy security. In the domain of energy security, energy exporting states demand security of payment from energy importing states and energy importing states demand cheap and uninterrupted supply of energy from exporting states. The transit states, if there is/are, demand security of transit fee (Shaffer, 2009).Energy security reduces poverty and it connects the states through webs of pipelines and electricity grids. In this way, the energy trade deepens regional integration and it contributes to improving political relationships among energy consuming, energy exporting and transit states. Having this rationale in mind, the leaders of South Asia and Central Asia devised plans and projects in the domain of energy security.

Energy Projects Connecting South Asia and Central Asia and their Causes of Incompletion

The TAPI Gas Pipeline, conceived in 1996, was intended to be funded by the Unocal Corporation (UNOCAL) and Delta Oil of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. It is supposed that 1,600 km pipeline will carry 33 billion cubic meters of natural gas per year. The estimated cost of this project is US$10 billion. Likewise, the CASA-1000 that has been under discussion since 2007 remains an unfinished project. It has been planned to transfer the electricity surplus of hydropower plants located in Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan to South Asia. Only 15% of this project had been completed till October 2021 and further work on it was postponed indefinitely under the pretext of instability in Afghanistan. Besides CASA 1000, another challenge for Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan is their aging power stations. These states are in dire need of technology and finance for the rehabilitation of their hydropower stations.

The regional instability, border disputes, lack of finance, opposition of the US are prominent factors hampering execution of these projects. Lack of finance and instability of Afghanistan are present in the projects of TAPI and CASA 1000. IP Gas pipeline has been facing

severe opposition of the US and that opposition has discouraged financers to undertake this project. The TAPI, being project of around US$10 billion, has raised US$1 billion from the Islamic Development Bank and the Asian Development Bank so far. China's reassurance to increase investment and Moscow's intention to participate in this project are encouraging signs (Symeonidis, 2022). Likewise, seeking US $3 billion funding for the Kambarata-1 and the US $727 million for the Upper Naryn Cascade plants are challenges for Kyrgyzstan (Rehman, 2011). Thus, the instability in Afghanistan was the result of efforts to exploit regional natural resources. This instability discouraged international financers to fund projects of TAPI Pipeline and CASA 1000.

Parallel to the projects of TAPI Pipeline and CASA 1000, IP Gas pipeline remained unfinished due to opposition of the US. A project of $ 7 billion has been supposed to transport 750 MMCFD to Pakistan for 25 years. In 2006, the U.S. State Department official Steven Mann presented official policy of the US about energy security in the Caspian region. He argued that the US opposed all the proposed pipelines involving Iran (Cook &Roshandel 2009, p.86). India withdrew from IP gas pipeline under the threat of the US. Pakistan resolved to complete its portion of IP pipeline under IP Gas Sale Purchase Agreement. Under this agreement, Pakistan will have to face fine of $ 18 billion from Iran in case of non- compliance. Pakistan has not started to work on its portion allegedly under the threat of the US sanctions. Contrary to these facts, Iran has completed 900 KM pipeline on its side (Rehman& Mushtaq, 2020).

At this juncture, it is prudent on the part of the States of South Asia and Central Asia to seek energy security under the banner of the SCO. Before exploring role of China to ensure energy security to the regions of South Asia and Central Asia, it is imperative get cognizance of the SCO and position of China in the SCO as well.

China in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)

The statistical outlook proves the SCO as most relevant forum for the states of South Asia and Central Asia to resolve issues of energy security. Gathering 40% of the world's population, counting for 30% of the World's GDP and regulating trade of $ 8.03 trillion make the SCO as the largest and most prominent regional organization of the world (Rossi, 2022). In SCO, China is in leading position on the basis of having GDP of17 trillion dollars and foreign reserves of 4 trillion dollars (Ahmar, 2021).This prominent organization was founded as "Shanghai Five" by China, Russia, and Central Asian countries (Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, and Kyrgyzstan) on 26 April 1996 and it was renamed as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization after the inclusion of Uzbekistan in 2001. The prominent institutions of the SCO comprises of the Heads of State Council (HSC) and The SCO Heads of Government Council (HGC) being the supreme decision making body and forum to provide strategies in the priority areas respectively. The SCO pursues consensus based approach in decision making procedure and this approach barricades hegemonic designs of powerful members.

The SCO incorporated energy security in the framework of the SCO. On September 16, 2022, the Council of the Heads of State of the SCO issued statement on energy security. The Council focused on areas of cooperation related to fossil fuels. For the utilization of the renewable and non- renewable sources of energy, the Heads of State of the SCO reiterated increasing of investment in the domains of fossil fuels for the sake exploration and production.

Likewise, the SCO's Energy Club's official objectives include discussion of energy cooperation between the states and proposals of new projects. The Club also stresses on cooperation in the resolution of problems related to energy transport, production, and consumption.

In changing regional and international milieu of politics, China has been assuming driving position in Asia. It seems that dream of Asian century will be realized under the spirit of the Chinese World Order. China has been attempting to reset the current international order by concentrating on negotiation, compromise, and policy coordination (Odgaard, 2013).Through the economic corridors, deliberated under the Belt and Road Initiative, China expects to place itself at center of new global economy. It has been aligning powerful states of West Asia with its agenda. Its enlargement is slow but ineluctable. In this context, two extraordinary events validate this premise. China brought Iran and Saudi Arabia on negotiation table and it was successful in creating détente between these regional powers of Middle East and Gulf respectively. Other event is signing of deal of foreign investment worth of $ 400 billion for 25 years between Iran and China. These incidents reveal that China can infuse new spirit to the SCO. In actuality, the SCO has become instrument of the Chinese international order that is based on coexistence. Thus, China can also utilize forum of the SCO to ensure energy security to the states of South Asia and Central Asia.

China's Role to Ensure Energy Security between South Asia and Central Asia

In the light of conceptual framework elaborated earlier, the dimensions of cooperative leadership in the theory of regional integration necessitates that China can take initiatives and measures to ensure energy security to the states of South Asia and Central Asia under the banner of the SCO.

Provision of Finance and Technology

In the SCO region, India and Russia occupy 6th and 12th positions respectively in terms of largest economies of the world on the basis of GDP. China occupies 2nd position in this category. The gap between China and other SCO economic powers is so wide that those powers cannot collectively match Chinese economic clout. China has become the biggest holder of foreign exchange reserves and the second biggest Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) provider in the world (Ying, 2017). In the SCO region, it has become major destiny of foreign direct investment. The outflow of the FDI from China is also prominent in the SCO region. On the basis of its economic clout, it delivered$900 million and $ 10 billion low-interest loan to SCO members in 2004 and 2009 respectively. In 2010, it provided about $20 million in aid to Kyrgyzstan in the aftermath of Osh crisis (Huasheng, 2013).

Country	China	Russia	India	Kazakhstan	Pakistan	Iran	Uzbekistan	Kyrg	Tajk
Inflow	180.957	38.4	44.735	3.172	2.01	1.425	2.044	0.248	0.084
Outflow	145.19	63.602	15.522	1.468	0.242				

The projects like TAP Pipeline, IP Pipeline and CASA 1000 electricity have been facing issue of lack of financing. This lacking of finance is owing to two factors. Firstly, instability of

Afghanistan and, secondly, the fear of US sanctions. Due to these factors, the leaders of the concerned states have been unable to show political will. At this critical juncture, Chinese initiative to support and finance these projects will prove a fresh air in the hot desert. Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan, collectively, preserve 5.5% of world's economically efficient hydropower potential. Their hydropower stations need rehabilitation. Ageing hydropower infrastructure has become a severe challenge for these states. Thus, the Chinese initiative of financing the above mentioned projects, if taken seriously, can ensure energy security to the regions of South Asia and Central Asia (OSCE Report, 2022).

Constructive Engagement for Stability of Afghanistan

Besides provision of finance and technology by China, its constructive engagement to ensure stability in Afghanistan is need of the hour. Constructive engagement implies stopping of conflicts, facilitating peaceful resolutions of events, and alleviating humanitarian disastrous. Thus, it is prudent to pursue inclusive approach. In this approach, regional members, international actors and various ethnic groups of Afghanistan should be included. The withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan in the aftermath of Doha agreement concluded on February 29, 2020 between the United States and the Taliban has rendered exceptional opportunity to the regional stakeholders to engage themselves in constructive engagement so that long lasting dream of seeking stable Afghanistan may be realized. The violence ridden Afghanistan foiled efforts of connecting Central, South, and West Asia (Ahmar, 2021). China under the banner of the SCO has strong conviction that instability in Afghanistan would cause devastating repercussions for the SCO region. It established SCO-Afghanistan Contact Group in 2005. The SCO promotes principle of non- intervention. It is imperative on the SCO to employ constructive engagement to bring warring sections of the Afghan society on the negotiation table. Besides, China on the platform of the SCO should chalk out strategies to counter regional instability. The volatile situation of Central Asia like Osh crisis demands from the SCO to probe the issue of regional instability cautiously. The SCO should articulate ways to the members to counter various challenges to the peace and security of the region. In the absence of a reaction mechanism on the part of the SCO, regional instability persists. China should lead in forming a reaction mechanism that will operate to manage instability (Huasheng, 2013).

Conflict Resolution Mechanism

Financial contribution, constructive engagement to manage volatility and forming of reaction mechanism will function when conflict resolution mechanism will operate properly. These measures are interlinked and they bear fruit collectively. It is imperative upon the core member to discourage antagonistic narratives. In the words of James Rosenau, "Aturbulent environment tends to put an organization at odds with it" is so compelling assertion that it is prudent on the members to resolve their conflicts (Rosenau, 1990). Thus, there are fault lines that can become battle lines if timely actions are not taken. These battle lines can be handled through mechanism of regional institutions whereby powerful state employs elements of hard and soft power. For example, the Central Asian States like Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan being upstream states and Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan and Turkmenistan being downstream states have been facing challenge of transboundry water sharing. The status of the Caspian Sea is also controversial. The

SCO members have also been facing conflicts of territorial nature. Most of the territorial disputes, including demarcation of Caspian Sea, is due to nonexistence of trust and regulatory mechanism. Trust among the members expedites regional integration. Conflict constrains process of regional integration (Murray, 2015). To settle it, China should articulate conflict resolution mechanism in the light of International law. Besides, the regulatory mechanism for dealing issues related to energy security is a prime requirement. This mechanism will help states handle issues related to security of supply and security of payment.

Benefit Sharing Mechanism

The projects and plans of energy security should be utilized for multilateral river basin management and peace-building. The energy security should result into integration and peace-building. For the realization of energy projects of Central Asia and South Asia, inclusive cooperation among state-level actors, energy companies, and institutions should be deliberately promoted and strengthened. China, under the banner of the SCO, must focus on the formation of benefit-sharing mechanisms. There must be an authority to regulate material advantages among the actors of energy security. Equally, resettlement and rehabilitation plans for thosewho are affected by energy projects under the banner of the SCO should be promoted (Huda, 2020).The development projects along the energy corridor should be promoted. A sense of ownership among the local residents also needs to be promoted. All these actions can be taken when there is some mechanism to promote benefits.

Conclusion

The scholarship on regional integration denotes the role of core state under rational-realist perspective. These are the interests, both material and normative, of powerful regional member that expedite process of regional integration. The core state, normally, promotes its own agenda on the forum of regional organization. Apparently it seems that China has a design under the framework of the SCO, Belt and Road Initiative, and Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank to challenge the hegemony of one superpower. China and Russia can establish the International Order of the 21st century only when the regions of West Asia, Central Asia and South Asia are integrated. Iran preserves 4th and 2nd position in oil reserves and gas reserves respectively in the world. Keeping in view Iranian potential of oil and gas, China has made a historic deal of $ 400 billion investment to a US sanctioned country (Iran) for 25 years. The Chinese effort to create rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia should be comprehended in this context. After these steps, China must come forward and it must show boldness on its position related to TAP Gas Pipeline, IP Gas Pipeline, and CASA 1000. Under the banners of the SCO, BRI, and AIIB, China can connect regions of West Asia, Central Asia and South Asia known as three Asia's in the domain of energy security. The Chinese World Order is based on conceptions of cooperation, coexistence, and self- reliance. The multilateral and pluralistic attributes of the Chinese world Order enriches worth of the SCO. Opposing the US hegemony by China has strong appeal for the oppressed people of three Asia's. The best way to promote the Chinese world Order under the banner of the SCO is to ensure energy security to the oppressed people of these regions. However, China alone cannot handle challenges of Central Asia and South Asia's connectivity. A well-integrated coordination and association is required and cooperation with its regional

partners. With the help of Chinese investment, Russian and Chinese technology, and regional cooperation by regional partners (Iran, Central Asian States, Pakistan, Russia) based on prudence, the regions of Central Asia and South Asia will see connectivity not only in energy security but in domains of railway and road as well.

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