



PAKISTAN'S ROAD TO CENTRAL ASIA: A PERSPECTIVE THROUGH PRISM OF TRANSIT TRADE TREATIES

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Abstract:

Central Asian Republics (CARs) are landlocked countries looking for access to nearest sea ports. Whereas Pakistan is looking to diversify its economy by accessing CARs. Afghanistan has traditionally been the land bridge from subcontinent to CARs, however, transit trade through Afghanistan has not been without challenges. Because of Afghanistan's political unrest and instability, APTTA 2010 has not been entirely successful in easing Pakistan's transit trade to CARs. This paper employs qualitative analysis to examine Pakistan's physical access to CARs through the prism of transit trade treaties. It investigates alternative solutions that circumnavigate Afghanistan via Iran and China, with a focus on the aspirations and sensitivities of these transit countries. Iran and China, superficially seem to be attractive alternatives in the context of an insecure Afghanistan, but these alternative routes to CARs are not without their own set of challenges and drawbacks, which warrant a renewed push to establish a working relationship for beneficial transit trade with Afghanistan.

Keywords: Pakistan, APTTA, Chahbahar Agreement, QTTA, CARs, CAREC

JEL Classification: F02, F13, F53, Q37

1. Introduction

Central Asian Republics (CARs) are imprisoned by landlockedness of their geography, with no immediate access to world ocean trade. In this prison analogy, Russia and China (and to a lesser extent Iran) are their jailors, who due to their large size, economic footprint and good neighbourly linkages/ contiguous borders, dominate access to CARs. This dominance and dependency on China and Russia has created an oligopsony of CARs hydrocarbon wealth (Khan U. , 2023). Moreover, CARs landlocked prison causes cost escalation of any commodity coming in and out of CARs. Innate high costs discourage businesses and consequently connectivity with rest of the world. Easing of these high costs are dependent on hard and soft connectivity of CARs with their neighbours. Hard connectivity is the physical connection via road, rails links etc, whereas, soft connectivity is the customs and other bureaucratic/ regulatory issues, which delays smooth transit of freight through multiple border crossing points (BCPs) of intermediate countries. In order to address these hard and soft connectivity issues, Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation



(CAREC) program and the TIR convention are playing active roles in breaking CARs out of their geographical prison. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is also an important regional cooperation initiative, but it helps to tie CARs more tightly to the big two, China and Russia, who cast a long shadow. It is unlikely that CARs would be able to leave this shadow under the banner of SCO.

Moreover, there are two major UN conventions that aim to ensure free transit trade to landlocked countries. The first is the Convention on Transit Trade of Landlocked States (1965) and the second is the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS, 1982). Pakistan is not a signatory to the first, but it has ratified UNCLOS with a declaration that content of freedom of transit to the land locked states has to be agreed upon by the transit State and the land locked State concerned and it will be regulated only by national laws of Pakistan (UNCLOS, 1982), thereby necessitating bilateral/ multilateral transit treaties with landlocked countries.

2. Literature Review

Asif (2011) has highlighted that Pakistan shares no common border with any of the CARs, which is one of the main obstacles in accessing the region. Khan & Elahi (2016) regard poor political and security situation in Afghanistan as an obstacle preventing CARs from taking advantage of shortest route to Indian Ocean via Pakistani ports. With the construction of Chahbahar port, CARs have an alternative and Pakistan must do all it can for peace in Afghanistan for future links with CARs. Akbari (2020) has concluded that though Chahbahar Agreement offers Afghanistan an alternative to Pakistan, however, it cannot completely supplant Pakistan as a transit country and trade partner.

Fair (2008) describes contemporary historical Pakistani relations with CARs, noting that Pakistan's aspirations with CARs were economic in nature after dissolution of USSR. Initially, Pakistan's push for linkages was welcomed by CARs with their inclusion in Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) in 1992. However, Pakistan's support for the Taliban in Afghanistan and the growth of Islamic extremism in the area in the mid-1990s prompted fear and anxiety in these new countries. As a result, instead of focusing on connection with Pakistan, CARs began to turn to Russia for economic security. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) was created in 2001 to deal with concerns of security and terrorism in the region with Russia, China, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan as members. After Pakistan's joining in US war on terror against Taliban in Afghanistan, Pakistan's image in eyes of CARs was salvaged and Pakistan again started reengaging with CARs for economic connectivity.

Linn (2012) examined CARs regional economic integration in his paper on Central Asian regional integration and cooperation. He mentions how, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991, the five states experienced a severe economic downturn. However, they regained economic stability after the year 2000 and worked to improve internal and external integration. Despite the region's abundance of electricity, oil, and other mineral resources, neighbouring countries such as Pakistan have been unable to capitalise on them.



Asian Development Bank (ADB) (Asian Development Bank, 2010) highlights that capabilities of CARs are improving in exploiting use of their abundant energy resources. However, the major challenge faced by these countries is the channel through which they can export their resources. ADB through its Central Asia Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) program (CAREC, 2020) has compared progress made by regional countries in removing bottlenecks in shape of benchmarks. This report has highlighted high dwell times and large costs of freights crossing through Pakistan, as compared to other regional countries, indicating poor performance of Pakistani customs and communication infrastructure. Moreover, it has also indicated Pakistan's over reliance on road based transport for high freight costs and deemed such practice unsustainable. Emphasis on rail based freight and reducing custom clearance times are recommended.

Javaid et al. (2022) argues that Russia intends to maintain its hold on CARs through dependency and does not wish CARs to explore southern trade links that would free them from this dependency. Al-Nouimat et al. (2019) and Zhekenov et al. (2021) contend that China primarily uses the SCO's influence to ensure stability of its eastern Muslim Xinxiang province by combating the three evils, i.e. religious extremism, terrorism, and separatism, as well as to further its economic interests. Russia, on the other hand, uses the SCO to counter Western encroachment in its sphere of influence (CARs). They also emphasise that Iran has made significant diplomatic inroads into CARs by portraying itself as a benign neighbour with no intention of spreading its brand of Islamic revolution (a major concern for CARs) and has positioned itself well to be a viable ocean outlet for CARs.

3. CAREC

CAREC programme is an Asian Development Bank (ADB) sponsored initiative started in 1997 to develop economic cooperation among countries by linking landlocked CARs with the world. There are eleven members of this program including all five CARs, Pakistan, China, Azerbaijan, Afghanistan, Georgia and Mongolia. This program sponsors hard and soft infrastructure development projects like roads and railway links to establish connectivity with CARs. This program (Rastogi & Jean-Francois, 2014) not only finances hard infrastructure projects to build connectivity, but more importantly proffer solutions to problems of soft barriers to trade, like delays at ports and borders, inefficient customs procedures, cumbersome and unnecessary clearance procedures which need to be overcome for increase trade connectivity with CARs and the rest of the world (Ferrantino, 2013). CAREC has ear marked six routes, called transport corridors to connect CARs with the rest of the world and two of these routes (routes 5 and 6) originate/ terminate at Pakistani ports, linking CARs with the Indian ocean.

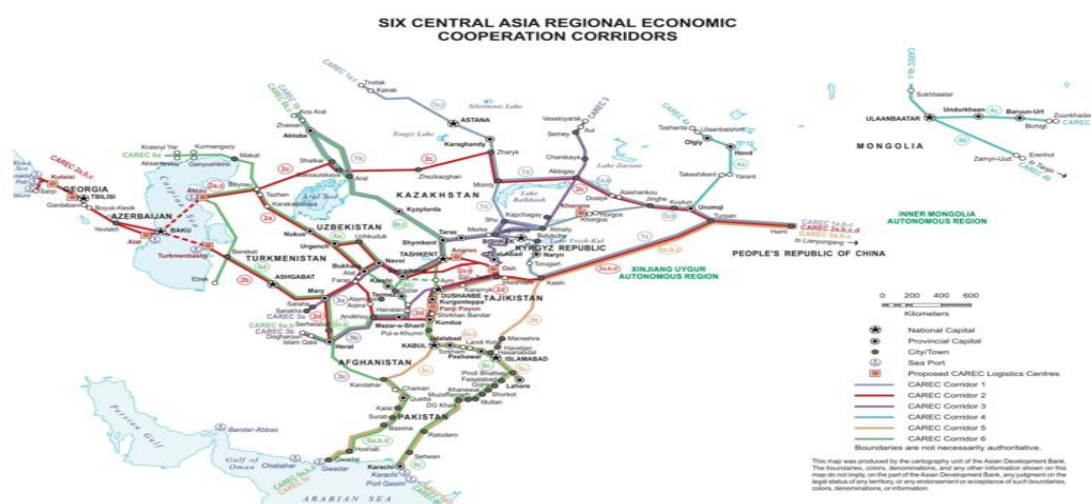


Figure 1. CAREC Transport Corridors. Corridors 5 and 6 connect with Indian Ocean through Pakistan. Source: carecprogram.org

4. TIR Convention

TIR stands for Transports Internationaux Routiers or International Road Transports. It is an important international road transit convention that was concluded in 1975 to harmonized issues of international transport of goods. This convention not only covers customs transit by road but also by rail or a combination of rail and road (UNECE, 2021). It is the only universal customs transit system in existence from which cargo can be moved in sealed containers/ vehicles from customs office of departure of one country to another country without requiring customs checks through intermediate borders by ensuring security of cargo and guarantees to customs authorities. This convention also sets out international standards for transporters like regular checks and standards for vehicles, insurance etc to ensure confidence in the transporters to ply reliably through intermediate countries.

Pakistan, Afghanistan, China, Iran and other CARs are signatories (UN, 2021) of this convention, enabling CARs to trade in an international customs transit framework without facing mandatory customs stoppages/ checks through transit countries.

5. Routes to CARs

As Pakistan does not have contiguous borders with CARs, it can only access CARs via Afghanistan, Iran and China through following trade routes:

a. Afghan Route

- (1) First route traverses through Pakistan – Afghanistan – Uzbekistan – Kazakhstan touching Peshawar, Tourkham, Kabul, Termiz and Shymkent to Almaty.
- (2) Second route transverses through Pakistan – Afghanistan – Tajikistan – Kyrgyzstan – Kazakhstan touching Tourkham, Kabul, Bander Sherkhan, Dushanbe and Bishkek to Almaty.



(3) Third route transverses through Pakistan – Afghanistan – Turkmenistan – Uzbekistan – Kazakhstan touching Chaman, Towrgondi, Bukhara and Shymkent to Almaty.

(4) This route traverses from Pakistan to Afghanistan's cities Kandahar, Herat to Turkmenistan border at Towrgondi.

b. Chinese Route

This corridor is the shortest route to Kazakhstan, passing through Karakoram highway to China and reaching Kazakhstan through Kyrgyzstan traversing via Soust - Khunjab pass -Kashgar- Bishkek to reach Almaty (Kazakhstan).

c. Iran Route

This is the southernmost corridor traversing through Iran's port of Bandar Abbas to Turkmenistan. Using Turkmenistan's rail/ road infrastructure onwards to Uzbekistan finally reaching Kazakhstan.



Figure 1. Red lines depicting trade corridors through China and Afghanistan.

5.1 Afghanistan

Traditionally, Afghanistan has been the main transit route to CARs for Pakistan. Using other countries to traverse to CARs requires additional layers of bureaucracy and treaties to make that happen. Afghan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement 2010(APTTA, 2010) is the main instrument through which Pakistan access CARs. This agreement was signed between Pakistan and Afghanistan, which expired(Bhutta, 2020) on 11th Feb 2021 and is in the process of renegotiation. APTTA's predecessor, the Afghanistan Transit Trade Agreement (ATTA, 1965) was signed in 1965, which granted Afghanistan access to Pakistan's ports but did not address Pakistan's access to Central Asia through Afghanistan. With ATTA, Pakistan



faced establishment of black markets, in which duty free goods destined for Afghanistan were rerouted to Pakistani markets, resulting in revenue losses. Furthermore, Afghanistan was not given access to Indian markets under the ATTA of 1965 and there was no mention of transit trade to CARs for Pakistan. As a result, in 2010, a new Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement (APTTA, 2010) was signed, granting Afghanistan trade access to all countries of the world through Pakistani ports, barring imports from India and in return Pakistan got to trade with CARs.

However, despite APTTA 2010, Afghanistan has put hurdles for Pakistani traders to export and import goods from CARs. This was widely presumed to be due to anti Pakistan sentiment in USA sponsored Afghan regime. However, against expectation, after Kabul regime change in August 2021, there has not been a complete turnaround to Afghan dealing with Pakistani traders. All cargos from Pakistan are offloaded (PAJCCI, 2018) from Pakistani trucks and then loaded onto Afghan trucks for further transport to CARs. Moreover, customs clearance and check stops in Afghanistan further delay any consignments passing through Afghanistan. Afghanistan justifies such actions by claiming that Pakistan does not allow cargos from India to Pakistan and Afghan transporters face many hurdles/ delays due prolonged customs clearances, with burdening requirement of huge bank guarantees/ insurance from bonded transporters. These complaints of slow processing of freight are not without merit, as an ADB research (CAREC, 2020) has found Pakistan's BCPs at the Pakistan-Afghan border (Torkham and Chaman) to be among the slowest and most costly in the region. Moreover, Pakistani ports have the longest dwell periods in the region, escalating demurrage and freight costs. (Rafiq A. , 2020; Asian Development Bank, 2020) Persistence of such soft barriers to trade over the years, has led to diminishing trade with Pakistan and will likely result in complete loss of business traffic to neighbouring Iran.

4. Torkham	Sost/Tashkurgan
5. From Torkham	To Wagha**
6. From Chaman	To Wagha**
* This route will become operational on a later date to be agreed mutually.	
** Pakistan will facilitate Afghan exports to India through Wagah. Afghan trucks will be allowed access on designated routes up to Wagah. Afghan cargo will be off loaded on to Indian trucks back to back at Wagah and the trucks on return will not carry Indian Exports.	

Figure 2. Snapshot of APTTA 2010 agreement extract explicitly barring goods from India.

On giving Afghanistan access to India, APTTA, clearly states that Afghanistan can export goods directly to Wagah border but no imports are allowed from India while Pakistan will use Afghanistan for transit to CARs; which was the basic purpose of APTTA 2010. In 2016, Afghanistan refused to honour APTTA and when Pakistan announced plans for bypassing Afghanistan using Quadrilateral Transit Trade Agreement (QTTA), Afghanistan



agreed to re-honour APTTA. The reason for Afghanistan's belligerence was it finding an alternative in Iran's Chahbahar port by signing an Chahbahar agreement in 2016 with India and Iran (Kutty, 2016). Chahbahar agreement allows Indian goods to be shipped to Afghanistan via Iran's Chahbahar port. However, upon inspection it is found that APTTA is a more comprehensive and generous agreement in Afghanistan's favour. Some of the salient differences are(Akbari, 2020):

- a. Chahbahar agreement covers transit of goods and persons through Chahbahar port while APTTA gives Afghanistan access to all sea ports of Pakistan in addition to Wagah border.
- b. Chahbahar agreement does not state freedom of transit, whereas APTTA gives this right to Afghanistan.
- c. Most important of all, APTTA abolishes all custom duties/ charges for transiting cargo, except for services rendered; whereas Chahbahar agreement does not and it only mentions provision of best endeavours for reduction of such charges in its language.
- d. APTTA provides explicit definition and type of visa (6 months, with each stay no longer than 15 days) to transporters where as Chahbahar agreement does not and vaguely mentions facilitation of visas for contracting parties.

In addition to APTTA being a comprehensive agreement, Pakistan is Afghanistan's major trading partner and top export destination, accounting for 43% of Afghanistan's exports and 90% of Afghanistan's fresh fruits and vegetables end up in Pakistani markets(Yasa, 2021). These factors make Pakistan an indispensable trade partner to Afghanistan and gives Pakistan leverage in re-negotiating APTTA, which has become a protracted affair(Ghumman, 2021).

5.2 Iran

Iran has a direct border with Turkmenistan boosting connectivity with CARs. Furthermore, unlike Pakistan, Iran has good rail connectivity with both Afghanistan and Turkmenistan, giving Iran a significant advantage in freight transportation costs. Moreover, because of the low cost of fuel in Iran, freight costs within Iran are reduced even further. Secondly, Iran has an FTA with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), which increases its trade advantage over Pakistan. Due to these reasons, Iran is a major trading partner of CARs and provides them an outlet to Indian Ocean through her ports. Iran, with assistance from India, covets to channel and monopolize trade with CARs via Chahbahar port(Sayareh & Meysam, 2016). Iran is the linchpin of International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) and Ashgabat Agreement, which aim to connect Iran with India, Russia and CARs. Considerable progress has been made to remove barriers to trade with CARs and increase connectivity, especially via rail and is a direct competitor for Pakistan's ambitions to provide Indian Ocean access to CARs.



Figure 3 Iran's Vision. Adapted from Source: CSIS: Reconnecting Asia

Iran's only impediment to dominating trade with CARs is prevailing economic sanctions. Pakistan can access CARs via Iran due to its stronger rail infrastructure and contiguous borders with Turkmenistan, but this would only let Iran compete more effectively with Pakistani commodities, resulting in a decreasing market space for Pakistani exports. This is not merely conjecture. Iran has a precedence of trade rivalry (Rahim & Heydari, 2020) with a country to whom it provided a land bridge to CARs. Iran had repeatedly raised costs for Turkish cargos transiting Iran to CARs by increasing transit trade fees (World Bulletin, 2014) and refusing to refuel CARs bound Turkish trucks (World Bulletin, 2014) in order to render Turkish exports uncompetitive from Iranian exports in the CARs market. This case of Turkey using another country for transit serves as a stark warning to countries that use other relatively developed countries to access their export markets, since they have the potential to steal their market share (Khan U. , 2023).



Figure 4. Chabahar Agreement Route. Source: <https://ifpnews.com/>



5.3 China

As lack of stability and political will in Afghanistan made transportation of goods a liability, Pakistan along with China, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan, decided in the form of Quadrilateral Transit Trade Agreement (QTTA) to bypass Afghanistan by transporting goods using Karakorum highway via China to Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan (Shoaib, 2015). QTTA was signed on 9th March 1995 by Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan to enable Pakistan to circumnavigate Afghanistan to Central Asia. It was enforced in May 2004 and followed the route Karachi-Rawalpindi-Hassanabdal -Gilgit-Khunjrab (Pak/China Border)-Kashgar-Torugart (China/Kyrgyzstan Border) -Bishkek- Akjol-Kordai (Kyrgyzstan/Kazakhstan Border) -Almaty (Kazakhstan). QTTA uses Karakorum highway to connect to Xinxiang province in China which in turn is linked with CARs. This route remained in operation till landslide on Karakoram Highway in January 2010. After considerable repairs and rehabilitation, this route was reopened on 2nd September 2015 for traffic. However, this agreement has not been effective in enhancing trade, as freight moving through this route face numerous delays at BCPs due to oversight and lack of concentrated effort by the member countries to remove grassroots level customs/ bureaucratic impediments. These impediments and resulting delays make it unattractive for traders to utilize QTTA for shipments.



Figure 5. QTTA route. *Source: www.issi.org.pk*

5.4 China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

CPEC is a Chinese flagship programme of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) to link western China to Pakistani ports in the Indian Ocean.



Since QTTA uses the Karakorum highway, CPEC projects will help Pakistan to connect with Kazakhstan using the CPEC infrastructure. Not only will hard infrastructure be improved, but soft barriers to trade (Ferrantino, 2013) such as delays in BCPs and customs coordination are expected to be streamlined automatically when China's own goods are subject to such transit exercises from Pakistan to China and vice versa (Khan U. , 2023).

In light of Afghanistan being a willing barrier between Pakistan and CARs, QTTA is a viable alternative. As already stated, QTTA's importance was highlighted when Afghanistan insisted on inclusion of India in APTTA and stopped Pakistan shipments to CARs in 2016 (Rafiq M. , 2020). This was not acceptable to Pakistan due to prevalent tensions with India. Afghanistan dropped its demand for reciprocal access to India after Pakistan announced its intention to revitalise QTTA, thwarting Afghanistan's efforts to assert its monopoly over the route to CARs (Pakistan Business Council, 2020).

With the persistent instability of Afghanistan, CARs like Tajikistan and Uzbekistan have requested to join QTTA to enhance their connectivity to the rest of the world through Pakistan's warm water ports (Bhutta, 2017; Khan M. Z., 2020). However, certain issues have persisted which have resulted in lacklustre utilization of QTTA agreement. They are:

- a. Delay in issuance of visas to the drivers/personnel.
- b. Lack of information about the agreement and associated protocols by custom officials of member countries. Authorities unnecessarily stop vehicles in a variety of locations as they pass through their jurisdictions. China's customs and immigration authorities cause unnecessary delays in the inspection and clearance of vehicles in transit.
- c. The QTTA transit route is not an all weather road link. Due to unsuitable weather, it remains closed for a minimum of four months every year (December to end March).
- d. Most borders work on 5 or 6 days weekly basis and have different working hours.
- e. Numerous inspections by different agencies at the borders and during the transit, especially in China.

There is sensitivity (Verma, 2020) in China w.r.t. Islamic separatism (East Turkistan Islamic Movement) and China has a strict posture towards any activity which might perceive to aid such unrest in her Xinjiang province. Cross border movement of cargo from one Muslim state, Pakistan, to another (Kyrgyzstan/ Kazakhstan) is a cause for suspicion and increased checking of cargoes at BCPs. To streamline transit of goods via QTTA, following is considered essential:

Adherence to TIR convention by member countries. After customs inspection at point of origin, the truck/ container should be sealed and same seal should be opened at final destination.

E-Visa facilitation for transport operators may be ensured by QTTA member countries. Multiple entry unified visa sticker mechanism is also a viable option which may be introduced to ease transporter's multiple visa woes.

A list of approved operators should be shared with all embassies of QTTA member countries by Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



Operators should be granted at least 6 months or one year multiple entry visas as per QTTA agreement.

China may be sensitized about Pakistan's trade interests with CARs, and Pakistan must reinforce soft infrastructure linkages of CPEC with QTTA in shape of MOUs and written understandings from China in order to streamline transit trade.

6. Discussion

Against popular belief, Pakistan has good light industrial and agricultural capacity which has export potential to CARs (Khan U. , 2023). Both China and Iran also have good industrial capacity and compete with Pakistani light industrial goods/ produce in CARs market. Relying on Iranian or Chinese transit has the potential to introduce unintended sharing of trade intelligence and subsequently, loss of market share from CARs in the long run. Afghanistan with no industrial capacity offers no competition and is a viable transit country for Pakistan. But it is rife with political instability and is expected that transit trade to CARs via Afghanistan will always be problematic even after conclusion of renewed APTTA. Safeguards to these concerns must be introduced in the new negotiated APTTA deal to have a financial punitive effect on Afghanistan, in order to deter it from obstructing Pakistani trade.

Further, a multilateral approach in dealing with Afghanistan is also a feasible option, if CARs can be lobbied to discourage Afghanistan from obstructing trade and increasing CARs landlockedness. This can be achieved by expanding APTTA to include other CARs under one transit trade agreement for duty free transit to CARs and beyond. If Pakistan is successful in forging an umbrella multilateral transit trade deal that includes all CARs and Afghanistan, it will preclude Pakistan from becoming a hostage to Afghani unilateral actions; as trade interests of other CARs/ stakeholder would also be impacted, and Afghanistan's own commerce with CARs would be leveraged as collateral.

Presently, APTTA is the best agreement Afghanistan could hope for and it would not be possible for her to get any better deal from any other country. Case of Chahbahar agreement is relevant in this regard. It may be argued that while Pakistan gives Afghanistan access to the whole world (through its ports) sans Indian imports, Afghanistan gives Pakistan access to three CARs. This huge quantitative imbalance in terms of access to countries needs to be registered. At present negotiations for renewing APTTA are stalled with Afghanistan for mainly want of import access from India, reduction of customs delays and charges on services/ facilities. Reduction of custom delays and service charges may be addressed to make Pakistani ports competitive, however, Government of Pakistan (GoP) may exercise firmness in negotiations viz-a-viz Indian imports, as Pakistan has all the leverage in terms of being Afghanistan's main trading partner . If all else fails, GoP should consider offering same language and terms of Chahbahar agreement, which Afghanistan has signed with India and Iran, to discourage it from unnecessarily dragging her feet in signing new APTTA agreement, which is already very generous by regional standards.

After all is said and done, there is no point in pursuing road to CARs if Pakistan cannot reap tangible economic benefits from it. Renting out port and rail/ road infrastructure will not make a dent in changing Pakistan's economic landscape. Real tangible economic



benefits can be realised only if there are Pakistani trading houses/ companies operating from CARs territory; marketing and importing Pakistani origin products into CARs (since no one else will). Encouraging establishment (Khan U. , 2023) of Pakistani trading houses/ corporations inside CARs territory must be a major GoP policy directive, which may be dovetailed with all initiatives (transit trade agreements, preferential trade agreements etc) aimed at promoting enhanced connectivity with CARs.

7. Conclusion

Pakistan accesses CARs through Afghanistan, Iran and China. Despite the obvious hard connectivity concerns with CARs: soft infrastructure connectivity challenges play a dominant role in influencing the trend, speed and cost of trade between these countries. Important international instruments like CAREC and TIR are available to address hard and soft connectivity issues with CARs. Iran is taking advantage of these instruments and augmenting them with its own regional partnership programs like INSTC and Ashgabat Agreement to increase its hard and soft connectivity and become a go to warm water port for CARs. Despite having a firmer international standing and access to better transit agreements than Iran, Pakistan has lagged behind in utilizing and enforcing cooperation programs (QTTA, APTTA, CAREC, CPEC etc) to its advantage for connecting with CARs. Bureaucratic/ regulatory bottlenecks (soft infrastructure issues), have plagued transit trade through Afghanistan and China. This must change and Pakistan must exercise adroit diplomacy to renegotiate and enforce transit agreements, if Pakistan wishes to capitalize on the untapped economic potential of CARs. Furthermore, the idea of using Iran to connect with CARs must be spurned; otherwise, it will see itself bypassed and circumvented, negating the benefits of its prized geostrategic location.

Conflict of Interest

There is no conflict of interest to disclose.



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