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Q10

Critically analyse India's evolving diplomatic, economic and strategic relations with the Central Asian Republics (CARs) highlighting their increasing significance in regional and global geopolitics.

UPSC Civil Services Mains 2024 · GS II · 10 marks · India and its Neighbourhood

India and its neighborhood - relations.

Core demand of the question

- Map India's evolving diplomatic, economic and strategic relations with the Central Asian Republics
- Show why the CARs have gained regional and global significance
- Critically note thin trade, the land block, and Russian and Chinese weight

Revision summary

- **India's CAR ties:** SCO, summits, uranium from Kazakhstan, Chabahar and **INSTC**, limited defence and training.

The region gained weight through energy, critical minerals, Afghanistan after 2021, and China-Russia competition.

Trade remains small beside China's; Pakistan and Afghanistan block the short land route.

TAPI and grand Silk Road language have under-delivered.

- **Critical path:** logistics via Iran, pharma and education, SCO without camp-following.

Significance is real in maps and modest in India's daily trade.

Introduction

The five Central Asian Republics - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan - sit on energy, uranium, Islam and a post-Soviet security order. India discovered them late, after 1991, and still reaches them the long way round. Diplomacy has thickened. Cargo has not. That is the critical part of the analysis.

Body

What has evolved

The relationship is a summit vocabulary with a thin invoice.

- **Peg:** Diplomacy now includes a leaders' summit format, **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation** membership, more missions, ITEC training, and a shared line on terrorism and connectivity.
- **Peg:** Kazakhstan is a **uranium** supplier; energy talks with Turkmenistan, including the **TAPI** idea, never quite became a pipe.

- **Peg:** Chabahar and the **International North-South Transport Corridor** are the bet that Iran and the Caspian can replace the closed Pakistan land route.
- **Peg:** Trade remains modest next to China-CAR volumes; Indian firms are not the default miners in the steppe.

Why significance rose

Maps moved faster than India's trucks.

- **Peg:** The Ukraine war made Caspian and Central Asian energy a European conversation; uranium and critical minerals matter to reactors and to Western decoupling.
- **Peg:** A Taliban-run Afghanistan pushed the republics to seek more partners than Moscow.
- **Peg:** China's Xinjiang-CAR roads are a strategic fact on India's northern periphery; CARs are also Eurasian votes and Islamic diplomacy that is not Gulf-only.

The critique

Over-selling civilisational links hides a logistics failure.

- **Peg:** There is no Indian equivalent of Belt and Road credit; Pakistan denies overland access; Afghanistan is unstable; **INSTC** is slow.
- **Peg:** Russian influence in security and Chinese influence in debt and rail will not be talked away at a Delhi summit.
- **Peg:** Keep Chabahar and **INSTC**, sell pharma and vaccines, stay in the SCO without being a Russia-China junior, and do not pretend the Silk Road now runs through Mumbai.

Flow diagram

India -> Chabahar INSTC
 Chabahar INSTC -> Five CARs
 Five CARs -> Energy uranium
 Pakistan Afghan block -> no road India
 China BRI -> Five CARs
 Russia -> Five CARs

Conclusion

The Central Asian Republics matter more because energy, minerals and Afghanistan do. India's diplomacy has caught up; its roads and trade have not. The relationship is a long game against a land block and against other people's belts.

Facts & figures

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

India-Iran-Caspian-Russia route meant to shorten Europe-India cargo when the Pakistan land route is closed.

Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline

A long-proposed gas pipe stalled by security and politics.

Shanghai Cooperation Organisation

The main Eurasian table where India sits with the CARs, China and Russia.

Chabahar Port

India's Iranian gateway toward Afghanistan and Central Asia, built to work around a blocked western land route.

Kazakhstan uranium supply

The most concrete energy-mineral strand in India's CAR commerce.

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